



**UNIVERSITY
OF TURKU**

Turku School of
Economics

Experiential pop-ups and customer experience

How experiential pop-ups shape experiences across the customer journey

International Business

Department of Marketing and International Business

Master's thesis

Author:

Sanna Kristeri

Supervisors:

D.Sc. Niina Nummela

3.5.2026

Turku

Student's statement regarding the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for preparing and/or writing this thesis:

I have not used any AI-based tools.

I have used AI-based tools. Their use is documented in the Appendix. The AI tools were used in a way that complies with academic integrity guidelines.

The originality of this thesis has been checked in accordance with the University of Turku quality assurance system using the Turnitin Originality Check service.

Master's thesis

Subject: International Business

Author: Sanna Kristeri

Title: Experiential pop-ups and customer experience: How experiential pop-ups shape the customer journey

Supervisors: D.Sc. Niina Nummela

Number of pages: 99 pages + appendices 9 pages

Date: 3.5.2026

In an increasingly experience-focused marketing world, brands are under pressure to create value for consumers through meaningful and engaging consumer experiences. As traditional marketing approaches have become less effective in answering this growing consumer need for experiences, firms have increasingly moved away from transactional approaches, and experiential marketing formats such as experiential pop-ups have gained importance as tools for creating immersive and memorable brand encounters. At the same time, customer experience research emphasizes that experiences unfold over time across multiple touchpoints rather than as isolated encounters. Despite the growing use of experiential pop-ups, existing research has largely examined them as isolated events or focused on the on-site experience, leaving a gap in understanding of how these experiences develop across time.

This study addresses this gap by exploring how consumers experience experiential pop-ups before, during, and after participation. The main research question guiding this thesis is: *how do consumers experience experiential pop-ups across the customer journey?* The study adopts an exploratory qualitative research design grounded in an interpretivist approach focusing on participants' subjective experiences, interpretations, and meaning-making processes. Empirical data were collected through semi-structured interviews with participants who had previously participated in experiential pop-ups. The interview design was structured around the experiential pop-up customer journey stages and informed by experiential marketing theory. The data were analyzed using theory-guided content analysis, allowing the identification of recurring experiential response patterns across pre-participation, participation, and post-participation stages.

The findings show that experiential pop-ups function as continuous experiential processes rather than discrete encounters. In the pre-participation stage, consumers construct expectations through digital, social, and physical touchpoints such as social media and word-of-mouth. These touchpoints generate anticipation, expectations and curiosity, while also involving evaluations of relevance, effort and expected value. Participation is characterized by immersive, interactive, and multisensory environments in which consumers actively engage with activities, space, and products. Experiential responses occur simultaneously across sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and social dimensions, with prior expectations being either confirmed or challenged. In the post-participation stage, the experience continues through memory formation, reflection, and social sharing. Consumers tend to reconstruct the experience through holistic impressions such as atmosphere and emotional tone, which are later reinforced by tangible cues and subsequent brand interactions. Across stages, the experience is strongly socially embedded, as it is shared, interpreted, and amplified through interaction with others. Overall, experiential pop-ups primarily generate cognitive and affective brand outcomes, particularly increased awareness, familiarity, and positive associations, while behavioral effects such as purchase intention or loyalty emerge indirectly and are dependent on perceived relevance and value alignment.

The study concludes that experiential pop-ups operate as multi-stage and socially embedded experiential processes that shape how consumers perceive, interpret, and remember brands across the customer journey. While they are effective in strengthening brand-related perceptions, their ability to directly drive behavioral outcomes is conditional and context-dependent. The study contributes to experiential marketing and customer journey literature by conceptualizing experiential pop-ups as dynamic and cumulatively extended experience processes. Future research should examine experiential pop-ups in different industries and diverse participant groups and employ managerial perspectives on designing and managing experiential pop-ups across the customer journey.

Keywords: experiential pop-ups, experiential marketing, customer journey, customer experience, touchpoints, experiential value

Pro gradu -tutkielma

Oppiaine: Kansainvälinen liiketoiminta

Tekijä: Sanna Kristeri

Otsikko: Elämykselliset pop-upit ja asiakaskokemus: miten elämykselliset pop-upit muokkaavat kokemuksia asiakaspolulla

Ohjaajat: KTT Niina Nummela

Sivumäärä: 99 sivua + liitteet 9 sivua

Päivämäärä: 3.5.2026

Yhä kokemuskeskeisemmässä markkinointimaailmassa brändit pyrkivät luomaan arvoa kuluttajille merkityksellisten ja osallistavien kokemusten kautta. Perinteiset markkinointikeinot eivät kykene vastaamaan kasvavaan kokemusten tarpeeseen, jonka vuoksi yritykset ovat siirtyneet pois vaihdantaan perustuvista lähestymistavoista, ja kokemukselliset markkinointimuodot, kuten elämykselliset pop-upit, korostuvat keinoina luoda osallistavia ja mieleenpainuvia brändikohtaamisia. Samanaikaisesti asiakaskokemustutkimus on korostanut, että kokemukset rakentuvat ajan kuluessa useiden kosketuspisteiden kautta sen sijaan, että ne olisivat yksittäisiä irrallisia tapahtumia. Vaikka elämyksellisten pop-upien käyttö on kasvanut, aikaisempi tutkimus on tarkastellut niitä pääasiassa erillisinä tapahtumina tai keskittynyt paikan päällä tapahtuvaan kokemukseen, luoden tutkimusaukon siihen, miten nämä kokemukset kehittyvät ajan kuluessa.

Tämä tutkimus vastaa tähän tarkastelemalla, miten kuluttajat kokevat elämykselliset pop-upit ennen osallistumista, osallistumisen aikana ja sen jälkeen. Tutkimusta ohjaa päätutkimuskysymys: miten kuluttajat kokevat elämykselliset pop-upit asiakaspolun eri vaiheissa? Tutkimus toteutettiin eksploratiivisena laadullisena tutkimuksena, perustuen interpretivistiseen tieteenfilosofiaan, keskittyen osallistujien subjektiivisiin kokemuksiin, tulkintoihin ja merkityksiin. Empiirinen aineisto kerättiin puolistrukturoiduilla haastattelulla henkilöiltä, jotka olivat osallistuneet elämyksellisiin pop-ujeihin. Haastattelut jäsenettiin elämyksellisen pop-upin asiakaspolun vaiheiden mukaisesti ja pohjautui kokemuksellisen markkinoinnin teoriaan. Aineisto analysoitiin teoriaohjaavan sisällönanalyysin avulla, mahdollistaen toistuvien kokemusten tunnistamisen ennen osallistumista, osallistumisen aikana ja osallistumisen jälkeen.

Tulokset osoittavat, että elämykselliset pop-upit ovat jatkuvia kokemuksellisia prosesseja eivätkä yksittäisiä kohtaamisia. Kuluttajien odotukset perustuvat digitaalisiin, sosiaalisiin ja fyysisiin kosketuspisteisiin, esimerkiksi sosiaalisessa mediassa ja kuluttajien välisissä keskusteluissa ennen osallistumista. Nämä kosketuspisteet synnyttävät odotuksia, ennakkointia ja uteliaisuutta sekä arviointia kokemuksen merkityksellisyydestä ja odotetusta vaivasta ja arvosta. Osallistumisvaiheessa pop-upit ovat kokonaisvaltaisia, vuorovaikutteisia ja moniaistisia ympäristöjä, joissa kuluttajat osallistuvat aktiivisesti. Kokemukset ilmenevät samanaikaisesti aisteihin, tunteisiin, ajatteluun, käyttäytymiseen ja sosiaalisiin suhteisiin liittyvinä reaktioina, jolloin aiemmat odotukset joko vahvistuvat tai ne haastetaan. Osallistumisen jälkeen kokemus jatkuu muistoina, reflektiona ja sosiaalisena jakamisena. Kuluttajat jäsentävät kokemusta kokonaisvaltaisten vaikutelmien, kuten tunnelman ja tuntemusten kautta, ja myöhemmät konkreettiset muistot pop-upista ja brändikohtaamisesta vahvistavat näitä. Pop-up-kokemus on vahvasti sosiaalisesti rakentunut prosessi, sillä kokemuksia jaetaan, tulkitaan ja vahvistetaan muiden kanssa. Kokonaisuudessaan elämykselliset pop-upit aiheuttavat ensisijaisesti kognitiivisia ja affektiivisiä brändivaikutuksia, kuten tunnettuuden lisääntymistä, tuttuutta ja positiivisia mielle yhtymiä, kun taas behavioraaliset vaikutukset, kuten ostoaikeus tai asiakasuskollisuus, syntyvät epäsuorasti ja ovat riippuvaisia koetusta merkityksellisyydestä ja arvosta.

Tutkimus toteaa, että elämykselliset pop-upit toimivat monivaiheisina ja sosiaalisesti rakentuneina kokemuksellisinä prosesseina, jotka muovaavat sitä, miten kuluttajat havaitsevat, tulkitsevat ja muistavat brändejä asiakaspolun eri vaiheissa. Vaikka ne ovat tehokkaita vahvistamaan brändiin liittyviä mielikuvia, niiden kyky vaikuttaa suoraan käyttäytymiseen on ehdollinen ja kontekstisidonnainen. Tutkimus käsitteellistää elämykselliset pop-upit dynaamisina ja kumulatiivisesti rakentuvina kokemuksellisinä prosesseina. Jatkotutkimukset voisivat tarkastella elämyksellisiä pop-ujeja eri toimialoilla ja monimuotoisemmissa osallistujaryhmissä sekä hyödyntää liikkeenjohdon näkökulmia niiden suunnitteluun ja johtamiseen asiakaspolun eri vaiheissa.

Avainsanat: elämykselliset pop-upit, kokemuksellinen markkinointi, asiakaspolku, asiakaskokemus, kosketuspisteet, kokemuksellinen arvo

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Introduction	9
1.1	Background for the study	9
1.2	Objectives and scope	12
1.3	Structure of the thesis	14
2	Experiential pop-ups across the customer journey	15
2.1	Experiential marketing	15
2.1.1	Foundations of experiential marketing	15
2.1.2	Dimensions of experiential value	17
2.1.3	Experiential pop-ups as experiential platforms	20
2.2	Customer journey	25
2.2.1	Customer journey management	25
2.2.2	Stages of the customer journey	26
2.2.3	Touchpoints in the customer journey	27
2.2.4	Mapping the experiential pop-up customer journey	30
2.3	Experiential pop-ups across the customer journey	33
3	Methodology	35
3.1	Research approach	35
3.2	Data collection	37
3.3	Data analysis	41
3.4	Evaluation of the study	44
3.4.1	Trustworthiness of the study	44
3.4.2	Research ethics	46
4	Findings	49
4.1	Experiential pop-up experience in the pre-participation stage	49
4.1.1	Anticipation and curiosity toward the pop-up	49
4.1.2	Sensory and symbolic cues shaping expectations	51
4.1.3	Evaluating relevance and worthwhileness to participate	52
4.1.4	Socially shaped participation decisions	55
4.2	Experiential pop-up experience in the participation stage	57
4.2.1	Immersive multisensory environment	57
4.2.2	Active participation and experiential doing	60
4.2.3	Emotional and cognitive engagement	62

4.2.4	Social co-experience and interaction	65
4.3	Experiential pop-up experience in the post-participation stage	67
4.3.1	Remembering and reflecting on the experience	67
4.3.2	Sharing and extending the experience	70
4.3.3	Continued engagement with the brand	72
4.4	Synthesis of empirical findings	74
5	Conclusions	78
5.1	Theoretical contributions	78
5.2	Managerial implications	84
5.3	Limitations and suggestions for future research	87
6	Summary	89
	References	91
	Appendices	100
	Appendix 1 Interview guide	100
	Appendix 2 Interview information sheet	102
	Appendix 3 Interview consent form	104
	Appendix 4 Data management plan	105
	Appendix 5 Explanation of the use of AI	107

FIGURES

Figure 1 Experiential marketing process	17
Figure 2 Experiential value creation	20
Figure 3 Experiential pop-ups as experiential platforms	24
Figure 4 The customer journey	29
Figure 5 Conceptual framework of experiential pop-ups across the customer journey	34
Figure 6 Processual model of experiential pop-ups across the customer journey	83

TABLES

Table 1 Experiential pop-up journey map	32
Table 2 Operationalization of the study	39
Table 3 Details on the participants and interviews	40
Table 4 Example of the data analysis process	43
Table 5 Synthesis of experiential pop-up customer journey findings	76

1 Introduction

1.1 Background for the study

“Aren’t pop-ups just temporary shops?” Oh, not anymore! Pop Ups are evolving into full-blown experiences that’ll make you forget reality for a hot minute.”
(Parasolprojects.com 2025.)

Pop-ups, also referred to as pop-up stores (Picot-Coupey 2014) or pop-up shops (Rosenbaum et al. 2021), have become an increasingly visible phenomenon in contemporary retail environments (The Economist 2009) and appeared across significant global markets (Boustani 2025, 10). Traditionally, pop-ups have been defined as temporary retail spaces that “pop up” for a limited time, typically from days to weeks, and then disappear (Robertson et al. 2018, 425; Klein et al. 2016, 5761). Their origins have been linked to guerrilla marketing¹ (Alexander & Bain 2016, 170) and to the evolution of flagship stores² (Haas & Schmidt 2016, 89), and have since been regarded as one of the most significant marketing innovations of the early twenty-first century (Surchi 2011, 257).

Initially, pop-ups primarily served short-term transactional and promotional purposes (Surchi 2011, 256; Niehm et al. 2006, 6), such as selling excess inventory or creating urgency through exclusive offers (Spitzkat & Fuentes 2019, 198; Surchi 2011, 256). Their core logic was simple: appear suddenly, grab attention, make sales, and then disappear (Agile Retail 25.6.2025). However, more recently, pop-ups have evolved from temporary points of sale into strategically important marketing formats (Rosenbaum et al. 2021, 94) that emphasize experience-oriented brand engagement over transactional objectives (Boustani 2025, 108). Today’s *experiential pop-ups* are increasingly used as innovative experiential marketing tools (Klein et al. 2016, 5765). They provide a controlled environment for strategically shaping customer experiences (Lowe et al. 2018, 77) where consumers interact with, and experience brands rather than merely shop (Overdiek & Warnaby 2020, 66) to serve brand-related goals such as communicating brand identity and increasing brand awareness (Rudkowski et al. 2020, 4).

This transformation is closely connected to the rise of experiential marketing (Boustani 2025, 20), reflecting a broader shift from functional value provision toward experiential value creation (Schmitt 1999). Contemporary consumers increasingly operate within what Pine and Gilmore (1998) describe

¹ Guerrilla marketing is a marketing activity that is cost-effective, creative and uses surprise-effects approaches (Ahmed et al. 2020, 852).

² Flagship stores are high-quality stores in notable locations, with the goal to strengthen the brand rather than sell products (Kargin & Lamey 2025, 1).

as the experience economy, where value is no longer derived only from products and services but from the meaningful and emotionally engaging experiences and brand interactions surrounding them (Schmitt 1999; Smith & Hanover 2016). Consumption is thus understood as a “flow of fantasies, feelings, and fun” (Holbrook & Hirschman 1982, 132), where value emerges from sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and relational dimensions of experiences (Schmitt 1999, 57). Therefore, brands increasingly compete by staging meaningful brand experiences for consumers that foster emotional and sensory engagement to support broader brand objectives over traditional “features-and-benefits” marketing (Schmitt 1999 53, 57; Smith & Hanover 2016, 2).

Experiential pop-ups represent a concrete manifestation of this shift (Istituto Marangoni Miami 16.6.2025). They function as temporary, immersive and interactive (Boustani 2025 24–27; Alexander & Bain 2016, 170) strategically designed experiential marketing platforms (Lowe et al. 2018, 75) that encourage active consumer participation and engagement with the brand (Harris 2015, 592). Products play a secondary role or may not be sold on-site at all, as the primary objective lies in creating memorable brand experiences (Niehm et al. 2006, 10) and strengthening consumer-brand relationships (Russo Spina et al. 2012, 21–22). As a result, experiential pop-ups increasingly resemble temporary branded events rather than traditional retail environments (Alexander & Bain 2016, 171).

Brands ranging from emerging start-ups to established global corporations across industries and markets have adopted experiential pop-ups for diverse strategic purposes (Rudkowski et al. 2020, 2; Harris 2015, 592). For example, the cookie brand Oreo created an immersive theme park-like pop-up in South Korea with interactive games, encouraging physical engagement with the brand (Korea.net 2023), while, in the US, Silk, a plant-based milk brand, launched an interactive pop-up, inviting visitors to join a lie detector cereal taste test, playfully distinguishing truth-tellers from “cereal liars”. Similarly, the high-end fashion house Prada and the fashion brand Kate Spade have integrated cultural, social, and sensory elements into their pop-ups, functioning as social gatherings rather than stores (Parasolprojects.com 2025; Burney 2024). Certain locations, such as Seoul’s Seongsu-dong (Korea.net 2023) and Selfridges’ Corner Shop in London (Selfridges.com) have even emerged as hubs for such experiences.

Experiential pop-ups have also become increasingly visible in the Finnish market and have attracted notable attention through social media and local media coverage. In 2025, the beauty brand CAIA establishing a temporary physical presence through an experiential pop-up without prior retail distribution in Finland (@elbelindblom, Tiktok, 25.3.2025). Similarly, the global beauty company

L'Oréal implemented a pop-up in a high-visibility location to promote a new product line (@kriseld, Instagram, 13.9.2025). Also, the domestic food company Fazer employed an experiential pop-up to create "a brand experience like never before" (Perttunen 2025). These examples illustrate how experiential pop-ups are used for different strategic purposes as noted in prior literature, including market entry (Picot-Coupey 2014), product launches (Kim et al. 2010, 148), and brand engagement (Boustani 2025, 29), indicating their growing relevance in the marketing landscape.

At the same time, understanding customer experience has emerged as a key priority in both academic research and managerial practice (Schmitt & Zarantonello 2013, 26). Customer experience encompasses customer's sensorial, cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and social responses to brand interactions (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 71; Becker & Jaakkola 2020, 636). Importantly, these experiences do not occur in isolation but unfold across a broader customer journey, defined as the sequence of interactions and experiences that occur across multiple touchpoints before, during and after engagement with a brand (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 71; Norton & Pine II 2013, 12). In increasingly omnichannel environments, these journeys are becoming more complex and "phygital", combining physical and digital touchpoints that jointly shape consumer perceptions and behaviour (Mele et al. 2021, 428–429).

As a result, understanding customer experiences through the customer journey, and how diverse and complex touchpoints contribute to the overall customer experience, has become a central managerial challenge for customer experience management (Reitsamer & Becker 2024). Providing a unified and consistent experience across multiple channels is critical (Poorrezaei et al. 2023, 663) as positive experiences along the entire journey are viewed as a source of competitive advantage (Kranzbühler et al. 2018, 441). However, while interactions can generate both positive and negative outcomes, how these interactions accumulate into a holistic customer experience remains insufficiently understood (Poorrezaei et al. 2023, 663).

Within this background, experiential pop-ups can be understood as high-intensity, omnichannel touchpoints embedded within the broader customer journey (Rudkowski et al. 2020), capable of reinforcing brand experiences, shaping brand meaning across channels (Boustani 2025, 24, 59) and trigger experiential responses (Alexander & Ling 2023, 479), including anticipation before participation, immersive experiences during the visit, and sharing it afterwards (Rudkowski et al. 2020, 1; Shi et al. 2021, 375). Even though their growing importance, most research often examines them as one-time retail or marketing events. They are not seen as part of a broader experiential process

that happens across the customer journey. This shows the need to understand holistically how experiential pop-ups are experienced across different stages of consumer interaction.

1.2 Objectives and scope

Experiential pop-ups have gained increasing attention as experiential marketing tools (Lowe et al. 2018; Klein et al. 2016), but existing academic research remains limited. Prior studies have mostly focused on transactional pop-ups, specific industries, like fashion and luxury, or consumer attitudes and behavioural outcomes rather than consumers' lived experiences, often relying on quantitative methods (e.g. Warnaby & Shi 2019; Alexander & Bain 2016; Klein et al. 2016; Ryu 2011; Kim et al. 2010; Niehm et al. 2006). Furthermore, research has typically examined pre-participation (e.g. Ryu 2011), participation (e.g. Alexander & Ling 2023) and post-participation (e.g. Robertson et al. 2018) separately, and research analysing experiential pop-ups as part of a holistic customer journey remains scarce (Rudkowski et al. 2020). In addition, scholars have called for deeper exploration on how interactions between visitors and experiential environments evoke responses and shape perceived value (Alexander & Ling 2023).

For this reason, there is limited understanding of how experiential pop-up experiences are formed through multiple touchpoints and how these experiences unfold across the entire customer journey. This represents an important gap, as firms increasingly rely on experiential formats to engage consumers, differentiate their brands, and create memorable experiences (Boustani 2025, 20; Shi et al. 2021, 361; Haas & Schmidt 2016). Without a comprehensive understanding of how these experiences unfold, the potential of experiential pop-ups as strategic marketing tools remains only partially understood. This is also reflected in the fact that many brands have yet to fully leverage their potential (Boustani 2025, 11).

To address this gap, this study examines experiential pop-ups from a customer journey perspective and focuses on consumers' lived experiences across pre-participation, participation, and post-participation stages. By combining the lenses of experiential marketing and customer journey, this study addresses an important gap and underexplored perspective in existing literature. The study aims to develop a more holistic understanding of experiential pop-ups experiences through experiential touchpoints embedded within a broader process. In doing so, this thesis offers both theoretical advancement and practical guidance for brands seeking to design meaningful experiential marketing strategies and leverage experiential pop-ups as a source of competitive advantage. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine how consumers experience experiential pop-ups across the customer journey. To reach this objective, the main research question of this thesis is:

How do consumers experience experiential pop-ups across the customer journey?

To address this question, the study is guided by the following sub-questions:

1. What experiential pop-up touchpoints emerge across the stages of the experiential pop-up customer journey?
2. What kinds of experiential responses do experiential pop-up touchpoints evoke among consumers?
3. How do consumers perceive the value of experiential pop-up experiences across the experiential pop-up customer journey?

This study focuses specifically on experiential pop-ups that are strategically designed for marketing and branding purposes, functioning as experiential marketing platforms that emphasize immersion, interaction and engagement, strategically shaping customer experiences to support brand-related goals rather than transactional objectives (Boustani 2025; Lowe et al. 2018; Rudkowski et al. 2020). Purely transactional pop-ups and sales-oriented pop-ups are therefore excluded, as they do not capture the experiential mechanisms central to this study. This enables a deeper exploration of experiential responses that may not emerge in sales-driven pop-ups.

Furthermore, a consumer-centric perspective is adopted, focusing on examining how individuals interpret and make sense of their experiences of experiential pop-ups across three stages of the journey: pre-participation, participation, and post-participation. The customer journey is used as an analytical framework to structure these experiences rather than as an objective process tracked over time. Accordingly, the study examines remembered experiences, that is, consumers' retrospective interpretations of their interactions (Reitsamer & Becker 2024, 2) rather than real-time observations. This allows for an understanding of the customer journey from a cross-sectional perspective, while acknowledging that it does not capture all the dynamic changes that occur throughout the full process.

The study does not examine the managerial performance metrics of the companies that create these pop-ups or how efficiently they create these events or financial outcomes. Instead, focus is on the experiences of customers and how these experiences affect their perceptions of the brand. While the empirical data is collected from Finnish consumers, the experiential pop-ups themselves may be located in different countries. This allows for contextually grounded insights while maintaining broader relevance for international business discussions.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the research topic by presenting the background, identifying the research gap and outlining the objectives and scope of the study. It also presents the research questions the study will answer. The following Chapter 2 develops the theoretical framework of the thesis by reviewing literature on experiential marketing and customer journeys, and by positioning experiential pop-ups within this framework through pop-up literature. The chapter first discusses the shift from traditional marketing toward experiential marketing and then positions pop-up stores as evolving experiential marketing tools. Next, customer journey perspective is introduced and its relevancy on understanding how participants experience experiential pop-ups. Through this literature review, the chapter integrates these perspectives into a conceptual model that explains how experiential pop-ups work as experiential platforms within the customer journey.

Chapter 3 presents the research methodology used in the study, including the research approach, data collection, and data analysis procedures. The chapter also discusses the evaluation of the study and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 presents the empirical findings of the study, structured according to the pre-participation, participation, and post-participation stages of the experiential pop-up customer journey to illustrate how consumers experience experiential pop-ups across the customer journey.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings in relation to existing literature and provides theoretical contributions as well as managerial implications. The chapter also outlines the limitations of the study and suggests directions for future research. To finish, Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by summarising the study and key findings and contributions.

2 Experiential pop-ups across the customer journey

2.1 Experiential marketing

2.1.1 Foundations of experiential marketing

In recent decades, increasing attention has been directed toward the need to generate value for customers in the form of experiences (Berry et al. 2002, 85) rather than solely through products or services (Schmitt 1999, 53). This shift reflects the emergence of the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), in which value is derived not only from functional attributes but also from the meaningful, memorable, and emotionally engaging experiences that surround them (Shahid et al. 2022, 1398; Schmitt & Zarantonello 2013, 26). Firms therefore compete not merely through functional offerings but through the staging of experiences (Schmitt 1999, 56) that address both hedonic and utilitarian consumer needs (Boustani 2025, 20). Consequently, understanding and satisfying consumers requires approaches that account for this experiential value creation (Smith & Hanover 2016, 2).

Traditional marketing theories, which typically assume that consumers behave as rational decision-makers who evaluate product attributes based on functional value, fail to fully capture these experiential aspects of consumption. They overlook the psychological, sensory, and emotional processes that shape how consumers experience, perceive and respond to offerings. (Schmitt 1999, 55–56.) In contrast, experiential marketing builds on the experiential view of consumption introduced by Hirschman & Holbrook (1982), which acknowledges that consumption is often driven by fantasies, emotions, playfulness, and fun alongside rational evaluation, bringing the hedonic perspective to consumer behaviour (Farias et al. 2014, 87). From this perspective, consumer behaviour is shaped as much by affective and experiential motives, such as emotional engagement, imagination, and sensory stimulation as by rational cognitive evaluation (Russo Spena et al. 2012, 23; Schmitt 1999, 59).

Schmitt (1999, 57) initiated that experiential marketing focuses on the customer's lived experience; how people interact with and respond sensorially, emotionally, cognitively, behaviourally and socially to an offering. Experiential marketing is therefore commonly defined as a process of identifying and satisfying customer needs and creating value for the customer by engaging them through interactive brand experiences that bring brand personalities to life (Smilansky 2009, 3). Farias et al. (2014, 88) elaborate this by stating that products and services are no longer seen as ends in themselves but as elements that contribute to broader experiences that are personal, memorable, and multisensory in nature. Thus, according to the experiential view, value is not derived solely from

what is consumed, but from how consumption is experienced (Schmitt 1999, 57–60; Yuan & Wu 2008, 388).

Experiential value refers to the value consumers derive and retain from consumption experiences beyond functional outcomes (Mathwick et al. 2001, 41). Experiential value perceptions emerge through direct interactions with offerings, such as product usage, but also through more indirect forms of engagement, such as observation or symbolic meaning (Yuan & Wu 2008, 392). Mathwick et al. (2001, 41) state that a central premise of experiential marketing is that value is created through experiences themselves, and that the consumption experience can constitute a rich source of value in its own. Farias et al. (2014, 94) explains that this means that consumers desire to be persuaded on more than only attributes, which Schmitt (1999, 29) introduced as a want to be “entertained, stimulated, emotionally affected and creatively challenged”. Therefore, in order to appeal to the contemporary consumer, “the experience must be conveyed” (Farias et al. 2014, 94).

Because of this, brands increasingly compete by staging experiences for customers, which serve experiential value rather than being functional and utilitarian in nature (Schmitt & Zarantonello 2013, 27). From the brand perspective, the essence of experience marketing is to offer entertaining, interactive and engaging brand experiences for customers (Same & Larimo 2012, 483) by educating them, letting them escape reality, and providing them with aesthetic objects or spaces to see (Pine & Gilmore 1998). Schmitt and Zarantonello (2013, 44) explain that staging an experience involves the content that can elicit an experience, and brands can stage experiences through a wide range of stimulations (Schmitt 2011, 63) like the brand’s identity, products, packaging, communications, events, advertising (Brakus et al. 2009, 53–54) and physical environments such as store atmospheres and spatial design (Farias et al. 2014, 92), thematic content, sensorial cues, interactive elements (Pine & Gilmore 1998; Schmitt 1999) and service encounters (Verhoef et al. 2009, 32–34). Through these intentionally designed interactions, consumers can engage with brand in meaningful and memorable ways (Petkus Jr 2004, 50). Ultimately, the goal is to strengthen emotional connections between consumers and brands while adding value to customers (Smilansky 2009, 1).

A central premise of experiential marketing is that consumers are active participants in experience creation process, actively contributing to how the brand experience is formed and interpreted (Boustani 2025, 123). Consumers are active participants who live through experiences and co-create meaning with brands rather than passive recipients of marketing messagers (Overdiek & Warnaby 2020, 63) and experiences emerge through processes of encountering, undergoing, and remembering interactions with brands across these interactions (Schmitt 1999, 57).

Accordingly, customer experience can therefore be understood as consumers' subjective, internal responses and reactions to these stimuli staged and managed by firms (Becker & Jaakkola 2020, 636). When consumers encounter different staged brand stimuli, they interpret these encounters and form multidimensional reactions to them (Farias et al. 2014, 92). In this sense, experiential marketing conceptualizes the experience itself as a distinct type of offering: a memorable episode that engages consumers emotionally, sensorially, behaviourally, socially and cognitively (Schmitt 1999; Pine & Gilmore 1998; Becker & Jaakkola 2020, 635). Ultimately, experiential value and the outcomes of experiential marketing are reflected in these consumers' subjective perceptions and evaluations of these experiences (Yuan & Wu 2008, 388) and these reactions influence how the experience and the brand are remembered. Experiential marketing thus seeks to understand the broader holistic space of meaning in which consumption occurs, including emotions, routines, prior experiences, symbolic associations, and contextual factors that shape how consumers experience an offering. (Schmitt 1999, 57–59.)

Experiential marketing provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how consumers experience experiential value from consumption experiences by brand staging experiences that consumers live through, remember, and attach meaning to. Figure 1 demonstrates the process through which experiential value emerges in experiential marketing.

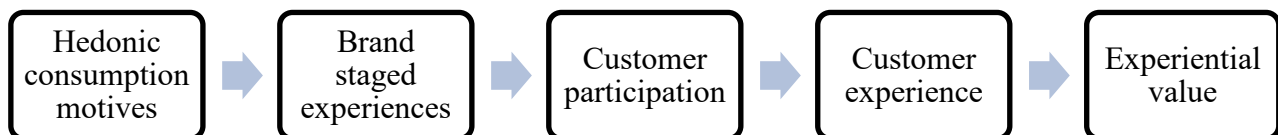


Figure 1 Experiential marketing process

Figure 1 showcases how consumers approach consumption with hedonic motives, seeking emotional, sensory, and meaningful experiences. Firms respond by staging brand-related experiences through various stimuli such as products, environments, communication, and events. Through customer participation in these staged encounters, consumers generate subjective responses that form the customer experience. Ultimately, these experiences result in experiential value, which reflects the value consumers derive from the consumption experience beyond functional benefits.

2.1.2 Dimensions of experiential value

As introduced in the previous section, experiential marketing focuses on creating value through customer experiences. Customers encounter offerings through various firm-staged stimuli and

experience them through subjective perceptions, reactions and responses (Becker & Jaakkola 2020, 636). Consequently, the value of experiential marketing is reflected in how consumers experience these encounters (Yuan & Wu 2008, 388). Importantly, customer experience is not one-dimensional. Instead, experiential value emerges through multiple dimensions of experience that shape how consumers perceive and engage with a brand (Schmitt 1999, 57). Experience literature consistently recognizes that customer experience consists of several interconnected dimensions, most commonly sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and relational elements that together form the holistic customer experience (e.g. Brakus et al. 2009; Schmitt 1999; Schmitt & Zarantonello 2013).

Seeing experiences as multidimensional provides a structured framework for analysing customer experiences beyond a functional understanding and enables to examine how different aspects of an experience contribute to overall experiential value (Schmitt 2011, 70–71). One of the most influential frameworks for analysing experiences and experiential value is the experiential marketing framework developed by Schmitt (1999). The framework consists of two key aspects: 1) strategic experiential modules (SEMs), and 2) experience providers (ExPros). SEMs represent the five types of experiences that firms seek to create, whereas ExPros refer to the tactical tools through which these experiences are delivered (Schmitt 1999, 60). From a consumer perspective, however, these modules can be interpreted as the experiential responses and reactions that emerge when consumers interact with brand stimuli (Brakus et al. 2009). In this sense, SEMs represent the dimensions of experiential value, that show how consumers perceive and evaluate brand encounters, while ExPros can be understood as the stimuli staged and managed by firms (Becker & Jaakkola 2020, 636). The five dimensions that Schmitt (1999) identifies are: *sense, feel, think, act, and relate*, which represent the sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and relational aspects of an experience (Schmitt 1999, 60). Together, they provide a structured framework for understanding how experiential value emerges from consumer interactions with brands (Mathwick et al. 2001, 41).

Sense experiences appeal to consumers' five senses: sound, sight, taste, touch and smell, to create sensory stimulation, satisfaction and aesthetic pleasure (Schmitt 1999, 61). These experiences are often created through atmospheric design elements such as lighting, colours, music, scents, food and beverages, textures, and spatial design that shape the sensory perception of the environment (Farias et al. 2014, 87; Wiedmann et al. 2018, 101). Sense experiences usually combine a clear and recognizable core concept, but each execution feels fresh and innovative through creative variation in its sensory execution (Gentile et al. 2007, 398). These sensory stimuli influence consumers' perception, judgement and behavior shaping the overall experience with the brand (Wiedmann et al. 2018, 101–102). When orchestrated effectively, multisensory experiential environments can create

memorable and distinctive brand experiences (Wiedmann et al. 2018, 115) to enhance experiential value creation (Pine & Gilmore 1998).

Feel experiences focus on eliciting consumer's emotions, moods, feeling and other affective responses, forming the emotional component of the customer experience (Schmitt 1999, 61). These experiences can range from subtle positive moods to stronger emotions such as joy, excitement or pride. Feel experiences arise as the result of contact and interaction that trigger specific feelings with specific emotional stimuli (Lee et al. 2008, 220) that consumers are willing and able to internalize (Gentile et al. 2007, 398). Stimuli can be for example storytelling or previously evoked emotions that carry over from earlier encounters with the brand (Achar et al. 2016, 168). Through feel experiences, brands can develop experiential value in the form of emotional engagement and affective brand-consumer connections (Schmitt 1999, 61; Gentile et al. 2007, 398).

Think experiences engage consumers' cognitive processes, by stimulating curiosity, reflection, problem-solving or creative thinking (Schmitt 1999, 61–62). These experiences often involve elements of surprise or intriguing elements, such as interactive installations that stimulate thinking and conscious mental engagement that encourages consumers to question assumptions or explore new ideas, or stimuli that engages customers to use their problem-solving or creativity (Schmitt 1999, 61–62; Gentile et al. 2007, 398). By stimulating intellectual engagement, think experiences encourage consumers to actively process the brand message and participate mentally in the experience (Lee et al. 2008, 220). This cognitive engagement can enrich experiential value by making the encounter more meaningful and memorable.

Act experiences target customers' behaviours, lifestyles, and physical actions (Schmitt 1999, 62) aiming to create a unique bodily experience (Lee et al. 2008, 220). This dimension encompasses the behavioural component of experience, that comes from the "practical act of doing something" (Gentile et al. 2007, 398). These experiences encourage consumers to actively participate in the experience through activities such as product trials, workshops, or interactive installations, and often leverage emotional appeals to encourage action (Schmitt 1999, 62). Rather than focusing solely on product usage, act experiences aim to inspire new behaviours, influence lifestyle choices, and integrate the brand into consumers' everyday lives (Gentile et al. 2007, 398), thereby extending experiential value beyond the immediate consumption moment.

Relate experiences extend beyond the individual and connect consumers with broader social groups, cultural meanings, or aspirational identities and emphasize social interaction, belonging, and self-expression (Schmitt 1999, 62). They encompass the lifestyle aspects; a person's values and beliefs,

and the relational components; a person's social relationships or connection to their ideal self, of the customer experience. Relate experiences may emerge through shared participation, interactions with others, social media engagement, brand communities, or the product or its usage can work as stimuli for social identity by giving consumers a sense of belonging or helping consumers connect with the values represented by the brand. (Gentile et al. 2007, 398.) By enabling consumers to express their values, identities, and lifestyles through the brand, relate experiences foster experiential value in the form of belonging and social recognition (Pine & Gilmore 1998; Lee et al. 2008, 220–221).

Although each experiential dimension has distinct characteristics, they are not independent. Effective experiential marketing combines multiple dimensions simultaneously, creating rich and holistic experiences that engage consumers on several levels. (Schmitt 1999, 62.) While SEMs essentially describe experiential goals their realization depends on ExPros; the tangible and intangible tools through which firms provide experiences to consumers, such as spatial environments, communications, media, people, and interactive elements (Schmitt 1999, 62–63). In essence, ExPros are the tools used to active the SEMs dimensions and create experiential value, as shown in Figure 2.

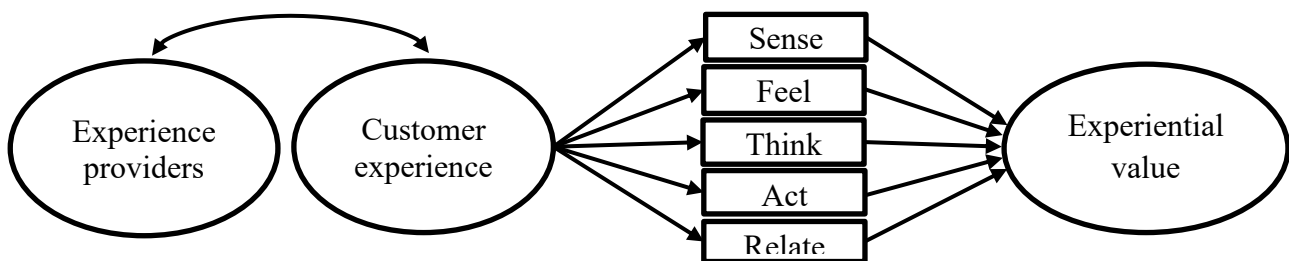


Figure 2 Experiential value creation

Figure 2 illustrates how experiential value emerges from customer experiences through sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and relational responses during interactions with brands. Customer experiences are realized and these experiential responses triggered by experience providers, which represent firm-staged stimuli. These five dimensions illustrate how experiences and experiential value are formed, providing a holistic framework for evaluating experiential marketing initiatives.

2.1.3 Experiential pop-ups as experiential platforms

Experiential pop-ups are innovative experiential marketing tools (Klein et al. 2016, 5765), defined as temporary, immersive retail environments designed to create memorable and engaging interactions between consumers and brands (Lowe et al. 2018, 78; Warnaby et al. 2015, 303). Unlike traditional stores, they strategically shape customer experiences (Lowe et al. 2018, 77), and prioritize brand-building objectives rather than immediate sales outcomes (Robertson et al. 2018, 427; Rosenbaum et al. 2021, 99). Within Schmitt's (1999) experiential marketing framework, they can be understood as

experience providers (ExPros) that stage stimuli and interactions that activate multiple experiential dimensions simultaneously. As mentioned, firms can design experiences through every point of interaction with consumers (Farias et al. 2014, 88) including spatial environments, communications, media, people, and interactive elements (Schmitt 1999, 62–63). Thus, retail spaces, such as pop-ups, play a particularly important role in shaping consumers' subjective experiences, as environmental stimuli can influence multiple experiential responses and reactions (Farias et al. 2014, 93).

Therefore, in the context of this study, experiential pop-ups are conceptualized as experiential platforms where consumers interact with and experience brands in designed environments (Overdiek & Warnaby 2020, 66). From this perspective, experiential pop-ups operate as temporary experiential environments where brands stage sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and relational experiences (Schmitt 1999). The design of experiential pop-ups therefore operationalizes experiential marketing by providing the physical and social context in which these experiential dimensions are activated. They thus create experiential value through intentionally designing environments where consumers can encounter brands through multiple experiential stimuli. Several key characteristics distinguish experiential pop-ups from traditional retail formats and facilitate experiential value creation, including *immersion and interactivity, ephemerality and novelty, multisensory design, flexible location, event-based engagement, promotion and communication and social interaction*.

First, experiential pop-ups are platforms for experience creation by emphasizing immersion (Klein et al. 2016, 5761) and interactivity (Harris 2015, 592), positioning consumers as active participants rather than passive observers (Boustani 2025, 24–27). They do not rely on conventional product displays, but intentionally immerse visitors in branded worlds that encourage exploration and active participation, thus differing from usual encounters with brands (Robertson et al. 2018, 425; Boustani 2025, 59). Interactive installations, hands-on product explorations, and participatory activities allow consumers to engage directly with the brand and fully immerse themselves in the experience through trial, play, entertainment and discovery (Harris 2015, 592; Boustani 2025, 27–30). Such experiences combine entertainment and functionality, as consumers may test products, receive samples or services and make more informed decisions while engaging with the brand in personally meaningful ways (Boustani 2025, 25). Through these encounters, experiential pop-ups can create value via emotional resonance, influence future brand interactions and create memorable brand experiences that resonates long after the store has closed (Boustani 2025, 24, 59; Pomodoro 2013, 344).

Second, ephemerality and novelty are defining characteristics of experiential pop-ups. Ephemeral spaces appear temporarily, operate for a limited time, and then disappear (Taube & Warnaby 2017,

385). This limited availability is often reinforced through countdown messaging to create a sense of urgency and exclusivity, which strengthens perceptions of uniqueness, reinforcing the idea that they offer something novel (Surchi 2011, 260; Zogaj et al. 2019, 119). Experiential pop-ups capture attention through this novelty, that is built around surprise, discovery and distinctiveness through exclusive products and experiences that feel unique and out of the ordinary (Robertson et al. 2018, 426; Klein et al. 2016, 5762; Pomodoro 2013, 347). As a result, experiential pop-ups can stimulate curiosity and encourage rapid consumer action such as willingness-to-pay and spontaneous participation (Alexander & Bain 2016, 171; Zogaj et al. 2019, 113). This combination of temporary nature and novelty can also create a sense of serendipity, where consumers perceive encountering the pop-up as a unique opportunity rather than a planned marketing strategy (Lowe et al. 2018; Zogaj et al. 2019, 113), sometimes even getting consumers to queue to participate (Boustani 2025, 30).

Third, Alexander and Bain (2016, 171) state that successful experiential pop-ups ought to engage all of the customer's senses simultaneously, and Boustani (2025, 23) found that they often combine a blend of visual, auditory, and tactile elements to create rich multisensory environments to stimulate consumer engagement. Elements such as the store's atmosphere, music, aromas, textures, and even sponsored refreshments contribute to a holistic environment that enhances participants' experiential perceptions (Zogaj et al. 2019, 111). Experiential pop-ups are often visually unique and appealing (Boustani 2025, 26), featuring exclusive aesthetic elements, up-to-date designs, inviting layouts, large installations and sets (Zogaj et al. 2019, 111; Alexander & Ling 2023, 485). They are typically built around a strong, distinctive concept or theme, with just subtle brand or product messaging, while offering visitors a fresh and differentiated experience (Shin & Kim 2023, 205; Alexander & Ling 2023, 485). Through such multisensory design, experiential pop-ups work as attractive, creative and eye-catching environments that can capture attention of passers-by (Boustani 2025, 26; Surchi 2011, 261-262), create memorable impressions (Zogaj et al. 2019, 111) and encourage both on-site engagement and social media sharing (Klein et al. 2016, 5761–62; Lowe et al. 2018, 78).

Fourth, experiential pop-ups are also flexible in their location and may appear in different and unconventional settings (Boustani 2025, 43, 53), like shopping malls, storefronts, event venues or mobile installations such as buses and vans (Alexander & Bain 2016, 167; Pomodoro 2013, 344–345). Their locations are often strategically selected in high-traffic, central and trendy city districts (Pomodoro 2013, 344) or economically significant urban areas (Rudkowski et al. 2020, 4) where the location itself becomes part of the brand experience (Surchi 2011, 260), enhancing its appeal and aligning with their strategic goal of capturing attention and generating excitement (Boustani 2025, 23, 53). The unusual or unexpected placement of pop-ups can enhance visibility and reinforce the

sense of novelty associated with them. Also, bringing the brand directly to consumers in public spaces can create spontaneous meeting points (Pomodoro 2013, 345; Boustani 2025, 53).

Fifth, due to their ephemeral nature, experiential pop-ups are inherently event-driven, functioning more as immersive happenings or events than traditional stores (Alexander & Bain 2016, 171). They integrate event-based marketing (Boustani 2025, 25) hosting tailored events inside the pop-up, such as games, challenges, exhibitions, parties, or workshops featuring different entertainment elements (Boustani 2025, 84; Haas & Schmidt 2016, 90). Such live experiences allow consumers to truly live, breathe, and feel the brand (Smilansky 2009, 4), while activities enhance perceptions of authenticity and reinforce a playful, innovative, and “feel-good” brand identity (Shi et al. 2021, 373–374). According to Lowe et al. (2018, 79) successful experiential pop-ups carefully align these events with brand values, emphasizing excitement and the creation of serendipitous experiences to enhance engagement. These events can generate excitement, buzz and social engagement (Boustani 2025, 59; Alexander & Bain 2016, 171), offer samples or giveaways (Pomodoro 2013, 345) and encourage purchasing behaviour (Lowe et al. 2018, 78) through special offers (Pomodoro 2013, 344). As a result, these experiences can enhance perceived experiential value (Boustani 2025, 23–24).

Sixth, experiential pop-ups are supported by communication and promotional activities that help shape consumer expectations and drive traffic (Boustani 2025, 25, 54), extending the pop-up experience beyond the physical activation (Shi et al. 2021, 375). Brands leverage social media announcements, influencer collaborations, and digital advertising to inform consumers about the location, timing, and unique features of the pop-up (Warnaby et al. 2015, 311; Boustani 2025, 25). In addition, experiential pop-ups may utilize event-related promotions such as discounts, promotions, and limited-time offers to attract visitors and stimulate impulse purchases during the event (Warnaby & Shi 2019, 279). They also frequently rely on low-cost and unconventional promotional tactics such as stickering, advertising on public transport, and other guerrilla marketing techniques to generate brand visibility, buzz, and surprise among visitors (Pomodoro 2013, 344; Surchi 2011, 260–262).

Finally, experiential pop-ups often function as spaces for social interaction and sharing, facilitating interaction between consumers and the brand, as well as among participants themselves. They foster a sense of community and shared participation by creating shareable moments that can enhance social recognition and peer status and create an opportunity to be part of something and engaging with environments that align with consumer’s identity. (Boustani 2025, 27–30; Kim et al. 2010, 137.) Experiential pop-ups often feature knowledgeable brand representatives who act as the face of the brand, bridging the gap between the company and its customers (Niehm et al. 2006, 10).

Representatives may demonstrate products, guide activities and drive engagement in two-way communication that allows consumers to receive information and share their own perspectives, creating opportunities for personalized interactions (Boustani 2025, 90; Kim et al. 2010, 134). This sense of belonging and social recognition often encourage word-of-mouth promotion (Kim et al. 2010, 137) and enhance the memorability of the experience, helps build emotional connection and strengthen long-term consumer-brand relationships (Boustani 2025, 27–30; Overdiek 2017, 117). These social interactions often extend beyond the physical pop-up, as they can make customers feel more confident with their choices, leading to follow-up purchases, and also via social media sharing, which can amplify brand visibility and encourage word-of-mouth (Kim et al. 2010, 134).

Through the identified characteristics, experiential pop-ups stage stimuli to respond to the hedonic consumption need of consumers and encourage consumer participation. Experiential pop-ups thus function as experience providers that leverage *immersion and interactivity, ephemerality and novelty, multisensory design, flexible location choices, event-based engagement, promotion and communication and social interactions* to stage rich experiential environments and interactions. Through these interactions, experiential pop-ups form the experiential pop-up customer experience as consumers' respond to them through sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and relational dimensions (Schmitt 1999). They therefore operationalize experiential marketing by providing a concrete setting in which they facilitate the creation of experiential value through consumer participation as illustrated in Figure 3.

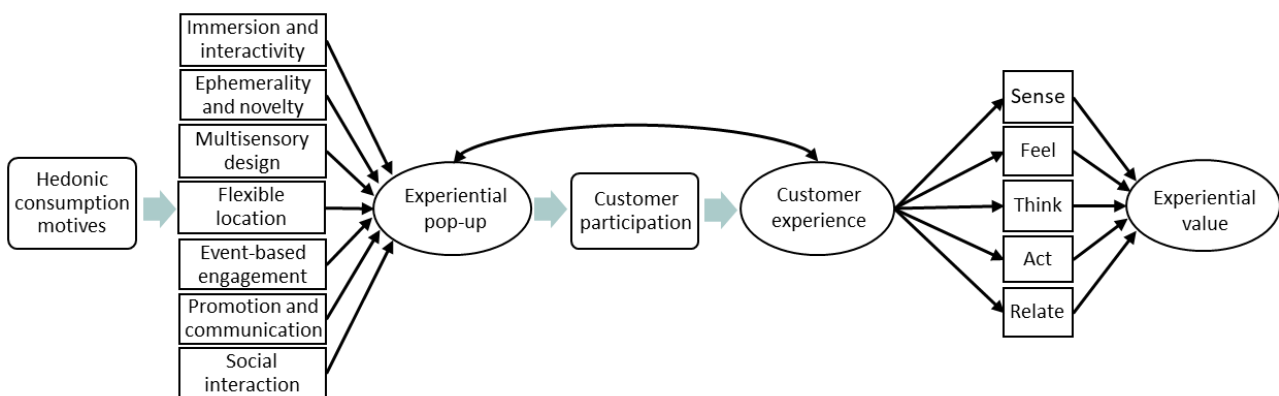


Figure 3 Experiential pop-ups as experiential platforms

While experiential pop-ups thus are experiential marketing platforms that stage immersive environments that activate multiple experiential dimensions, these experiences do not occur in isolation. Instead, consumers encounter and engage with experiential pop-ups across multiple interactions before, during, and after the experience (Rudkowski et al. 2020, 1). Understanding experiential pop-up experiences therefore requires a customer journey perspective.

2.2 Customer journey

2.2.1 Customer journey management

The customer journey, or customer experience journey (Siebert et al. 2020), contributes to customer experience management by providing a framework for understanding, designing and managing customer interactions over time (De Keyser et al. 2020, 2; Tueanrat et al. 2021, 336). Importantly, the customer journey perspective expands experiential marketing which views experiences as isolated events, and redirects marketing focus toward the management of the entire customer journey (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 71), emphasizing that customer experience unfolds across multiple interactions and touchpoints (Kranzbühler et al. 2018, 446; Becker and Jaakkola 2020, 635).

The customer journey refers to the process through which customers pursue to fulfil specific goals (Jaakkola et al. 2022, 6), encompassing the sequence of interactions with a brand and its offerings a customer has across multiple touchpoints before, during, and after a purchase or service experience (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 71; Norton & Pine II 2013, 12). Customer journey literature highlights that experiences are influenced by brand-controlled stimuli but also by elements outside the firm's control, such as external information sources or social influences (Jaakkola et al. 2022, 2). Customer journey perspective therefore expands customer experience as follows: it arises as consumers' subjective sensorial, affective, cognitive, relational, and behavioural responses and reactions to stimuli arising from interaction encountered along the entire customer journey (Becker & Jaakkola 2020, 636; Weidig et al. 2024, 1; Nardini et al. 2019, 520). While customer experience captures how customers think, feel, and behave during interactions, the customer journey provides the structure for understanding when, where, and why these experiences occur (Norton & Pine II 2013; Nardini et al. 2019). This enables to examine, from the customer perspective, how experiences develop across interactions over time and how individual touchpoints collectively shape the overall customer experience (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 76; Homburg et al. 2017; Halvorsrud et al. 2016).

Although firms cannot directly create or control customers' internal responses or reactions (Jaakkola et al. 2022, 2), they can influence experience formation by intentionally designing and managing the interactions and elements that customers encounter throughout the journey (Becker & Jaakkola 2020, 641). Customer journey management therefore focuses on understanding and mapping how experiences unfold across the entire sequence of interactions between a customer and a firm (Grewal & Roggeveen 2020, 3) in order to manage and design holistic, meaningful, consistent, and emotionally engaging experiences across the entire journey (Tueanrat et al. 2021, 336; Følstad & Kvale 2018, 211). As customer interactions increasingly occur across multiple channels and

environments, customer journey management has become an important managerial priority (Reitsamer & Becker 2024, 1). Effective journey design ensures cohesive and contextually appropriate brand interactions across touchpoints, thereby shaping positive customer experiences across the journey (Kuehnl et al. 2019, 551–552). In the following sections, the structure of the customer journey is presented to allow examination of the experiential pop-up customer journey.

2.2.2 Stages of the customer journey

As customer experiences unfold dynamically over time (Kranzbühler et al. 2018, 446) customers partition journeys into meaningful segments when encountering distinctive changes in their journey (Reitsamer & Becker 2024, 3). While the full customer journey is complex and holistic, dividing it into stages gives an analytical structure for a more manageable examination of experiences (Grewal & Roggeveen 2020, 4). To structure this process, customer journey frameworks commonly distinguish three main stages: pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase (e.g. Lemon & Verhoef 2016; Grewal & Roggeveen, 2020).

The pre-purchase stage refers to the parts of the experience that occur before a direct transaction takes place or actual service begins (Rosenbaum et al. 2017, 144). It typically begins when a customer first considers potential products or brands (Mele et al. 2025, 4) or when a goal, need or impulse is recognized, and proceeds as the customer considers how that need or desire might be fulfilled, potentially through a purchase (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 76). At this stage, customers are exposed to various touchpoints such as social media, advertising, word-of-mouth recommendations, and other external sources (Rosenbaum et al. 2017, 144; Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 75). Rather than focusing only on decision-making behaviours, this stage can be understood as the period in which expectations, impressions, and anticipatory experiences begin to form (compare Lemon & Verhoef 2016).

The purchase stage encompasses interactions that occur during direct engagement with the firm. This can include touchpoints related to aspects of visiting a store, browsing an online shop, or engaging with customer service. The purchase stage therefore usually represents the most direct point of contact between the customer and the firm and is often the most immersive phase of the journey, as customers experience the brand first-hand (Rosenbaum et al. 2017, 144; Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 75.) Consequently, this stage constitutes a critical moment for experience formation, as brands manage direct interactions to trigger cognitive, emotional, sensory, behavioural, and social responses.

The post-purchase stage covers experiences that occur after the primary interaction that are directly connected to the brand or its offerings. These may involve product use, continued brand engagement,

such as providing feedback, leaving reviews, sharing experiences on social media or recommending the product to others. Positive experiences may contribute to what has been described as a “loyalty loop” (e.g. Court et al. 2009), prompting continued loyalty, encouraging repeat purchases and advocacy, whereas dissatisfaction may restart the cycle, and the customer returns to the pre-purchase stage to evaluate other options. (Rosenbaum et al. 2017, 144; Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 75.)

Importantly, experiences in each stage are influenced by earlier interactions and touchpoints encountered throughout the process, shaping subsequent expectations and perceptions (Micheaux & Bosio 2018, 130; Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 76–78). Over time, repeated interactions may contribute to relationship development or attitudinal changes resulting from particularly memorable experiences (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 78). Therefore, while originally viewed as a linear funnel (e.g. Lemon & Verhoef 2016), more recent research emphasize that journeys are fluid and iterative (Mele et al. 2021). Customers may move back and forth between stages, revisit or skip stages, or accelerate through them depending on contextual, emotional, social, and other factors (Mele et al. 2021, 428–429; Grewal & Roggeveen 2020, 4, 7; Hamilton & Price, 2019, 188). For example, customers are prone to impulse shopping, can turn to friends and family for advice, switch from one brand to the next with little cost or have trial experiences such as testing (Grewal & Roggeveen 2020, 7; Lingqvist et al. 2015, 1). In digitally enabled environments, online and offline touchpoints interact, creating iterative “phygital” journeys in which boundaries between stages become blurred as they are further shaped by channel switching, feedback loops, and dropouts (Kranzbühler et al. 2018, 447; Mele et al. 2021, 421). Next, different types of touchpoints are outlined to understand this complexity.

2.2.3 Touchpoints in the customer journey

Customer experience is formed through a series of interactions with the firm, its partners, other customers, or external information sources encountered along the entire customer journey (Weidig et al. 2024, 1; Mele et al. 2025, 5). These interactions are called *touchpoints* which refer to episodes of direct or indirect contact between customers and a firm across human, communicative, spatial, and digital points of interaction (Baxendale et al. 2015, 236; Dhebar 2013, 200). They include all one-way or two-way interactions involving transactional or informational exchange between customers and firms, including interactions among customers themselves (Herhausen et al. 2019, 9; Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 74). Because firms do not control all interactions influencing the journey (Jaakkola et al. 2022, 2), touchpoints are commonly categorized based on ownership (Towers & Towers 2022, 28). Lemon and Verhoef (2016) identify four categories of touchpoints: brand-owned, partner-owned, customer-owned, and social/external touchpoints.

Brand-owned touchpoints include all interactions owned, designed, managed, and controlled by the brand owner, such as advertising, websites, product attributes, pricing, physical environments, sales personnel and service encounters (Towers & Towers, 2022, 27–28). These touchpoints are particularly important because they are directly manageable by the firm, offering firms significant opportunities to shape the experience (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 77–78). *Partner-owned touchpoints* are interactions that are jointly co-created or managed together with an external partner such as marketing agencies, distributors, or platform providers. However, the boundary between brand-owned and partner-owned touchpoints is often blurred, thus their influence on customer experience is less clearly understood. (Towers & Towers 2022, 27–28; Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 77.)

Touchpoints go beyond brand-owned to include earned touchpoints (Baxendale et al. 2015, 235). *Customer-owned touchpoints* are those actions and experiences that are outside of the brand's control and arise from customers' own actions, motivations, and internal processes, independent of firm influence, such as internal need recognition and personal reflection, and usage behaviours. These touchpoints are most prominent in the post-purchase phase, where satisfaction and future behaviours are shaped, and have become increasingly important with the rise of co-creation and user-generated content. (Towers & Towers 2022, 28; Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 77–78.) *Social or external touchpoints* originate from the broader social and environmental context and remain outside the control of the brand (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 78). These touchpoints include peer interactions, word-of-mouth, third-party reviews, social media content, and the observable behaviour of other customers. These interactions can significantly shape behaviour and brand perceptions, sometimes even outweighing firm-controlled touchpoints. (Towers & Towers 2022, 28.) Third-party information sources, such as reviews or social media posts, can be independent, but sometimes work in alignment with the brand (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 78) meaning they can be touchpoints that are to some degree brand-owned.

Importantly, customers do not experience these touchpoints independently and each touchpoint interdependently influences how the next is perceived in the journey (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 82). They are important, because customers respond to touchpoints cognitively, emotionally, behaviourally, sensorily, and socially, and these responses shape whether individual interactions are perceived as satisfying, dissatisfying, or neutral (Kranzbühler et al. 2019, 308). Collectively, touchpoints and consumers' responses and perceptions to them is important to understand, as they contribute to the formation of the overall customer experience (Kranzbühler et al. 2019, 308; Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 74; Baxendale et al. 2015, 236) and thus experiential value. For this reason, Kuehnl et al. (2019, 565) highlights the importance of holistically designing and orchestrating touchpoints across the customer journey from the consumer's perspective.

Customers may interact with multiple touchpoints and types during the journey, and they do not always belong exclusively to one stage (Reitsamer & Becker 2024, 3). The importance of each type varies depending on the product, service, or individual customer path (Towers & Towers 2022, 29; Rudkowski et al. 2020, 2). Hence, it is important to evaluate these touchpoints' significance in changing the customer's perceptions and behaviours toward the brand (Baxendale et al. 2015, 235). Therefore, firms ought to identify and prioritize high-impact touchpoints (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 82). Reitsamer and Becker (2024, 9) support identifying the combination of stimuli most likely to elicit positive experiences and to use these stimuli at specific points to trigger the desired sequence of experiences. A *key moment* is any point in the transaction that significantly influences the customer's experience, and a *moment of truth* represents a particularly critical interaction in which the brand has the opportunity to create a lasting impression (Norton & Pine II 2013, 13). While managing all touchpoints is complex, identifying and prioritising these moments enables firms to more effectively understand the customer experience and manage the overall customer journey (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 82; Norton & Pine II 2013, 13–14). Figure 4 illustrates how brand-owned, partner-owned, customer-owned, and social/external touchpoints occur at pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages of the customer journey (Lemon & Verhoef 2016).

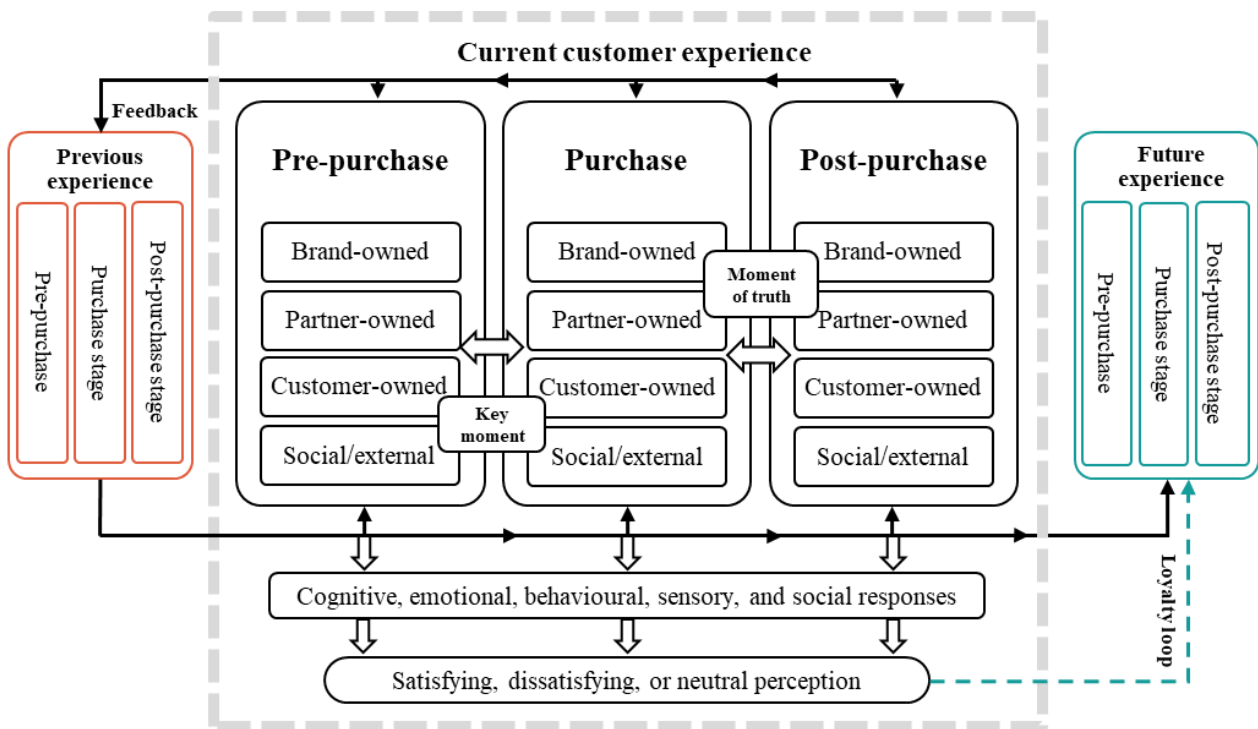


Figure 4 The customer journey (adapted from: Lemon & Verhoef 2016)

Each interaction shapes subsequent experiences, with key moments and moments of truth representing high-impact touchpoints. Touchpoints trigger cognitive, emotional, behavioural, sensory

and social responses, while interactions are perceived as either neutral, satisfying or dissatisfying, possibly leading to a loyalty loop.

2.2.4 Mapping the experiential pop-up customer journey

Building on the customer journey framework discussed in the previous sections, customer journey mapping (CJM) provides a structured approach for understanding how customers experience interactions with firms across touchpoints (Reitsamer & Becker 2024, 8). By representing experiences across the journey, CJM captures how customers respond and react at different stages of the journey (Harris et al. 2020, 76–77; Villani 2019, 90–92). Mapping the sequence of interactions helps identify key touchpoints, understand customer behaviour, and reveal how different interactions collectively shape the full experience (Moon et al. 2016, 501; Rosenbaum et al. 2017, 143–144). CJM also helps in identifying the moments where value is created or where friction occurs (Crosier & Handford 2012 68; Jaakkola et al. 2022, 10), supporting the analysis and improvement of customer experience (Moon et al. 2016, 502). Because customer experience emerges through sensorial, cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioural responses across multiple touchpoints, CJM is suitable for analysing experiential value creation (Micheaux & Bosio 2018, 130; Crosier & Handford 2012, 67–68).

Applying a customer journey perspective is particularly relevant in the context of experiential pop-ups. As discussed in Section 2.1.3, experiential pop-ups are experiential marketing platforms designed to create interactive brand experiences. Consequently, they should not be understood as isolated encounters, but rather as broader customer journey processes involving multiple interactions across stages and touchpoints (Rudkowski et al. 2020, 5). Although the physical visit to the pop-up typically occurs during a limited time period, the overall experience extends before and after the event itself (Shi et al. 2021, 375). Experiential pop-ups can therefore be understood as temporary but high-intensity touchpoints embedded within a broader customer journey (Rudkowski et al. 2020, 2).

However, traditional customer journey frameworks typically structure journeys around pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages (Lemon & Verhoef 2016) Such a structure does not fully capture experiential pop-ups, which resemble events (Alexander & Bain 2016, 171) and may not involve on-site purchasing at all (Niehm et al. 2006, 10). Moreover, previous research suggests that customers naturally segment experiences when they encounter meaningful transitions, such as entering a new physical environment or changing interaction context (Reitsamer & Becker 2024, 2–3). To better reflect the experiential and event-like nature of experiential pop-ups, this study conceptualized the experiential pop-up journey through three stages: *pre-participation*, *participation*, and *post-participation* to focus on consumer experience before, during, and after participation.

Within this framework, touchpoints can be understood according to the ownership categories introduced earlier in Section 2.2.3. While customer journey literature distinguishes between brand-owned and partner-owned touchpoints (Lemon & Verhoef 2016), experiential pop-ups are typically organised by a single brand (Rudkowski et al. 2020, 4), and involve interactions that customers may not easily attribute to specific partners (see Towers & Towers 2022, 27–28). Therefore, this study focuses on three relevant touchpoint types for experiential pop-ups: *brand-owned*, *customer-owned*, and *social/external touchpoints*. Experiential pop-ups combine both physical and digital touchpoints (Shi et al. 2021, 375), allowing consumers to engage with brands within the temporary retail space but also through online platforms and social environments (Boustani 2025, 59).

During the *pre-participation stage* of experiential pop-ups, according to Rudkowski et al. (2020, 9–11) consumers encounter information before physically attend the pop-up, that can trigger awareness, shape expectations, influence motivation and the decision to attend. According to Shi et al. (2021, 375) pre-participation interactions involve touchpoints such as branded social media promotion, influencer collaborations, advertising (Boustani 2025, 25, 54; Warnaby et al. 2015, 311), user-generated content (Kim et al. 2010, 134) and word-of-mouth communication (Robertson et al. 2018, 436; Niehm et al. 2006). Physical cues like exterior presence, location visibility, and the surrounding urban environment may also function as awareness touchpoints that attract attention to the pop-up (Rudkowski et al. 2020, 9–11; Pomodoro 2013, 344). Prior research further suggests that perceptions of novelty, surprise and hedonic value increase consumer interest in pop-ups, encouraging visitation (Robertson et al. 2018, 428–429; Zogaj et al. 2019, 119; Ryu 2011, 145). Pre-existing familiarity, attitudes, and perceived benefits regarding pop-up retail may also shape participation intentions (Niehm et al. 2006, 8; Kim et al. 2010, 10, 148). Despite its importance, this stage often receives less strategic attention from brands than the on-site experience itself (Rudkowski et al. 2020, 11).

In the *participation stage* consumers interact directly with the brand, the physical experiential pop-up environment, and other participants. They engage in behaviours such as exploration, trial, sensory engagement, social interaction with staff and other participants, and participation in experiential activities (Rudkowski et al. 2020, 9–11; Kim et al. 2010, 148). Touchpoints may include spatial store design, multisensory environmental cues, interactive installations, product displays, product sampling, payment interactions, and interactions with brand representatives (Rudkowski et al. 2020, 9–11; Warnaby et al. 2015, 311). Although immediate sales are often not the objective, impulse purchasing can be stimulated through limited time offers or promotions (Warnaby & Shi 2019, 279). Rudkowski et al. (2020, 12) state that this stage tends to have the most touchpoints within the pop-up customer journey, reflecting the strong emphasis placed on in-store experiential engagement.

After leaving the experiential pop-up, in the *post-participation stage* consumers may reflect on the experience (Boustani 2025, 29), evaluate the encounter, share impressions with others, follow brand channels, recommend it or engage in purchasing (Robertson et al. 2018, 430–431; Rudkowski et al. 2020, 9–11). Positive experiences can prompt long-term brand loyalty (Lowe et al. 2018, 77). Touchpoints may include social media sharing, user-generated content, online reviews (Shi et al. 2021, 375; Warnaby et al. 2015, 312), word-of-mouth communication (Klein et al. 2016, 5761), visits to brand websites or online stores, promotional codes, brand merchandise and communication about future events (Rudkowski et al. 2020, 9–11). If effectively managed, this stage enables brands to extend experiential value into longer-term brand engagement. However, prior research suggests that post-participation engagement often remains underdeveloped, as brands frequently fail to establish mechanisms for sustaining relationships after the event (Rudkowski et al. 2020, 12).

Because pop-ups emphasize experiential value rather than direct sales, evaluating their effectiveness solely through transactional metrics is insufficient (Zogaj et al. 2019, 112). Instead, experiential outcomes such as emotional engagement, brand connection, and behavioural intentions are more appropriate indicators of success (Klein et al. 2016). Moreover, consumers often evaluate pop-ups based on the quality of the experience itself rather than if they made a purchase (Lowe et al. 2018, 77). Understanding the full experiential pop-up journey is therefore essential for analysing value creation. Based on this literature, a conceptual journey map is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Experiential pop-up journey map

Journey stage	Customer behaviours	Touchpoints	Touchpoint types
Pre-participation	Awareness, expectation, motivation, decision to attend	Social media promotion, influencer content, advertising, user-generated-content, word-of-mouth, exterior presence, location visibility, surrounding urban environment	Brand-owned, customer-owned, social/external
Participation	Exploration, interaction, sensory engagement, participation	Spatial design, multisensory environment, installations, product demonstrations, sampling, experiential activities, staff interactions, interaction with other participants, payment interactions	Brand-owned, social/external
Post-participation	Reflection, evaluation, sharing, recommendation, loyalty	Social media sharing, word-of-mouth, promotional codes, brand merchandise, website visits, future event communication, purchasing	Brand-owned, customer-owned, social/external

Table 1 illustrates key touchpoints and behaviours that may occur across the pre-participation, participation and post-participation stages of the experiential pop-up journey. This provides a theoretical starting point to analyse experiential pop-up experiences and experiential value creation.

2.3 Experiential pop-ups across the customer journey

This study combines experiential marketing and customer journey literature to examine how consumers experience experiential pop-ups across multiple interactions. As discussed in Section 2.1, experiential marketing conceptualizes consumption as inherently experiential, emphasizing that customer experience occurs as sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and relational responses to brand encounters (Schmitt 1999; Becker & Jaakkola 2020). This study positions experiential pop-ups as experience providers, temporary experiential platforms where such experiences are staged through immersive, interactive, multisensory, and socially engaging environments (Lowe et al. 2018; Overdiek & Warnaby 2020; Boustani 2025) identified in Section 2.1.3, enabling the activation of multiple experiential dimensions simultaneously.

However, as discussed in Section 2.2, these experiences do not occur in isolation. Customer journey literature highlights that experiences unfold across multiple touchpoints and interactions over time (Lemon & Verhoef 2016; Reitsamer & Becker 2024). It is therefore necessary to apply a customer journey perspective for understanding experiential pop-ups, as consumers encounter them before, during, and after participation through a variety of touchpoints, including digital, physical, and social interactions (Rudkowski et al. 2020; Shi et al. 2021). Experiential pop-ups are thus understood as temporary but high-intensity touchpoints embedded within the broader customer journey in this study.

This study conceptualizes the experiential pop-up journey through three stages: pre-participation, participation, and post-participation (Section 2.2.4.). Within these stages, consumers encounter brand-owned, customer-owned, and social or external touchpoints shape how the full experience unfolds. These touchpoints provide the context in this study through which consumers engage with the brand and form their experiences. They trigger experiential responses, including sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and relational reactions (Schmitt 1999), and capture how consumers experience experiential pop-ups and serve as the primary basis for analysis in this study.

Experiential value in this study is an outcome of these interactions, emerging from consumers' responses to touchpoints across the journey. Prior studies imply that pre-participation touchpoints can shape expectations and motivations, participation touchpoints can shape immersion and engagement, and post-participation touchpoints can shape reflection, sharing, and continued brand relationships. Thus, experiential pops extend outside the physical, temporary event and across channels. However, these prior findings need more empirical support, especially in the context of experiential pop-ups.

This conceptualization defines the analytical focus of this study, which examines 1) the touchpoints that emerge across the experiential pop-up journey, 2) the experiential responses these touchpoints evoke, and 3) how consumers perceive the value of these experiences across stages. While literature provides a theoretical basis for identifying touchpoints and responses, actual experiences may differ from planned journeys (Halvorsrud et al. 2016) highlighting the importance of adopting a customer perspective (Norton & Pine II, 2013, 13). Therefore, this study focuses on participants' actual experiences, addressing a gap in prior research that has relied on observational approaches (Rudkowski et al. 2020). As prior literature provides only partial view of experiences, empirical analysis is needed to explore experiential pop-up experiences across the journey. Figure 5 illustrates the conceptual framework of this study.

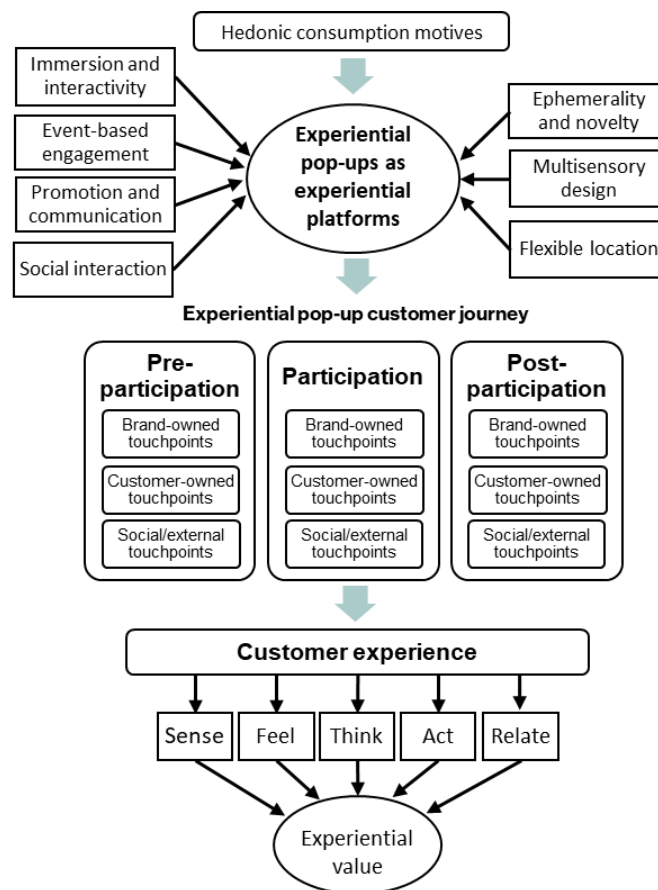


Figure 5 Conceptual framework of experiential pop-ups across the customer journey

In Figure 5, experiential pop-ups are temporary experiential platforms, responding to consumers' hedonic motives, and stage experiences within the customer journey. Across pre-participation, participation, and post-participation stages, touchpoints trigger experiential responses (sense, feel, think, act, relate), which shape customer experience and contribute to experiential value as an outcome of the customer journey. This provides a basis for examining experiential pop-up experiences from the customer's perspective.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research approach

The research approach provides the overall logic through which a study addresses its research problem, and its selection is guided by the research aim and the type of knowledge sought (Leavy 2017, 8; Vogt et al. 2012, 10). Depending on the research problem, studies may adopt exploratory, descriptive, or causal approaches (Ghauri et al. 2020, 63). As this study seeks to understand how consumers experience experiential pop-ups across the customer journey, the emphasis is placed on exploring individuals' perceptions, interpretations, emotions and meaning-making processes. Thus, an exploratory approach is adopted to explore how consumers experience and interpret experiential pop-ups across the stages of their journeys. Exploratory research is ideal when a phenomenon remains insufficiently understood and when the aim is to generate insights, identify patterns, and deepen understanding rather than test predetermined hypotheses (Ghauri et al. 2020, 63–64; Saunders et al. 2023, 179; Vogt et al. 2012, 341). As outlined earlier, prior research on experiential pop-ups is limited and existing research has failed to adopt a holistic understanding of experiential pop-ups from a customer journey perspective.

Consistent with this exploratory purpose, the study employs a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is appropriate when the objective is to develop a holistic understanding of complex phenomena by examining individuals' experiences, interpretations and meaning-making through participants' own accounts (Merriam & Tisdell 2016, 6, 15; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2015, 5). Rather than testing hypotheses or measuring (Bazen et al. 2021, 241), qualitative inquiry aims to capture consumers' subjective experiences (Leavy 2017, 124) and to understand how people make sense of the world around them (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 28). As the purpose is to understand how experiential pop-ups are experienced and how these experiences are interpreted as part of the customer journey, such *how* questions are best explored through qualitative methods (Bazen et al. 2021, 242), which allow rich descriptions of experiences, behaviours, and perceptions to emerge in participants' own words rather than numbers (Merriam & Tisdell 2016, 6, 17.)

A qualitative approach is particularly well suited for this study because understanding experiential pop-ups requires the access to consumers' subjective viewpoints. Experiential pop-up experiences are personal, contextual, and include meaning-making, and they cannot be fully captured through standardized measures alone (Becker 2018, 469). Qualitative methods enables participants to describe their experiences in their own words, highlighting the events, interactions, and meanings that matter

most from their perspective (Ghauri et al. 2020, 98; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2015, 5), enabling this study to explore how experiential pop-up experiences are formed and facilitate the development of a holistic understanding of experiential pop-up experiences and the meanings associated with them across the entire customer journey (Leavy 2017, 124). Moreover, qualitative research allows the examination of multiple perspectives and contextual factors supporting a comprehensive understanding of experiential pop-up customer journey beyond linear cause-effect relationships (Creswell & Creswell 2023, 195), supporting the aims of this study.

Qualitative research is also inherently flexible and iterative (Frechtling & Sharp 1997). Data collection and analysis are often conducted simultaneously (Ghauri et al. 2020, 130) and the process of making sense of information overlaps in a reflexive and evolving manner (Frechtling & Sharp 1997, 42). Early insights during the research process can inform subsequent analytical focus and interpretations are shaped by both empirical data and pre-existing theories (Srivastava & Hopwood 2009, 76-77). In line with common practices in business research (Saunders et al. 2023, 158–159), rather than following a strictly linear sequence, this study adopts this iterative process. This involves moving back and forth between empirical material, emerging interpretations, and relevant theory throughout the research process in order to identify patterns that provide meaningful explanation of how experiential pop-up experiences are formed and interpreted across the customer journey.

As iterative qualitative inquiry emphasises interpretation, and reflexivity, it is necessary to clarify the philosophical assumptions guiding the study (Leavy 2017). The methodological choices of this study are guided by an interpretivist research philosophy, which assumes that knowledge is socially constructed and continuously shaped through individuals' interactions, interpretations and lived experiences rather than being fixed (Saunders et al. 2023, 150; Merriam & Tisdell 2016, 23). In contrast to positivist approaches that aim to establish objective, generalisable laws, interpretivism emphasises subjective, context-driven human experiences and aims to understand phenomena from the perspectives of those experiencing them (Saunders et al. 2023, 150). This philosophical positioning is particularly appropriate as the value and significance of experiential pop-ups emerge through consumers' personal interpretations of their encounters with them across the stages of the customer journey. An interpretivist qualitative approach therefore provides an appropriate foundation for examining these subjective experiences. In order to gain insight into these experiences, it was necessary to collect empirical qualitative data from individuals who had directly participated in experiential pop-ups and were able to reflect on these encounters. The data collection process is described in the following section.

3.2 Data collection

In qualitative research, methods for data collection are selected based on the research objective and the type of knowledge sought (Vogt et al. 2012, 3–4). Common methods include interviews and observations (Ghauri et al. 2020, 99). In this study, primary data were collected through semi-structured, one-on-one interviews conducted by the researcher. Primary data was considered necessary, as the study focuses on consumers' subjective experiences and meaning-making processes, which require direct access to participants' own accounts (Merriam & Tisdell 2016, 17).

Semi-structured interviews were selected due to their suitability for exploring experiential pop-up customer journeys, as they allow participants to describe both what they experienced and how they made sense of those experiences (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2015, 94). Interviews are especially appropriate for understanding phenomena that cannot be directly observed, such as thoughts, emotions, meanings, and behaviours that occurred in the past (Creswell & Creswell 2023, 200; Patton 2015, 425–426). Compared to structured interviews, semi-structured interviews offer a balance between flexibility and consistency as a predefined interview guide ensures that main themes are covered, while allowing adaptation of questions based on participants' responses (Saunders et al. 2023, 512). This conversational format encourages participants to reflect on their freely on their experiences (Ghauri et al. 2020, 115) and emphasise aspects of the phenomena that they personally perceive as meaningful (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2015, 94). As conducting semi-structured interviews requires skills (Ghauri et al. 2020, 115), careful preparation, including piloting the interview guide and learning research interview practices from methodological literature, and reflective practices, such as taking notes after each interview and critically evaluating the interview performance, were employed to mitigate limitations, as this was the researcher's first experience using this method.

In qualitative inquiry, participant selection decisions are guided by the research purpose rather than statistical representativeness (Merriam & Tisdell 2016, 96). Since collecting data from the entire population of pop-up participants is impractical (Saunders et al. 2023, 291), non-probability purposive selection was employed to intentionally select information-rich cases (Bazen et al. 2021, 242); individuals with relevant experience and knowledge, who are capable of providing relevant insight into the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Creswell 2023, 198; Patton 2015, 264). As this study seeks to understand consumers' experiences, it was essential to recruit participants with direct, first-hand experience of experiential pop-ups (Ghauri et al. 2020, 95). Accordingly, participants were selected based on their prior experience with an experiential pop-up and their ability to reflect on the full customer journey, including post-participation experiences. To ensure sufficient

temporal distance for reflection on memorability, post-participation evaluations, and potential loyalty-loop formation, participants were required to have visited an experiential pop-up at least three months prior to the interview (Pizzutti et al. 2022). Although prior research has identified typical pop-up visitors as relatively young, often female, characterised by high shopping involvement, innovative tendencies and strong need for uniqueness (Niehm et al. 2006; Kim et al. 2010; Robertson et al. 2018), no demographic restrictions were applied in participant selection as the aim was to develop a holistic understanding of experiential pop-up experiences rather than compare demographic groups. Therefore, individuals were recruited if they met the criteria above.

To ensure conceptual clarity and methodological precision, the concept of an experiential pop-up was operationalised prior to participant recruitment. Potential participants were screened through preliminary conversations in which they were asked to describe the pop-up they had visited, including its purpose, atmosphere, activities, and the nature of interaction with the brand. This screening process was guided by theoretically grounded criteria derived from the literature review; pop-ups were considered experiential if they clearly embodied characteristics identified in the literature, such as immersive design, multisensory elements, interactivity, and a focus on brand engagement rather than direct sales (e.g. Klein et al. 2016; Robertson et al. 2018; Boustani 2025).

Participants were recruited through the researcher's personal networks and through self-selection via a recruitment video published on TikTok. In self-selection, individuals volunteer to participate after the researcher publicly communicates the need for participants (Saunders et al. 2023, 324). To ensure alignment with the study's focus, the recruitment message referenced two recent pop-ups in Helsinki that met the experiential criteria outlined above but also expressed openness to other relevant experiential pop-ups. Individuals who had visited either of these pop-ups or an applicable experiential pop-up and wished to participate were invited to contact the researcher directly. This approach facilitated access to information-rich participants and supported a comfortable interview environment. Although recruitment through personal networks may introduce bias, this risk was mitigated through careful interview design and continuous reflexive awareness throughout the process. Researcher judgement and subjectivity are inherent in non-probability sampling, however, such bias is theoretically justified in qualitative research when transparently applied and grounded in existing literature (Saunders et al. 2023, 295; Patton 2015, 264).

To support the structuring of the semi-structured interviews, an operationalization table was created, presented in Table 2. The table was developed based on the research questions and relevant literature and provided a conceptual framework for formulating the interview questions. The theoretical

concepts were not translated directly into interview questions word-for-word but were applied in a flexible and interpretive manner to guide the formulation of interview themes.

Table 2 Operationalization of the study

Research question	Sub-questions	Theoretical background	Interview themes
How do consumers experience experiential pop-ups across the customer journey?	What experiential pop-up touchpoints emerge across the stages of the experiential pop-up customer journey?	Customer journey stages, Customer journey touchpoints, Experiential pop-ups as experiential platforms, Experiential pop-up touchpoints	Pre-participation touchpoints (awareness, expectations, motivation) Participation touchpoints (arrival, environment, interactions, activities) Post-participation touchpoints (reflection, sharing, WOM, continued engagement)
	What kinds of experiential responses do experiential pop-up touchpoints evoke among consumers?	Experiential marketing framework, Experiential pop-ups as experiential platforms, Dimensions of experiential value	Sensory impressions (Sense), Emotional reactions (Feel), Cognitive perceptions (Think), Behavioural engagement and actions (Act), Social interaction and identity expression (Relate)
	How do consumers perceive the value of experiential pop-up experiences across the experiential pop-up customer journey?	Dimensions of experiential value, Experiential pop-ups as experiential platforms, Experiential pop-up journey map	Anticipated value pre-participation (expectations, motivations), Value during participation (enjoyment, meaningfulness), Value after participation (memorability, relevance, brand-related outcomes)

Prior to data collection, an interview guide was developed table (see Appendix 1 Interview guide) based on the operationalization to ensure consistency across interviews while allowing flexibility for adaptation, probing and follow-up questions based on individual responses and emerging insights (Patton 2015, 439). The guide was structured around pre-participation, participation, and post-participation stages of the customer journey and aligned with experiential dimensions to support exploration of experiential responses. The guide consisted primarily of open-ended exploratory questions to encourage participants to describe their experiences in their own words, supporting authentic insights by minimising the imposition of predetermined response categories (Patton 2015, 446–447; Vogt et al. 2012, 47). The guide was initially developed in English, the language of the thesis, and subsequently translated into Finnish for the interviews. A pilot interview was conducted prior to the data collection to test the interview guide, estimate the duration of the interviews and identify potential issues. Minor revisions were made to sequencing of questions and redundant questions were removed.

The interviews were conducted in early February 2026 and lasted between 39 and 56 minutes. All interviews were held as one-on-one video sessions via Microsoft Teams, allowing to access participant's regardless of location, and audio-recorded with participants' informed consent to ensure accuracy in data collection and transcription. Table 3 details on the participants and of each session. All interviews were conducted in Finnish to allow all participants, who were native Finnish speakers, to express themselves comfortably, supporting richer and more spontaneous answers without linguistic constraints. Each interview began with brief background questions to establish rapport, after which the discussion progressed through the predefined thematic areas. Probing and follow-up questions were used throughout to encourage elaboration and clarify meanings (cf. Patton 2015, 465–466), enabling the collection of data coming directly from participants, that might not have been captured through predetermined questions (Leavy 2017, 141). Leading questions and evaluative feedback were avoided by focusing on eliciting descriptions of concrete situations, experiences, and reflections as advised by Bazen et al. (2021, 242). Trust was built through a non-judgemental interviewing style, using nodding to demonstrated genuine interest in participants' experiences, and with clear communication about participants' right to withdraw or skip questions. In accordance to Leavy (2017, 39–40) it was emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers. At the end of each interview, participants were encouraged to share any additional reflections relevant to the topic. Initial thoughts and observations were written down directly after each interview to iteratively support adjustments of interview questions in later interviews.

Table 3 Details on the participants and interviews

Participant	Age, gender	Occupation	Pop-up participated	Interview details
Participant 1	24, female	Law student / Legal trainee	Jinro Gold pop-up Seoul, South Korea (5/2024)	2.2.2026 47:23
Participant 2	25, female	Law student / Junior expert	Jinro Gold pop-up Seoul, South Korea (4/2024)	3.2.2026 48:13
Participant 3	25, female	Business student	Jinro Gold pop-up Seoul, South Korea (4/2024)	4.2.2026 41:46
Participant 4	25, female	Business student	L'Oréal Paris Our science is worth it pop-up Helsinki, Finland (9/2025)	5.2.2026 55:26
Participant 5	22, female	Education student	L'Oréal Paris Our science is worth it pop-up Helsinki, Finland (9/2025)	6.2.2026 39:54
Participant 6	25, female	Business student	NCT COMMAZZ Grocery store pop-up Seoul, South Korea (4/2023)	9.2.2026 50:34
Participant 7	19, female	Part-time worker	Lancôme Idôle House pop-up Stockholm, Sweden (5/2025)	10.2.2026 44:40

Data collection continued until thematic saturation was reached, when same responses came up to interview questions, and additional interviews no longer produced substantively new journey- or experiential dimensions-related insights (Bazen et al. 2021, 243; Merriam & Tisdell 2016, 101). Nevertheless, qualitative inquiry typically involves relatively small sample to gain deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Patton 2015, 52) and to collect richer data (Saunders et al. 2023, 292).

The sample consisted of seven Finnish women aged 19–25, resulting in a relatively homogeneous group in terms of age, gender, and nationality, which may limit the transferability of the findings. While prior research suggests that younger consumers, particularly women, are more engaged with experiential pop-ups (Niehm et al. 2006), the composition of the sample primarily reflects the recruitment approach. As participants were recruited through the researcher's accessible networks, this contributed to the Finnish sample. In addition, participants received a lip oil as appreciation for participating, and this incentive may have unintentionally contributed to the all-female sample. However, variability was introduced at the level of research context by including experiences from four different experiential pop-ups across multiple geographic contexts. Two pop-ups were located in South Korea, one in Finland, and one in Sweden. This diversity enabled to capture different experiential settings and enrich the data. However, differences between these pop-ups may also have influenced participants' interpretations, which should be considered when evaluating the findings.

3.3 Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis refers to the process of answering research questions (Merriam & Tisdell 2016, 186–187) by transforming raw data into meaningful findings. This involves identifying patterns, organising data, and interpreting participants' accounts to construct a coherent understanding of the studied phenomenon. (Patton 2015, 521.) The specific approach depends on the research purpose (Merriam & Tisdell 2016, 187). In this study, qualitative content analysis was employed, as it enables the systematic classification of textual data into categories that describe the studied phenomenon (Elo & Kyngäs 2008, 108). Rather than merely describing the data, the aim was to reduce, organise, and interpret participants' accounts to develop a structured understanding of experiential pop-up experiences across the customer journey.

The analysis followed a theory-guided content analysis approach, in which the analytical process is structured by an existing theoretical framework while remaining grounded in the empirical data. In this approach, theory provides an analytical lens that guides categorisation, but the interpretations

remain derived from participants' accounts. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 113, 117.) The analysis proceeded through three phases: preparation, organising, and reporting (Elo & Kyngäs 2008, 110).

In the preparation phase, the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed into a written format using UTU transcribe. The researcher reviewed each transcript while listening to the original recordings to ensure accuracy and to correct any transcription errors without altering the original meaning or wording of participants' responses (Braun and Clarke 2006, 88). The final file consisted of approximately 101 pages of transcribed text. Given the extensive amount of empirical material, only the most relevant sections of the transcripts (i.e. direct quotations included in the findings) were subsequently translated into English, while the analysis was conducted primarily using the original Finnish transcripts to preserve nuance and meaning.

Following transcription, the analysis continued as the data were read multiple times to achieve familiarisation and a holistic understanding of the material. During this phase, attention was given to identifying meaningful expressions related to participants' experiences across different stages of the customer journey. Initial observations, reflections, and analytic ideas were noted, which allowed early recognition of recurring patterns of experiences and experiential elements.

In line with theory-guided analysis, an analytical framework was constructed prior to coding (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 113). Existing theory can help concentrate on the research objectives by assisting in determine the initial coding scheme (Hsieh & Shannon 2005, 1281). This analytical framework was constructed utilizing the conceptual framework of this study, shown in Figure 5. First, Schmitt's (1999) strategic experiential modules (sense, feel, think, act, relate) were used to capture different dimensions of experience. Second, the customer journey framework (pre-participation, participation, post-participation) was used to account for the temporal progression of the experience. Together, these formed an analytical matrix in which the journey stages functioned as main categories and the experiential dimensions as subcategories (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 117).

The data analysis of this study was structured, meaning only the elements that fit within the framework were extracted and collected and those that fall outside it were not (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 114). In the organising phase, the data were therefore systematically reduced (Cho & Lee 2014, 7) by focusing the analysis on elements relevant to the research questions (Schreier 2012, 7) and coded using the analytical framework. Meaningful expressions were identified focusing on experiential elements and assigned to one or more experiential dimensions and later to corresponding journey stages (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 114). The goal was to identify and categorize all instance of a particular phenomenon, such as emotional reactions, and parts that on first impression appeared

to represent an emotional reaction were highlighted as advised by Hsieh and Shannon (2005, 1281). Color-coding system was applied to organize the data as follows: codes related to sense were colored as yellow, feel with pink, think with blue, act with green and relate with purple. Each interview was analysed individually, and coding was inclusive, allowing segments of data to be assigned to multiple categories when appropriate. This phase resulted in a large number of initial codes: sense 125 codes, feel 180 codes, think 133 codes, act 160 codes and relate 201 codes.

Due to the large number of initial codes, the codes were subsequently reviewed and refined to improve clarity and reduce redundancy. Overlapping codes were merged and unclear or irrelevant codes were removed supported by AI, which assisted in identifying potential overlaps between codes. The use of AI was limited to support and interpretive decisions were conducted by the researcher. This reduced the total number of codes to approximately half of the original amount. The refined codes were then organized into an Excel database, where each experiential dimension was assigned a separate sheet. Within each dimension, codes were further categorised according to the three customer journey stages, resulting in a total of 15 analytical Excel tables (5 SEM dimensions \times 3 stages). Conceptually similar codes were grouped into initial categories within each dimension–stage combination. Each combination produced approximately 4 to 10 initial categories. An example of the data analysis process is showcased in Table 4.

Table 4 Example of the data analysis process

SEM	Journey stage	Category	Final category
Emotional reactions (Feel)	Pre-participation	Excitement towards the pop-up (Positive) Emotional anticipation towards the pop-up Emotional expectations before visit Curiosity driven by novelty and pop-up concept Emotional interest driven by visuality and recommendations	Emotionally driven anticipation and curiosity
	Participation	Enjoyment and fun during experience Immersive and engaging atmosphere Positive emotional connection to the brand General positive experience	Positive emotional engagement and enjoyment
	Post-participation	Remembered enjoyment and positive impressions after General positive memory of the experience Emotional impact that remained after the experience	Lasting emotional memory

As shown in Table 4, initial categories were further abstracted into higher-order categories that captured the central experiential patterns within each dimension and stage. For instance, multiple feel-related themes in the pre-participation stage were synthesized into a broader theme: “Emotionally driven anticipation and curiosity”. This step involved iterative comparison between categories and continuous reference to the original data to guarantee that interpretations stayed based on participants’ answers. Therefore, while the analysis was guided by the theoretical framework, category development also remained sensitive to empirical variation within the data.

In the final reporting phase, the findings were constructed as an analytical narrative in the findings chapter. Categories across experiential dimensions were compared within each journey stage, enabling the identification of broader patterns that integrate sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and social aspects of the experience to generate a more holistic interpretations of the experience. The findings were illustrated using carefully selected verbatim quotations to demonstrate how interpretations were grounded in participants’ accounts. To indicate prevalence without quantification, qualitative descriptors such as “many participants” were used (Braun & Clarke 2006, 83). This analysis ensured that findings are theoretically informed and empirically grounded and provided a structured explanation of how consumers experience experiential pop-ups across the customer journey.

3.4 Evaluation of the study

3.4.1 Trustworthiness of the study

All research aims to produce valid and reliable knowledge. In qualitative research, trustworthiness is determined by the rigor with which the research process is done and how well the findings “ring true” to readers and participants. (Merriam & Tisdell 2016, 237–238.) The trustworthiness of this study is evaluated using the widely cited criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability by Lincoln and Guba (1985), which are suited to evaluating qualitative studies (Merriam & Tisdell 2016, 239).

Credibility refers to the degree to which the findings accurately depict the experiences of the participants and are grounded in data, being truthful to those familiar of the phenomenon (Saunders et al. 2023, 218; Lincoln & Guba 1985, 301.) In this study, credibility was supported through semi-structured interviews that allowed participants to use their own words to describe their experiences and emphasise aspects they considered meaningful. Probing and follow-up questions supported ongoing clarification of meanings during the interviews (Saunders et al. 2023, 218), while conducting

interviews in participants' native language encouraged nuanced expression and decreased the possibility of misinterpretation. Interviews were audio-recorded and carefully transcribed to ensure accurate representation of participants' accounts. In addition, the clear alignment between the research problem, theoretical framework, data collection, and analysis, demonstrated through the operationalisation table (see Table 2), strengthens credibility. Credibility was further strengthened through prolonged engagement with empirical material and iterative analysis, which enabled the identification of patterns and deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba 1985, 301–302). Debriefing with the supervisor and peer discussions in thesis seminars provided opportunities to critically reflect on emerging interpretations and methodological choices, which helped recognize bias and supported justified analytical decisions (Shenton 2004, 67). The academic quality of sources were verified through the Jufo portal, enabling comparison of findings with trustworthy theoretical perspectives to produce the best possible explanation of the phenomenon (Saunders et al. 2023, 218).

However, certain limitations must be acknowledged. Methodological triangulation through observation could not be implemented due to the absence of experiential pop-ups during the data collection, resulting in reliance on retrospective accounts. The time gap between the experience and the interview may have influenced recall, and while participants expressed being generally able to describe their experiences in detail, recall bias cannot be fully excluded. Furthermore, the dataset consists of seven interviews, although eight were initially planned, as this interview could not be conducted due to unforeseen circumstances. Despite this, the data were considered sufficient due to the recurring patterns across participants. The use of interviews remains appropriate, as the study focuses on subjective experiences and their interpretation over time. In addition, the researcher's prior familiarity with experiential pop-ups may have influenced interpretation, and this was addressed through reflexive awareness throughout the research process. As with all qualitative interview-based research, the findings of this study reflect participants' subjective interpretations and are shaped by interviewer-interviewee interactions.

Transferability refers to the extent to which results can be applicable to other settings or contexts (Zeithaml et al. 2020, 44). In qualitative research, transferability is supported by providing enough background information that allow readers to determine applicability to other settings (Lincoln & Guba 1985, 316) as this judgment ultimately rests with the reader rather than the researcher (Shenton 2004, 69–70). In this study, transferability was supported by situating the study within a clearly defined academic background and providing thick descriptions of the research context, participant selection, data collection process, and analysis procedures as suggested by Merriam & Tisdell (2016, 265). The characteristics of the participants, length and context of interviews, and studied pop-ups

are reported in detail (Shenton 2004, 70). However, the sample is demographically homogeneous, consisting of young Finnish women, which may limit the transferability of the findings to broader populations. While variation was introduced through different pop-up contexts across countries, the findings should be interpreted as context-specific rather than broadly generalisable, which in qualitative research, is viewed as inherent and expected (Lincoln & Guba 1985, 298). Thus, the findings of this study may introduce insights into similar experiential marketing pop-up environments, but differences in contexts may limit the degree of transferability of the results.

Dependability refers to the transparency and logical consistency of the research process (Lincoln & Guba 1985, 316–319). In this study, dependability was enhanced through systematic documentation of all stages of the research process, including research design, data collection and analysis. Methodological choices and analytical decisions are made visible and explicitly justified in relation to the research objective and theoretical framework (Lincoln and Guba 1985, 323). The analytical process is described step-by-step, including coding, categorisation, and abstraction, allowing readers to follow how the findings were derived from the data. The operationalization table (see Table 2) further demonstrates the link between theory and empirical analysis. However, due to the flexible nature of qualitative research and semi-structured interviews, exact replication of the study is almost impossible. In addition, the researcher's limited prior experience with interviewing may have influenced the depth of some responses, which is acknowledged as a potential limitation.

Confirmability addresses whether findings are grounded in and emerge from the data rather than being shaped by the researcher's personal interest or assumptions (Zeithaml et al. 2020, 44; Lincoln & Guba 1985, 323). Confirmability was supported through transparent documentation of data collection and analysis by clearly linking findings to empirical material through the use of verbatim quotations. The interview guide is exposed, and the systematic coding and categorisation process are documented to ensure that interpretations are traceable directly to participants' accounts and grounded in empirical material (Lincoln & Guba 1985, 323). Reflexivity was maintained throughout the study by acknowledging the researcher's assumptions, prior experiences, and potential influence on the research process. In addition, the use of an explicit analytical framework and structured analysis enhances transparency and reduces the risk of inconsistent interpretation.

3.4.2 Research ethics

Ensuring ethical rigor is fundamental to qualitative research, as ethical conduct directly shapes the trustworthiness and legitimacy of the knowledge produced (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015, 64) particularly due to the close interaction between the researcher and participants (Merriam & Tisdell

2016, 260). All decisions made in a research are moral decisions and participants have the right to expect a sense of responsibility from the researcher (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 128, 131). Research ethics concern moral behavior within the research process, including respect for participants, integrity in decision-making, and transparency in reporting. Researchers rely on ethical guidelines that guide responsible decision-making throughout the study. (Wiles 2012, 4.) In this study, ethical considerations were guided by the principles of good scientific practice of the University of Turku that follow the ethical guidelines of The Finnish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (TENK 2023). Particular attention was paid to informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality, harm prevention, and research integrity.

Harm prevention was considered throughout the study. Although the topic of experiential pop-up participation was not considered sensitive, reflecting on personal experiences may still evoke discomfort. To reduce potential harm, the interview questions were planned to be non-intrusive and open-ended, enabling participants to determine the level of depth in their responses. A respectful and non-judgemental interview atmosphere was maintained, and participants were continuously reminded of their right to decline questions or to renegotiate consent and withdraw from the study at any moment without negative consequences.

Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection through a written consent form (Appendix 2), complemented by an interview information sheet (Appendix 3) which outlined the purpose of the study, the researcher's role, participant rights, anonymity procedures, and intended use of the data. This ensured that participants were fully informed about the study's purpose and procedures, as well as their rights as participants, prior to agreeing to participate as suggested by Saunders et al. (2023, 253). Written consent was provided via email before the interviews were conducted, and consent was reconfirmed verbally at the beginning of each interview. Participation was entirely *voluntary*, and participants were continuously informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without justification. Participants were also encouraged to ask questions at any point during the research process, supporting ongoing and informed participation (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2015, 71-72). Particular attention was paid to consent due to the intended inclusion of younger participants, and the researcher contacted their supervisor to discuss possible problems in consent giving as suggested by Ghauri et al. (2020, 27). As a result, only individuals aged 15 or above were recruited, as they are generally considered capable of providing informed consent independently (TENK 2023, 9–10).

Protecting participants' anonymity and *confidentiality* were central ethical priorities, as with empirical research, the researcher ought to always make sure that individuals are not identified from

the study (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 22). Participants' identities were safeguarded through anonymisation practices, using numerical identifiers (e.g. Participant 1) in transcripts and reporting. Any information that could potentially reveal the identity of participants were removed or modified during data transcription to prevent recognition. Only data directly relevant to the research objectives were collected, thereby minimising unnecessary exposure of personal information. Data handling followed EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) principle, and all data stored securely, accessible only to the researcher and managed according to the data management plan (Appendix 4). Data that could be used to identify individual participants were deleted immediately after they were no longer required for the research process.

Professional integrity was maintained through transparent reporting and accurate representation of participants' accounts. The research process, including data collection and analysis, is described in detail to ensure openness and accountability. The study was conducted independently without collaboration or financial involvement from the brands whose pop-ups were examined, thereby reducing the risk of conflicts of interest or external influence on interpretation. *Academic integrity* was ensured through accurate citation practices and appropriate acknowledgement of prior scholarship to avoid plagiarism and silencing. As the researcher functions as the primary instrument in qualitative research, reflexive awareness of personal assumptions and prior experiences was maintained throughout the study to minimise bias in data collection and interpretation.

A clear declaration regarding the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in the research process is provided to ensure ethical transparency. A detailed description of the tools used, and their specific applications is presented in Appendix 4. AI was used as a supportive tool for transcribing interviews and translating citations, rephrasing and summarizing sentences originally written by the researcher, and assisting with finding synonyms and translations for individual words to improve clarity and fluency, as the researcher's mother tongue is not English. AI was not used to modify or generate text originally written by other authors, and all sources are appropriately cited. While the use of AI in qualitative data analysis has been subject to criticism (see Nguyen & Welch 2026), its application in this study was limited to supporting the organisation of data, specifically by identifying connections and overlaps between categories initially developed by the researcher. No confidential or sensitive data, such as interview transcripts, were uploaded to AI tools in order to ensure data privacy. All suggestions provided by AI tools were carefully reviewed and edited by the researcher.

4 Findings

4.1 Experiential pop-up experience in the pre-participation stage

This section examines the pre-participation stage of the experiential pop-up customer journey and addresses how consumers experience experiential pop-ups before the actual physical visit. The findings show that this stage was barely a preparation for the on-site experience, but experiential in itself. It was at this stage when consumers began to experientially respond and anticipate, interpret, and evaluate the pop-up through multiple touchpoints prior to participation. Across the interviews, early encounters, such as social media content, recommendations, and the physical presence of the pop-up shaped pre-expectations, perceived relevance, and participation decisions. The analysis of this stage is structured around four themes: anticipation and curiosity, sensory and symbolic cues, evaluative sense-making, and socially shaped participation decisions. Together, these themes illustrate how experiential pop-ups shape experiences in the pre-participation stage.

4.1.1 Anticipation and curiosity toward the pop-up

A central finding from the interviews was that consumers experienced strong anticipation and curiosity towards experiential pop-ups before actually participating in them. Participants did not approach the pop-up as a neutral retail setting, but rather participants described it as an upcoming experience that evoked anticipatory feelings of excitement and interest and were drawn to the idea of participating in advance. Participants emphasised, that this anticipation was often driven by the perceived novelty and uniqueness of the concept. For many participants, experiential pop-ups represented something unfamiliar or different from traditional retail environments, which made them inherently appealing.

“This whole pop-up concept was quite new to me, and I didn’t really know exactly what to expect, so I wanted to go and see what it was all about.” – Participant 2.

“Yeah, I was definitely excited, kind of curious about what new and interesting things there would be and what I’d get to do.” – Participant 3.

Across interviews, curiosity was typically not directed at the brand itself, but at the experience as a whole and at the experiential nature of the pop-up. Participants described wanting to explore what the experience would involve and what it would offer, indicating that anticipation was constructed through imagined experience rather than direct knowledge. These statements suggest that anticipation was driven by the expectation of encountering something different or unexpected. The idea of the pop-up as “something fun” recurred across the interviews, indicating that consumers began to imagine

the emotional tone of the experience already before participation. The word “excitement” came up in the data multiple times by many participants, indicating a strong positive anticipatory feeling toward experiential pop-ups, as Participant 5 noted: *“I had a strong feeling of excitement and anticipation about visiting it.”* This suggests that the pop-up was not merely perceived as a place to check out, but as an event to look forward to. At the same time, anticipation was not always exclusively positive. For some participants, novelty also introduced uncertainty and mild social discomfort. Participants described not always knowing what the experience would involve or how participation would be perceived, which was not seen as a positive feature.

“I was excited to go there, maybe a little nervous since I didn’t exactly know what to expect.” – Participant 2.

“But I was also a bit nervous, I had this feeling of wondering what they might think of me, and whether they’d find it strange that I was coming to something like that.” – Participant 4.

Importantly, this uncertainty did not prevent participation but formed part of the emotional process leading up to it. This indicates that the pre-participation stage involves both excitement and uncertainty. Anticipation was shaped by both digital and external touchpoints, such as social media content, influencer videos, and recommendations from others, forming enjoyable anticipation. Participants often described how excitement for the experiential pop-up was built through recommendations from others, and curiosity about the experiential pop-up raised because of the TikTok advertisements by influencers that they saw about the pop-up. In some cases, excitement was built on both recommendations and an ad that they saw about the pop-up. Therefore, participants described combining limited information and social validation to construct expectations about the experience and what the pop-up would offer. For instance, one participant described how a recommendation strengthened positive anticipation:

“It was recommended to me as something that was really well organized and genuinely a fun concept.” – Participant 1.

Therefore, the data show that emotional anticipation was constructed based on this imagined experience derived from external touchpoints. In addition, prior experiences with similar pop-ups further reinforced this anticipation. Participants with prior pop-up experience demonstrated that their prior experiences with similar types of pop-ups further reinforced their anticipation, indicating that pre-participation expectations are cumulative and also shaped by earlier encounters. Notably, participants who had attended experiential pop-ups before described having clearer expectations and

stronger positive feelings toward new ones. This indicates that a prior positive experience contributes to a new expectation of a positive encounter.

“I had a bit of an idea of what to expect since I’d been to a couple of similar pop-ups before, so I already knew it would be a really fun experience... it gave me this kind of anticipatory feeling, like, yay, a fun day ahead.” – Participant 3.

These findings show that anticipation and curiosity form a central part of the pre-participation stage, where consumers begin to engage with the pop-up mentally and emotionally before physical participation. Participants constructed emotional anticipation through novelty, pre-touchpoints such as recommendations or ads and earlier experiences. This indicates that participants’ anticipation to participate in experiential pop-ups was highly emotionally driven.

4.1.2 Sensory and symbolic cues shaping expectations

Building on these anticipatory feelings, another key finding was that consumers’ expectations toward experiential pop-ups were strongly shaped by sensory cues encountered prior to participation. Across interviews, visual and environmental elements, such as advertisements, social media content, exterior design and location, acted as early touchpoints through which participants began to interpret what the pop-up experience would be like. Importantly, these sensory cues did not merely attract attention but actively shaped expectations. Participants described how aesthetic elements such as colours contributed to expectations of enjoyment, trendiness, and experiential value. Participants frequently described first encountering the pop-up through visually rich media, especially influencer videos and social media content, which provided cues about the atmosphere, activities, and overall experiential character, allowing participants to sense in advance how the experience would be.

“It [in the ad] looked nice and eye-catching, and it gave the impression that there would probably be something fun happening there.” – Participant 7.

Participant 7 also continued that their expectation was “*about getting to try all the things I had seen beforehand*” and “*wanting to see what it was actually like and whether it was as nice as it looked on social media*”. These comments suggest that even limited visual cues through social media videos enabled consumers to form expectations by imagining the experience in advance. Sensory exposure thus functioned as more than attention-grabbing, as it became the basis for anticipated experiential value. In addition to these digital touchpoints, the physical presence of the pop-up itself acted as an important sensory cue. Participants noted how the exterior design, colour, and overall visibility in the urban environment attracted attention and generated immediate and spontaneous assumptions about enjoyment and novelty.

“But then when we came across it during our walk, we just couldn’t not go in because it was so unusual and intriguing. It looked nice. It also was really attention-grabbing. It seemed fun, like there was probably something enjoyable going on inside.” – Participant 6.

Importantly, participants interpreted these sensory cues symbolically. Participants did not only describe what they saw, but what those visual elements meant. Features such as size, design, and location were understood as indicators of quality, effort, and significance. For example, a large and visually striking pop-up was associated with higher investment and credibility. Participant 3 noted that *“it was also the scale of the pop-up, this one looked really big, which made it feel like a lot of money had been invested into it. It gave the impression that it was a big deal, and that definitely made me want to go.”* Thus, consumers did not passively perceive sensory stimuli but actively interpreted them as signals of the pop-up’s quality and experiential value.

The location of the pop-up further reinforced these symbolic interpretations. Pop-ups were consistently across interviews described as being situated in central, visible, and high-traffic urban areas. Participant 7 noted that: *“You could basically see it from both directions, no matter which way you came from, it was very visible and overall, in a great location.”* Some participants said that it was an area where they often usually were anyways, therefore the pop-up easier becoming part of their day. From participants’ answers, the data suggests that centrally located and highly visible pop-ups were perceived as more attractive, difficult to ignore and easier to integrate into everyday routines, increasing the likelihood of participation. Beyond accessibility, location itself appeared to carry symbolic meaning. Certain places seemed to function as established pop-up locations in consumers’ minds, meaning that prior experiences tied to specific locations influenced expectations toward new pop-ups.

“I’d seen similar pop-ups in front of Kamppi before, so I assumed it would be something like that or had an image of what it might be like.” – Participant 5.

These findings indicate that sensory cues operate both perceptually and symbolically, shaping how consumers imagine the experience before direct interaction. These cues function not only as aesthetic stimuli, but also as symbolic signals through which consumers interpreted the pop-up’s quality, relevance, and experiential nature. Thus, sensory cues play a central role in shaping pre-participation expectations in the experiential pop-up journey.

4.1.3 Evaluating relevance and worthwhileness to participate

In addition to emotional anticipation and expectations, consumers engaged in active evaluation before deciding whether to participate. Rather than relying solely on emotional reactions, participants

assessed the pop-up in terms of personal relevance, expected value, and required effort, forming a judgement of whether attendance was worthwhile. Consumers actively constructed an understanding of what the pop-up represented and what they might gain from it. Perceived personal benefit was central to this evaluation. Across interviews, participants focused on the idea that they would gain something from the experience, being motivated to participate by expected value. Participant's answers suggest that there was not a one single benefit that consumers were looking for, and it could either be in the form of enjoyment, exclusive activities, or tangible rewards such as free products or personalised services. Importantly, the decision to participate were often driven by features that were seen as personally relevant, rather than the pop-up in general. This bridged the gap between initial interest and behavioural intention, as it helped consumers to justify their decision to participate. Some participant described general values like "enjoyment", while others highlighted a more specific benefit for example in the form of a service given at the pop-up.

"Knowing you'd get a free picture from it made it feel like you'd get something out of the experience for yourself, which was appealing." – Participant 3

"For me, it was definitely the skin analysis... something you don't usually get access to... That was really the main thing that got me to go, without it, I probably wouldn't have gone." – Participant 4.

Participants distinguished between superficial and meaningful benefits, indicating that not all benefits were perceived as equally meaningful and motivating. Certain features functioned as decisive triggers, indicating that consumers evaluated the pop-up through a lens of personal usefulness and relevance. While free samples and products were mentioned as attractive across interviews, they were often not sufficient on their own to motivate participation. This suggests that participation to experiential pop-ups was evaluated in terms of how distinctive or valuable the offered benefits were in accordance with personal preferences.

"If it had only been about some free tester products, I probably wouldn't have bothered to go." - Participant 5.

In addition to expected benefits, participants evaluated the effort required to attend the pop-up. Practical considerations such as time, location and convenience influenced whether participation was perceived as worthwhile. Participation was more likely when the pop-up fit naturally into existing routines or was easy to reach. For example, Participant 7 described how the visit was facilitated by "*I noticed we had a bit of free time and were already in the city centre*" and continued that the reason they saw it as a worthwhile to go attend was that "*it fit well into our schedule... you didn't really have to go anywhere specifically*". Participants noted that the accessibility of the pop-up, for example

by being in a prime location or along main subway lines, made participation intentions easier and more likely, as not much effort is done to get to the pop-up. Therefore, participation decisions were embedded in daily routines and practical constraints. Likewise, barriers such as queues or inconvenience affected how worthwhile the experience seemed. Participants made clear distinctions between situations in which waiting would be acceptable and those in which it would not. Participants evaluated the effort required in relation to expected value, thus, the willingness to queue depended on the perceived benefit of the experience.

“If it had been there for longer and I saw a really long queue, I might have decided to come back another time. But if it was a one-time opportunity, I’d probably be willing to wait.” – Participant 2.

“I definitely would have been willing to queue for the skin analysis, because those usually cost money and you normally have to book them somewhere. So yeah, I would have waited to get it for free. But if it had just been free products, I wouldn’t have queued at all.” – Participant 5.

Participants also evaluated the brand before deciding to participate. Participants generally described neutral or positive prior perceptions of the brands, but brand familiarity alone rarely emerged as a big factor affecting participation. Instead, it functioned as a supporting factor that could reduce uncertainty or increase trust. Participant 5 described L’Oréal as trustworthy and generally positive, while also noting that it was not a brand they regularly used. Similarly, Participant 7 stated that they had a generally good impression of Lancôme but did not feel especially attached to it or buy from them. Participant 6 further noted that “*I wouldn’t go to something just because I see a brand’s name somewhere if I don’t listen to them. But this was so eye-catching and made me feel like I had to find out what it was about*”. These findings suggest that the experiential value or sensory cues of the pop-up are more influential than prior brand attachment in motivating attendance.

Interestingly, the temporary nature of pop-ups did not emerge as a major driver of participation. Although some participants described a mild sense of urgency, temporariness was not consistently framed as a decisive factor. In some cases, if encountering the pop-up on the street, participants were not even aware of the limited duration beforehand. Importantly, prior experience with similar experiential pop-ups influenced how worthwhile new pop-ups were perceived to be. Participants with earlier positive experiences were more likely to assume that attending would be worthwhile, whereas those with less prior experience sometimes approached the pop-up with lower expectations. This indicates that evaluation in the pre-participation stage was shaped not only by the current offering, but also by accumulated experiential knowledge.

“Well, I think pop-ups in Korea were generally really nice.” – Participant 1.

“I haven’t really gone to pop-ups like that before. Maybe more like pop-up stores, but not those kind of promotional-style pop-ups. I thought the skin analysis might have been kind of a superficial thing, just done quickly to move people through. So I didn’t really have high expectations, in fact, I might have even thought it would be quite a bit less than what it turned out to be.” – Participant 4.

The findings suggest that consumers engaged in active sense-making before participation and participation decisions emerged from a balance between anticipated functional and experiential value and required effort. While emotional anticipation created interest, cognitive evaluation translated this into behavioural intention to attend (or not to attend) the experiential pop-up. The findings suggest that participation intentions were shaped through hedonic motivations such as enjoyment and fun but also functional benefits such as free products and services.

4.1.4 Socially shaped participation decisions

In addition to individual anticipation and evaluation, participation in experiential pop-ups was strongly shaped by social factors. Awareness, interpretation, and the decision to participate were embedded in social interaction rather than formed individually. Across interviews, word-of-mouth and recommendations played a central role in creating awareness and validating the attractiveness of the pop-up. Many participants described becoming aware of the pop-up through friends, siblings, or acquaintances who had either visited it already or shared information about it. Participants answers indicate that social recommendations reduced uncertainty and strengthened the sense that the pop-up would be worth attending.

“A friend of mine had already been there and recommended it to me... told me good things about it, talked about it and explained a bit what was there.” – Participant 1.

“[Got to know it] through my sister, she was like, “should we go?” I think she sent me some kind of TikTok video.” – Participant 5.

Touchpoints like social media ads can be mediated through social recommendations, such as is the case of Participant 5. Therefore, in addition to direct recommendations, social media and online content acted as important socially mediated touchpoints. Participants described being exposed to social media content, such as influencer ads and user-generated posts about the pop-up. These touchpoints did not only increase visibility but also framed the pop-up as something socially relevant or desirable. This perceived popularity and visibility of the pop-up contributed to its appeal, reinforcing its social relevance. In several cases, the content participants had seen, participants could not indicate whether it was advertising made by the brand or organic content, suggesting that these

sources were interpreted similarly from the consumer's perspective. Thus, discovery of the pop-up often took place in a social media environment where brand-owned and socially mediated signals overlapped.

“I was getting a lot of this kind of content in my social media feeds. I also saw a lot of videos on TikTok and ads on Instagram, as well as influencer collaborations related to it.” – Participant 7.

“I found out about it through social media, I follow this Instagram page that shares different pop-ups happening in Seoul, so you can see what's going on. And then on TikTok, there were a lot of posts about it too. I don't remember exactly where I first saw it, but it was definitely through social media, like other people talking about it, making videos on TikTok.” – Participant 3.

Participants also described discussing the pop-up with others. Participants noted on speculating about what it might include and collectively making sense of it before deciding to attend. Across interviews, participants described how they were talking about the pop-up after seeing it, with other people, which often contributed to a more profound want to “*find out*” what the experiential pop-up was and “*check out*” what it involved, as noted by Participant 6. This indicates that expectations were not always individually formed but often co-constructed through conversation and shared curiosity.

Decision to participate was frequently framed as a shared activity. Many participants described deciding to attend the pop-up together with friends, siblings, roommates, or partners. After becoming aware of the pop-up, many participants explained inviting other people to come with them. All participants stated that a big factor in motivating them to attend was the opportunity to attend together with someone. Even though they had gotten anticipatory feelings about attending, they wanted a companion to participate with them. The experiential pop-up was therefore not seen as something to participate alone, but something to participate in together. For participants, visiting the pop-up was not only about the individual experience as “*you get to spend some nice time with a friend*”, as noted by Participant 3. It was about spending time with others and sharing the experience. This suggests that the social value of spending time with others formed part of the attractiveness of the experiential pop-up. For some participants, social company was not only enhancing but even enabling participation. Attending alone was sometimes perceived as uncomfortable, unusual, or less appealing, which lowered the likelihood of participation without others.

“Maybe it was just that it felt a bit unusual to go, so I probably would never have gone alone.” – Participant 4.

This indicates that social context reduced psychological barriers and increased the attractiveness of participation. Participation decisions were both planned and spontaneous. While some participants

deliberately organized visits in advance, others decided to attend based on immediate exposure in the environment. In both cases, social context played a role in shaping the decision. Moreover, for participants in international contexts, experiential pop-ups were sometimes associated with broader cultural experiences. Attending them was not only about the brand activation itself, but also about sharing a culturally meaningful activity with others. Participant 1 described wanting to show visiting Finnish friends “*something Korean like this*”, while Participant 2 connected the product category itself to social and cultural experiences in Korea, which “*definitely influenced my desire to go and try this experience as well*”. This shows that the social significance of pop-ups could also extend beyond immediate attendance and become linked to place, culture, and shared exploration.

The findings demonstrate that participation decisions in experiential pop-ups were socially embedded. Consumers became aware of the pop-up through others, interpreted it socially, and often chose to attend with others. The pre-participation stage was therefore not only emotional and cognitive, but also social, with meaning and motivation being co-created prior to the actual visit.

4.2 Experiential pop-up experience in the participation stage

This section examines the participation stage of the experiential pop-up customer journey and addresses how consumers experience experiential pop-ups during direct engagement. The findings show that this stage forms the core of the customer journey, where anticipated meanings become lived and embodied through interaction with the pop-up environment. It was at this stage that pre-formed expectations were confirmed, transformed, or, in some cases, challenged. Across interviews, consumers described engaging with multiple touchpoints, including multisensory design, activities, products, and social interactions, through which experiential value is actively co-created. The analysis of this stage is structured around four interconnected themes: immersive multisensory environment, active participation and experiential doing, emotional and cognitive engagement, and social co-experience and interaction.

4.2.1 Immersive multisensory environment

A central finding of the participation stage was that consumers experienced the experiential pop-up as an immersive multisensory environment rather than as a conventional retail space. Participants clearly distinguished that the experiential pop-up was not a “normal” store, in their words, but described it as something that they got to experience through immersing themselves to the environment. Visuality and thematic coherence played a particularly important role in shaping this immersion. Participants consistently described the pop-ups as structured around a clear concept or

theme that extended across colours, installations, activities, and, in some cases, even music. Participants highlighted that the theme of the pop-up was a very distinctive element of the pop-up. For instance, Participant 2 referred to the experiential pop-up they visited as a circus-themed pop-up in which *“the whole space was designed to look like a circus, and the different stations were also built around that same theme”*. Similarly, Participant 7 referred to the experiential pop-up having a *“Barbie Dream House kind of vibe”*, where the consistent use of pink colour and styling created a strong and recognizable experiential setting. Many participants referred to this thematic coherence to contribute to making the environment feel immersive, indicating that immersion was closely linked to the perceived coherence and intentionality of the design.

“It had a clear theme and felt like a cohesive whole, it was built around this kind of circus theme. There was a very clear idea behind it... and it really showed in everything. There was a carousel, and I remember there being music as well. And there was this ticket that looked like a circus ticket. It all felt really well thought out... It even had those little gold flakes [in the product]. I think it felt more high effort than others [pop-ups], you could actually do things there.” – Participant 1.

“And they were also playing music there... if I remember correctly, their own music, but K-pop in any case. That also drew you in, like something was happening and inviting you to come take a look.” – Participant 6.

Participants also paid attention to specific visual details that reinforced the experiential quality of the environment. Elements such as bold colors, decorative features, mascots and distinctive installations made the space visually striking and engaging in participants accounts. Many participants noted the level of detail that was put into the experiential pop-ups and the way they were made a built in the visual design. Rather than recalling the environment only in abstract terms, participants frequently described vivid and concrete visual details, which suggests that sensory richness played a key role in how the experience was perceived and evaluated. Participants were able to describe these visual elements in detail, which further highlight this point. Such observations suggest that immersion was not only created at the level of the theme, but also through carefully curated smaller design and visual elements that captured the attention of the participants within the whole space.

“First of all, it was so colorful... the posters were my favorite. They were all completely different from each other, super bold and vibrant. Everything was really striking. I remember just being impressed by the craftsmanship and the level of detail. You could really tell that a lot of time had gone into it.” – Participant 6.

Product displays formed an integral part of this multisensory environment. Rather than being presented in conventional retail formats, products were embedded within the experiential design in visually creative and conceptually aligned ways. Participants described how products were displayed

using unconventional arrangements, such as being placed in themed installations or presented through playful formats. Participants described often making notations of this and looking and touching the elements as they were presented in such innovative ways. This indicates that product presentation functioned as a design element contributing to immersion, rather than merely facilitating product visibility.

“Well, it really stood out ... through the fun display solutions. The products weren’t just displayed on regular shelves, they were placed in all kinds of ways. For example, there were wheelbarrows with lip glosses in them, and then a wall where lip glosses were hanging with clips. So, it was those kinds of creative ways of presenting the products that really caught my attention.” – Participant 7.

The spatial layout and physical structures further reinforced the experiential quality of the environment. Participants described moving through different stations and themed areas, which created a sense of exploration and being “inside” and a part of the experience as a participant rather than merely observing it. Some participants further noted that this was the reason, why they did not see the experiential pop-up as a conventional store. The environment was often described as visually appealing and “photogenic”, encouraging participants to take pictures and engage actively with the space. Some participants noted that the place was something that they wanted to capture, and most participants noted of taking pictures of the pop-up because of its visuality. This suggests that visual design prompted interaction with the environment.

“There was this mascot... we took a picture with it. It was the kind of place that just made you want to capture it, it looked really nice.” – Participant 3.

Sensory engagement was further extended through direct interaction with products. Opportunities to touch, test, or taste products added a tangible dimension to the experience, allowing participants to engage multiple senses simultaneously. For example, participants described tasting products or trying cosmetics on-site, which made the experience feel more concrete and personally relevant. These product-based sensory encounters were not experienced as separate from the environment, but as integral components of the overall experiential setting.

“You could interact quite a lot with the products that were on display, touching and trying them out. There were also testers arranged in different spots... so you could browse and choose what to try. ...But overall, there were lots of hands-on elements, things you could physically engage with as part of the experience.” – Participant 7.

At the same time, the level of immersion was not uniform across all experiential pop-ups in the data. Participants 4 and 5 described L’oreal’s experiential pop-up they participated in as visually plain and lacking interactive or distinctive elements, which reduced the perceived experiential quality. These

participants could not (compared to others) describe in full detail the visual atmosphere in the pop-up. For example, Participant 4 noted that “...*the spaces, they weren't anything special, and there wasn't really anything interactive or something you could explore or play around with, apart from the face analysis device and the small goodie bags you got at the end*”. This variation suggests that immersion is not an automatic feature of experiential pop-ups but depends on how successfully sensory and spatial elements are designed and integrated.

The findings indicate that experiential pop-ups function as holistic multisensory environments in which visual, spatial, and product-related elements are combined into a coherent experiential whole. This immersive quality distinguishes experiential pop-ups from traditional retail spaces and forms the foundation upon which emotional, cognitive, and behavioural responses are built during participation.

4.2.2 Active participation and experiential doing

Another key finding of the participation stage was that consumers were not passive observers but actively engaged in the experiential pop-up through various forms of participation and doing. The experience unfolded through action, as participants consistently described taking part in structured and playful activities within the experiential pop-up, such as games, tasks, interactive stations and product-related experiences. All experiential pop-ups included at least some of these activities. Participants noted that these activities were often spread out the space, encouraging movement through the space and required both physical and cognitive involvement. These types of activities transformed the experience into an active process in which consumers were required to do, rather than merely observe. Participants often emphasized that this active interactivity was what distinguished the pop-up from a conventional store. Some participants also made distinctions between the activities, some being more interactive and fun than others, indicating that the level of interactivity contributed to a more profound experience.

“That there were all kinds of games that were played. And then that's exactly why it was so interactive. And it was nice in that you actually got to do things. This one was definitely more interactive, like you really had to take part... this one was done in a really playful way.” – Participant 1.

Active participation was often guided through designed mechanisms that structured the experience. These gamified mechanics were central in guiding participation. Participants noted on the use of systems such as stamp passes, station-based progression, quizzes, and rewards created a clear participation logic and encouraged participants to move through different parts of the pop-up and complete activities. Some participants noted that this made them participate in the activities, as they felt that they gained something in the end, it working as a good motivation to participate actively.

These mechanisms created a clear progression within the experience and linked participation to outcomes, reinforced consumers to engage more fully with the environment. This highlights how the pop-up environment was designed to facilitate active engagement.

“I think we were given a kind of pass [stamp card] to our hands... the idea was that you collect stamps in it from all the different stations. You could go through them in any order you wanted... there were probably around four or five stations... once you had collected everything, you could go and claim a reward. So yeah, it was encouraging in that way. Everyone wanted the free soju [South Korean alcoholic beverage], of course” – Participant 2.

At the same time, participation was not entirely fixed or linear. Participants described a sense of exploration and autonomy, where they could choose how to move through the space and which elements to engage with. Participants noted, that if you did not want, activities were not mandatory to attend, but all participants however noted on wanting to attend them. This created a feeling of agency, as consumers were able to shape their own experience rather than follow a strictly predetermined path. Participation also extended beyond obvious activities to more subtle forms of engagement, such as reading information, observing details, preparing for tasks, and paying attention to cues embedded in the environment. This suggests that experiential doing included not only physical action but also embedded cognitive engagement and the environment supported both guided interaction and self-directed exploration.

“Everything was definitely based on voluntariness, you could just come and enjoy the atmosphere if you wanted, but at the same time, the activities weren’t difficult to approach.” – Participant 6.

“And there were texts on the walls, so you read through them and looked at them, especially because there was that possible quiz at the end. You explored those, and then the face analysis part as well.” – Participant 4.

Notably, participation was not entirely frictionless. Even though, for some pop-ups participants described the experience to move “smoothly”, this was not the case for all pop-ups. Some participants referred to waiting times and queuing for certain activities, which introduced moments of passivity within an otherwise active experience. However, these moments were generally accepted as part of the experience and did not significantly diminish overall engagement. In some cases, waiting even contributed to anticipation within the experience and sustained involvement.

Hands-on engagement with products formed another important part of participation. By touching, testing, or tasting products, participants became more familiar with them, which lowered uncertainty and, in some cases, the threshold for purchase. Although purchasing was not the primary focus of the

experience, it could emerge as a possible outcome of active engagement. Many participants noted on not feeling encouraged to purchase, especially since *“you already got so much out of it, as noted by Participant 5 and because of this “it didn’t feel necessary to buy anything” as noted by Participant 6.* Participants described considering or making purchases during the experience, suggesting that engagement with the pop-up could however also translate into transactional outcomes.

Participation was also reflected in the amount of time consumers spent in the pop-up. Rather than engaging only briefly, participants often described spending extended periods of time in the space, ranging from a little under an hour to over an hour, without perceiving it as excessive. From participants accounts it could be indicated that the duration felt natural within the context of the experience. Participants associated this extended engagement with the design of the environment, which encouraged staying rather than quick circulation. As Participant 6 explained, *“it gave the feeling that they wanted you to spend time there, since they had made it so comfortable and inviting”* and further continuing that *“everyone was very welcome and could stay as long as they wanted. It didn’t feel like a just go around and leave kind of place, you could have spent the whole day there”*. These accounts indicate that participation was not only activity-based but also extended and the pop-up was experienced as a space that invited continued engagement, rather than a setting for brief interaction.

The findings indicate that experiential pop-ups are structured around activity-based engagement, where the experience is co-created through participation, exploration and interaction. Rather than being passively consumed, the experience is enacted by consumers through doing. This active involvement plays a central role in making the experience distinct from traditional retail encounters.

4.2.3 Emotional and cognitive engagement

A further key finding of the participation stage was that the experiential pop-up evoked both strong emotional engagement and continuous cognitive processing. Participants did not merely feel the experience, instead, emotional and cognitive responses unfolded simultaneously during participation, as consumers enjoyed, evaluated, interpreted, and made sense of what they encountered.

Emotional engagement was predominantly positive. Participants frequently described the experience as “fun”, “enjoyable” and “interesting”. These emotional responses were closely tied to the multisensory and activity-based character of the pop-up. The experience was often framed as a meaningful activity or event rather than as a shopping situation. The experience was described as something to do during the day, *“a fun pastime activity”* as described by Participant 1, positioning it

closer to leisure or entertainment than to transactional shopping. For example, Participant 6 compared the experience to *“coming home from a concert*, emphasizing a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment after participation. Participants highlighted that being able to try, test, and interact with different elements of the pop-up contributed to feelings of enjoyment and engagement. Participants further highlighted that emotional engagement was closely linked to the experiential nature of the pop-up, saying that it *“was fun that you got to test things, try things out, and actually do something”* as described by Participant 3, which Participant 2 supported: *“...just a happy and fun feeling, because I was simply spending an enjoyable day off.”*

A recurring pattern in the interviews was that novelty and unexpectedness intensified emotional engagement. Several participants described feeling surprised by the scale, creativity, or effort invested in the pop-up, particularly when the experience exceeded their prior expectations. Such reactions indicate that emotional engagement was intensified when the experience differed from participants’ initial assumptions. Participants described feelings of delight, appreciation, or even a sense of privilege, especially as the experience was free of charge yet offered substantial experiential value.

“The whole pop-up experience was surprising. It was pretty crazy, suddenly finding yourself at something like a fair, and even for free. So, it was quite fun.” – Participant 3.

“And it even gave a bit of a lucky feeling, like I had discovered something special. Not everyone gets to experience something like this... was very much that kind of feeling that you are really supposed to make the most out of the experience.” – Participant 6.

At the same time, emotional responses were not exclusively positive. Some participants expressed mild disappointment when certain elements of the experience did not meet the expectations that had been formed during pre-participation but also later in the participation stage. This was particularly evident when anticipated personalization or depth of interaction remained limited. Participants described feeling that the experience initially built expectations that were not fully delivered, resulting in a slightly underwhelming outcome despite otherwise positive impressions. Such accounts show that emotional engagement was dynamic and could shift as participants continuously evaluated the unfolding experience. For example, Participant 4 was initially excited for the skin analysis in the pre-participation stage, expecting personalized recommendations, but when this was not met, this is how they described it:

“Then I felt a bit disappointed. Even though I did get testers... and I left with a good feeling like, “that analysis was fun and the products were nice,” my expectations had kind of increased while I was there... but the next stage didn’t quite meet the expectations that had been built. So, in the end, it was a bit like, meh, nice products, but you created higher expectations than what you ultimately delivered.” – Participant 4.

Therefore, alongside emotional engagement, participants engaged in ongoing cognitive meaning construction. The experience was strongly sensory and emotional, and participants did not passively absorb it. Instead, they actively interpreted, evaluated, and made sense of what they encountered throughout the experience. Thus, a recurring pattern in the data was the comparison between prior expectations and actual experience. Participants continuously assessed whether the pop-up met, exceeded, or fell short of what they had anticipated the pop-up to be. In many cases, the pop-up was described as positively surprising and better than expected, especially in terms of scale, interactivity, and quality. Participants noted that they had expected something more promotional but were surprised when it was different from that. Similarly, participants described the overall concept as more elaborate and better executed than expected, suggesting that the experience reshaped their initial assumptions about pop-ups in general.

“At Hansakortteli in Turku there have been similar things... where they give out free products... I’m not sure if they’re exactly pop-ups, but compared to those, this felt much more personal. There, you just get the product and leave, whereas here you actually spent time with the brand. You had these longer one-on-one interactions with a staff member, which made it feel more meaningful... you stayed engaged with the brand for a longer period, and that clearly made the experience stronger.” – Participant 5.

In addition to evaluating the experience itself, participants also constructed meanings related to the brand itself. The experiential context allowed them to engage with the brand in a more concrete and embodied way, which influenced how the brand was understood. For example, some participants were surprised by the scale and visibility of the brand, which altered their perception of its market presence. Participants also interpreted elements of the pop-up such as design, organization, and execution as a signal of brand effort, investment, and professionalism, how much the brand had invested in the experience. Detailed design, clear organization, and well-executed activities were taken as indicators of how seriously the brand had approached the experience. This suggests that consumers used the experiential environment as a basis for inferring brand-related meanings, translating concrete elements of the experience into broader judgments about the brand.

In addition, participants reflected on the purpose of the pop-up. Although they recognized its promotional function, they did not primarily interpret it as a traditional advertisement. Instead, the pop-up was understood as a more enjoyable and consumer-oriented form of brand activation, offering something beyond straightforward selling. Participants emphasized the value of experiencing something tangible and different from everyday brand interactions through advertisements. Many participants noted on feeling more positive about the pop-up than traditional advertising and being more welcoming to this kind of promotion from brands. The pop-up was perceived as offering a

physical and embodied encounter with the brand, which contrasted with more distant digital touchpoints. This suggests that positive emotional engagement was closely tied to the perceived authenticity and non-intrusive nature of the experience.

“It didn’t feel like just a plain advertisement, I felt like the brand genuinely wanted you to try their products and then decide for yourself whether you’d want to buy them in the future.” – Participant 5.

“It was nice to have something physical like that, something beyond just social media... an actual, tangible happening... where you actually get to do something with the brand and get to know the products that way, make for a really enjoyable experience” – Participant 4.

“It also felt really cool that the brand had put together such a large-scale campaign, that it wasn’t just an ad, but by taking part, you actually got genuinely enjoyable content and something fun to do in your day. It didn’t really feel like you were just inside an advertisement, it was actually a fun experience.” – Participant 2.

Participants also assessed the personal relevance and utility of the experience while it was happening. They considered what they were gaining from participation, whether in terms of enjoyment, information, testing opportunities, or practical benefits. For example, elements such as product testing or limited services offered at the pop-up were evaluated as particularly useful or meaningful, as they provided direct personal value. As Participant 4 noted, the experience offered “*something beyond just being able to buy products*” highlighting how cognitive evaluation extended to the perceived utility of the experience. This shows that participation involved ongoing evaluation of value, not only immediate emotional response.

“You personally got something out of it, that it felt beneficial to you and was also enjoyable to do.” – Participant 7.

These findings indicate that the participation stage is characterized by intertwined emotional and cognitive engagement. Consumers do not simply sense and do but also interpret and evaluate. The experience is thus processed in real time as both enjoyable and meaningful.

4.2.4 Social co-experience and interaction

A final key finding of the participation stage was that the experiential pop-up was strongly socially embedded. Participants frequently described the visit as a shared activity rather than as an individual encounter, describing that the experience was co-created through interaction with friends, companions, staff, and other visitors. Participants emphasized that sharing the experience enhanced enjoyment and made the experience feel more meaningful. Being accompanied by familiar others allowed participants to discuss, react and interpret the experience together in real time. Participants

consistently described it being “fun” to experience it collectively with someone else, particularly someone close to them, amplifying how positive emotions were amplified through social interaction. In this sense, the experiential value of the pop-up was not only individually felt but collectively produced.

“It was nice to be there with others... And if you’re with people who are into things like cosmetics, you can kind of share the experience together.” – Participant 1.

“It probably made the experience more enjoyable because you could share it with someone and share those positive feelings... Most activities are usually more fun with someone else than alone.” – Participant 2.

At the same time, social co-experience was not produced automatically. Some participants noted that the experience could feel less communal when the environment did not support shared interaction or when other visitors were not similarly engaged. This suggests that social co-experience depends not only on the presence of others, but on the quality and intensity of shared engagement within the space. The presence and behaviour of other visitors also shaped the experience in indirect ways. Participants described using others as cues for navigating the space, discovering activities, and understanding how to engage with the environment. This suggests that participation was partly shaped through informal social learning within the space. The number of people present influenced how participants perceived and navigated the experience. A large audience was often noticed and contributed to the overall intensity of the environment. A lively atmosphere created by other visitors often reinforced the sense that the pop-up was attractive and worth engaging with.

“I did kind of look at what others were doing or where they were going. Since it was a bigger space and everything wasn’t immediately visible, you sometimes noticed things through other people... without seeing others go there, you might not have even noticed those areas.” – Participant 7.

In addition, participants described social interaction as contributing to meaning construction during participation. Participants described discussing and comparing elements of the experience with others, which influenced how they interpreted and evaluated it. This indicates that understanding of the experience was not formed solely at the individual level but emerged through interaction and shared interpretation. Additionally, participants noted how certain aspects of the pop-up, such as photobooths, seating areas, and shared activities, were also perceived as explicitly designed to support collective participation. Some participants even noted that some aspects of the pop-up could have been difficult to do alone.

“It was almost designed to be very social, especially because of things like the photobooths and similar elements. It was really nice because there was so much to talk

about and share. If I had been there alone, I probably would have taken photos and sent them to people like, “look what’s going on here.” But now we could just share everything together in the moment, and when we left, it felt like we had experienced it together.” – Participant 6.

Interactions with staff members formed another important dimension of the social experience. Participants described staff as guiding, instructing, and facilitating engagement throughout the pop-up. These interactions were generally perceived positively and useful, and participants noted that staff helped in lowering the threshold for participation and helped structure the experience. In some cases, staff proactively approached participants, introduced activities, and offered additional information or products, contributing to a more interactive and supported experience.

“And they were quite proactive, they came up to you, asked questions, introduced things, and offered testers that weren’t necessarily on display... And when they came to explain the products, it was actually useful.” – Participant 7.

The findings indicate that experiential pop-ups function as social environments in which experiences are co-created through interaction, shared participation, and collective sense-making. The presence of others, whether companions, staff, or fellow visitors, played a central role in shaping both the emotional and experiential character of the participation stage.

4.3 Experiential pop-up experience in the post-participation stage

This section examines the post-participation stage of the experiential pop-up customer journey and addresses how consumers experience that the pop-up experience continues after the physical participation has ended. The findings show that in this stage the experiential pop-up does not end at the point of exit. It was at this stage that the experiential pop-up experience extends through memory, reflection, social sharing, and continued engagement with the brand. Through these processes, the experience is reactivated and reinterpreted over time, shaping both individual perceptions and future interactions with the brand. The analysis of this stage is structured around three themes: remembering and reflecting on the experience, sharing and extending the experience, and continued engagement with the brand.

4.3.1 Remembering and reflecting on the experience

A central finding of the post-participation stage was that consumers continued to remember and reflect on the experiential pop-up after the visit had ended. The experience did not disappear once participants left the space but remained present in memory through sensory and emotional memories, and later evaluations of the experience as a whole, indicating that meaning making extended beyond

the moment of participation Participants most often remembered the experience through its visual and atmospheric qualities. Participants tended to recall the pop-up as an overall atmosphere or distinctive experiential environment, rather than simply listing separate features or recalling how activities functioned. They described what had stayed with them in terms of colours, design, and the overall feel of the space. These accounts suggest that memory operated primarily at the level of holistic atmosphere and participants memories of the visuality continued to shape how the pop-up was recalled over time. This suggests that sensory richness and thematic consistency contributed to memorability of the pop-up. At the same time, participants could recall some distinctive elements such as mascots, installations, or specific visual detail. Such accounts indicate that while participants often remembered the overall atmosphere, striking design details could also become enduring memory cues.

“What really stuck with me was the overall look of the place... how carefully everything had been thought through. And the overall visual design of the place, everything about it, has probably remained the most impactful aspect in my memory.” – Participant 2.

“Even though it’s been almost two years... I can’t necessarily describe everything I did in detail anymore, but I can still clearly picture it in my mind, hear the music, and it has really stayed with me.” – Participant 1.

Some participants also commented on how striking it was that they still remembered the experience so clearly after a long period of time. They noted that, even though a long time had passed since participating, they could recall “*quite clearly*” the experience, and “*what was there and what happened*” as noted by Participant 4. For Participants, this itself was taken as an indication of the memorability of the pop-up.

“And even now I’m thinking it’s quite striking how much I still remember. It could easily be that after three years, I’d just recall something vague, like “there were colors,” but the fact that I remember it in such detail really speaks for itself.” – Participant 6.

Across interviews, participants mentioned that physical takeaways extended this remembering process beyond the visit itself. Items such as printed photos, souvenirs, posters, and other tangible takeaways from the experience acted as reminders that brought the experience back into consumers’ minds after participation. Participant 3 described a printed photo as “*a nice memory*” from the experience, while Participant 6 explained that seeing a poster they got from the pop-up afterward immediately reminded them of the pop-up. These examples suggest that these physical objects functioned as post-participation memory cues by bringing the pop-up back into consumers’ everyday environments, helping to prolong the experiential impact of the visit.

In addition to sensory remembering, participants also retained the emotional tone of the experience. Many remembered the pop-up as a positive and enjoyable “feel-good” experience, even when they no longer recalled every detail of the experience. This indicates that emotional memory was often retained in a form, where the experience remained in mind as an overall positive feeling rather than as a series of separate moments. For some participants, revisiting photos or discussing the experience reactivated these emotions, producing a renewed sense of warmth, enjoyment, or appreciation, reinforcing the overall positive evaluation.

“Well probably just because it was such a feel-good experience and a nice moment, that it stayed in my mind because of that.” – Participant 6.

At the same time, post-participation reflection also involved evaluation. Participants considered whether the experience had been worthwhile, what had stood out, and how it compared with other brand encounters or pop-ups. For most participants, the pop-up was evaluated positively because it offered something beyond conventional retail or advertising. However, some participants also reflected critically on elements such as limited personalization or unmet expectations. This suggests that post-participation reflection involved not only remembering but also reassessing the quality and value of the experience.

These reflective processes contributed to brand-related meaning construction. Across the interviews, participants described that the experience had influenced how participants perceived the brand afterward. For participants, the experiential pop-up made the brand more memorable, more recognizable, or associated with specific feelings or attributes. Participants began to associate the brand with similar colours of the pop-up or values they had gathered from the experiential pop-up such as playfulness, quality, or premium-ness. Some participant expressed having a better impression of the brand after the experiential pop-up, while others noted on noticing the product or brand in retail setting afterwards more easily. Some participants noted on mild increased interest in the brand, if it was one that was already know to them. This indicates that the post-participation stage functioned as a period of brand meaning consolidation, in which the experience continued to shape how the brand was understood.

“I guess I see it as a playful brand that doesn’t take itself too seriously, which I personally like. Yeah, I guess I associate the brand through that [pop-up] with that playfulness.” – Participant 2.

”Yeah, it definitely left a positive impression of the brand. If I saw the bottle somewhere, I’d immediately remember like, oh right, this was from there... after that experience I was like, that [it’s a] good and appealing brand” – Participant 1.

“Maybe in that sense, it has just given me an overall positive impression of Lancôme. I kind of associate it with something feminine and pleasant, with just a nice feeling” – Participant 7.

At the same time, the influence of the pop-up on brand perception was not equally strong for all participants. Several participants noted that while the pop-up increased their awareness of the brand and consoled positive associations, it did not necessarily lead to a major change in their attitudes such as loyalty or future purchase decisions. Therefore, for some participants the influence on brand perception was often moderate rather than transformative. This suggests that the post-participation stage functions more as a process of brand meaning consolidation, increasing for example brand awareness and positive associations, than as a direct driver of behavioural change.

“I wouldn’t necessarily choose this specific brand because of the pop-up, but it at least brought it into my awareness. I wouldn’t say it changed my perception significantly, but at least it ensured that I didn’t have a negative impression of it.” – Participant 2.

“Yeah, at least on a subconscious level, I’d say it has made me more aware of the brand. It also created a feeling that I like the brand, mainly because I have such a positive memory associated with it.” – Participant 7.

“It was a nice experience, but I don’t think it really tied me strongly to L’Oréal. It was enjoyable overall, but in a way it could have been almost any brand. It didn’t really differentiate them for me in a way that would influence my future purchase decisions.” – Participant 4.

In some cases, these post-participation associations also affected perceptions of product value or quality. Participants noted that having tried the product or encountered the brand in a well-designed experiential setting created a more favourable or credible impression of the product, even if this did not directly determine future buying behaviour. Overall, the findings indicate that the post-participation stage is characterised by ongoing remembering and reflection. The experiential pop-up remains a present memory in consumers’ minds through sensory and emotional memory, tangible reminders, and later evaluations of the experience and the brand.

4.3.2 Sharing and extending the experience

A further key finding in the post-participation stage was that the experiential pop-up extended beyond individual memory through social sharing. Rather than remaining a purely personal memory, the pop-up was frequently extended into consumers’ social environments, actively communicated and circulated through both digital platforms and interpersonal interaction. This indicates that experiential pop-ups continue to exist as socially circulated and collectively interpreted experiences. One prominent form of continuation was social media sharing. Several participants described posting

content from the pop-up, such as photos or short videos, particularly through formats such as Instagram Stories. Participants said that the visually rich and aesthetically distinctive nature of the pop-up made it inherently “shareable,” encouraging capturing and content creation.

Importantly, this content captured in the experiential pop-up continued to circulate online after the visit. Participants noted encountering related content afterward, including brand-generated and user-generated posts. This reactivated the experience and created a feedback loop in which personal memory and ongoing exposure to digital content reinforced one another. This indicates that exposure to post-participation content is not only through consumer-driven sharing but also embedded in a broader digital environment where brand and user-generated content coexist.

”Since it was still there for a while after we had visited, I kept seeing videos about that pop-up afterward, as well as other Lancôme ads” – Participant 7.

In addition to social media, participants frequently described continuing the experience through conversations with others, such as friends, family members, or acquaintances. These conversations involved recounting the experience, highlighting memorable elements, and recommending the pop-up to others and functioned as a way to revisit and interpret the experience after it had occurred. For example, participants mentioned bringing up the pop-up when discussing related topics, such as skincare results or places they had visited, thereby integrating the experience into everyday social interaction. Participants described telling others that the pop-up had been “worth going to” or sharing positive impressions of the experience. Some participants noted on taking others again to experience the pop-up, making recommendation to extend into participation intention. In this sense, word-of-mouth extended the experiential pop-ups impact into the post-participation stage as consumers became active communicators of the experience, contributing to its visibility and perceived relevance among others who had not attended.

“Yeah, actually I talked about it at school yesterday, I mentioned that I had been to a skin analysis. Then they asked how much it cost, and I said it was free, that L’Oréal had this kind of pop-up. So, I’ve mentioned it quite a few times when it has come up in conversation with friends or others, and I’ve specifically said that it was a L’Oréal pop-up I went to.” – Participant 5.

“Later, maybe about a month after, we went to the same area. I remember mentioning then that there had been an NCT pop-up there, and that it had been quite something.” – Participant 6.

“It was a really good experience, and I was probably quite impressed as well, since I wanted to take someone else there to experience the same thing I had.” – Participant 2.

Moreover, sharing also involved collective remembering. Participants who attended the pop-up together described revisiting the experience through shared discussions, discussing what had stood out and reinforcing it as a joint memory. Participants highlighted how participation became a collective memory that they could share with an important person, and recollect together after. In some cases, participants also described a sense of recognition when encountering others who had attended the same pop-up, particularly through social media, which created a feeling of shared experience and belonging to a certain group when participants saw later other people talking about it.

“It left a really lovely, shared memory that you can still talk about from time to time, especially with the person you experienced it with.” – Participant 3.

“It was more like, “oh yeah, we went there too.” Seeing it later on social media gave that feeling of recognizing it and knowing exactly what people were talking about.” – Participant 7.

These findings indicate that the experiential pop-up continues to exist as a socially circulated experience after participation. The experiential pop-up extends into digital platforms and interpersonal communication, where it is shared, discussed, and reinterpreted. Through these processes, the experience gains a broader social presence beyond the individual visit.

4.3.3 Continued engagement with the brand

A final key finding was that the experiential pop-up influenced consumers’ subsequent behaviour and relationship with the brand. Rather than remaining only as a remembered or shared experience, the pop-up could translate into continued engagement, although the strength and form of this engagement varied across participants. A recurring pattern was that participation lowered the threshold for future interaction with the brand. Familiarity gained through direct experience with products, activities, and the overall environment reduced uncertainty, made the brand more recognizable and easier to consider in later situations. Participants described being more likely to notice the brand in stores or to consider its products.

Hands-on interaction with products reduced uncertainty and, in some cases, supported purchase-related behaviour. However, this effect was typically indirect. While some participants reported increased purchase likelihood, others emphasized that the experience did not necessarily translate into actual buying behaviour. This suggests that the impact of experiential pop-ups on purchasing is often indirect and gradual rather than immediate.

“Since you got to taste it, you kind of know what you’re buying.” – Participant 1.

“I think it lowered the threshold for me to buy.” – Participant 5.

“I don’t necessarily see it directly correlating with how much people buy products, at least based on my experience.” – Participant 4

Beyond purchasing, participants described broader forms of continued engagement with the brand. These included checking the brand’s social media channels after the visit, following up on specific results or information received during the experience, and maintaining a general interest in the brand. These behaviours suggest that experiential pop-ups can trigger continued information-seeking and exploratory behaviour beyond the immediate event.

“Afterward, I looked into my results with interest, maybe even with some excitement, because it was something personally important to me.” – Participant 5.

The participants’ answers also indicate that experiential pop-ups influenced consumers’ willingness to engage with similar experiences in the future. All participants expressed an interest in attending similar pop-ups again, particularly those that aligned more closely with their personal preferences or interests. Prior participation reduced uncertainty or hesitation, making future participation feel more natural and approachable. Having attended the experiential pop-up created expectations for future ones, particularly regarding experiential richness, personal relevance, and the opportunity to engage actively with products. This suggests that experiential pop-ups may contribute to the normalization of this form of brand engagement, encouraging repeated participation over time.

“Now that I’ve been to one, the threshold to go to others is lower, especially if something genuinely interesting comes up. It doesn’t feel like such a random or odd thing anymore.” – Participant 4.

“I just think it’s fun. It has that element of doing something, but also a sense of community, and you get to engage with the product in a completely different way. That’s what would make me want to visit again.” – Participant 1.

At the same time, continued engagement was not unconditional. Participants emphasized that future interest depended on relevance, such as alignment with personal preferences, product needs, and perceived value. Even those, that were not completely satisfied with the experience noted that they wanted to go again, but to a pop-up that was more relevant to them. Indicating that the relevance of the pop-up is important to consumers and that experiencing the pop-up also made new expectations for new ones. Most participants noted on wanting the future experiential pop-up to be a brand they liked or wanted to get to try the products, for example if they were expensive. They did not necessarily name any specific features that the pop-up ought to have. Some participants noted that they were willing to participate regardless of the brand preference, mostly due to the novelty of the concept, and now also a knowledge that the experience would be “fun” and “enjoyable”.

“To be honest, if a pop-up came to Helsinki, I’d probably go to almost any of them, just because it’s still quite a new concept here and I’d want to see how it’s organized.” – Participant 2.

“And I think it would be really fun to see a similar concept from a brand that’s personally meaningful to me, like a favourite brand. I already enjoyed it a lot even without being a fan, so I’d probably love it if it were something I genuinely care about.” – Participant 6.

In addition, certain touchpoints within the pop-up were explicitly designed to extend engagement beyond the visit. For example, Participant 7 described signing up for a mailing list in exchange for entry into a giveaway, thereby establishing an ongoing connection with the brand. Although such mechanisms were not widely emphasized across all participants, this illustrates how experiential pop-ups can incorporate elements that link the immediate experience to longer-term consumer–brand relationships.

Overall, the findings indicate that the post-participation stage includes continued engagement behaviours, from increased awareness and consideration to information-seeking, social interaction, and potential purchasing. While these effects vary in intensity, experiential pop-ups extend beyond the moment of participation by shaping how consumers interact with the brand in the future.

4.4 Synthesis of empirical findings

Through a systematic analysis of the empirical data, several key patterns emerged that provide insight into how consumers experience experiential pop-ups across the customer journey. The findings show that experiential pop-ups are experienced as a continuous and multi-stage process across the customer journey rather than as isolated encounters. Across the pre-participation, participation, and post-participation stages, consumers encounter distinctive touchpoints that evoke different sensorial, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and social responses. Together, these responses shape the overall experiential pop-up experience and contribute to the formation of experiential value over time. By identifying these stage-specific touchpoints and the specific experiential responses they evoke, the findings explain how experiential pop-up experiences are constructed, interpreted, and extended over time.

The findings show that experiential pop-ups begin as an experiential process already in the pre-participation stage. Consumers do not approach experiential pop-ups as purely informational or neutral encounters but actively form expectations through early touchpoints such as social media, influencer content, word-of-mouth, prior experiences, and physical visibility. These touchpoints evoke anticipation and curiosity, often driven by novelty, and sometimes also mild uncertainty. At

the same time, consumers interpreted sensory and symbolic cues related to the pop-up's attractiveness, scale, and perceived quality. Participation decisions were shaped through the evaluation of personal relevance, expected benefits, and required effort, while also being socially embedded via recommendations, shared curiosity, and joint planning which shape whether the pop-up is perceived as worth attending.

The participation stage emerges as the core of the experiential pop-up journey, where anticipated meanings were transformed into lived experiences. During this stage, consumers engage with touchpoints such as multisensory design, activities, gamified elements, product interaction, and social interaction. The findings show that experiential pop-ups are experienced as immersive and activity-based environments in which consumers became active participants rather than passive observers. Emotional and cognitive responses are closely intertwined, as consumers simultaneously enjoy the experience, and evaluate and interpret, in relation to their expectations about the experience and the brand. The participation stage is also strongly social, as the presence of companions, staff, and other visitors enhances enjoyment and contributes to shared meaning-making. While the experience is predominantly positive, moments of unmet expectations and friction, such as queues or limited personalization, also emerge, indicating variation in how the experience can be perceived.

Also, the findings show that experiential pop-ups extend beyond the moment of participation into the post-participation stage. After participation, the experience continues through remembering, reflection, sharing, and continued engagement with the brand. Consumers primarily recall the experience through its atmosphere, visuality, and emotional tone, while tangible reminders and later brand encounters reactivate these memories. Post-participation reflection involves evaluating the worthwhileness of the experience and reconsidering its meaning. The experience is further extended through social interaction, such as conversations (word-of-mouth) and social media sharing, which increase the pop-ups visibility beyond the actual visit and the individual who visited it. In addition, the pop-up can strengthen brand awareness, positive associations, and future brand consideration, although the extent of these effects can vary and its effect on behavioural outcomes such as purchase tends to be indirect rather than immediate and dependent on personal relevance.

Furthermore, the findings show how experiential value is perceived and formed across the experiential pop-up customer journey. Rather than emerging at a single moment, experiential value develops cumulatively as consumers anticipate, engage with, and later reflect on the experience. In the pre-participation stage, value is anticipated in the form of expected enjoyment, novelty, and potential benefits. During participation, value is experienced through immersion, active engagement,

enjoyment, and authentic and meaningful interaction with the brand. In the post-participation stage, value is extended through memorability, positive emotional recall, social sharing, and continued brand awareness and consideration. Thus, across data, value appears in multiple forms, including hedonic value (e.g. enjoyment and fun), social value (e.g. shared experiences, social interaction and belonging), and cognitive value (e.g. learning and meaning-making about the experience and brand). Thus, hedonic benefits on top of functional benefits (e.g. free products or services) work as drivers for participation. Importantly, the findings also indicate that experiential value does not automatically translate into immediate behavioural outcomes, such as purchase, but more often influences intermediate outcomes, such as brand awareness, positive associations, and reduced thresholds for future engagement.

In addition to these stage-specific patterns, across all three stages, the findings highlight two cross-cutting characteristics of the experiential pop-up journey. First, the findings highlight that the experience is strongly socially embedded across all stages. Social influence shapes awareness and participation decisions before the visit in the pre-participation stage, enhances engagement and enjoyment during participation, and extends the experience after participation in the post-participation stage through sharing, recommendation, and collective remembering. Second, the findings further demonstrate that the experiential pop-up journey is continuous and interconnected. Expectations formed in the pre-participation stage influence participation, which are then evaluated during participation and compared to the actual experience, while participation experiences are later reinterpreted and reinforced through post-participation reflection and social interaction, resulting into memories.

Taken together, the findings suggest that experiential pop-ups unfold as processual experiences that are constructed and reconstructed across multiple stages through interaction with diverse touchpoints. Rather than being tied to a single moment or encounter, experiential pop-up experiences develop cumulatively over time as consumers anticipate, experience, and reflect on them. Table 5 summarizes the key findings of the experiential pop-up customer journey across the three stages. As illustrated, stage-specific touchpoints stimulate distinctive experiential responses and further outcomes across the customer journey. These together contribute to the formation of experiential value.

Table 5 Synthesis of experiential pop-up customer journey findings

Stage	Key experience	Key touchpoints	Key experiential responses and value
	Anticipation and curiosity	Social media, influencers, WOM, prior experiences	Imagined experience and emotional anticipation formation, Curiosity, excitement, novelty-driven interest, mild uncertainty

Stage	Key experience	Key touchpoints	Key experiential responses and value
Pre-participation	Sensory and symbolic cues shaping expectations	Visual content, exterior design, location, scale	Expectations of enjoyment, perceived quality, imagined experience
	Evaluating relevance and worthwhileness	Perceived benefits, accessibility, time, queues, prior experience	Evaluation of value vs. effort, perceived personal relevance, participation intention
	Socially shaped participation decisions	Friends, recommendations, invite others, shared planning, social media	Social validation, co-construction of meaning, reduced uncertainty, preference for shared participation
Participation	Immersive multisensory environment	Spatial design, visuals, music, themed installations, product displays	Sense of immersion, perceived experiential richness, perceived quality differences
	Active participation and experiential doing	Activities, gamification, product trials, spatial progression	Engagement, involvement, time spent, sense of agency, lowered purchase uncertainty
	Emotional and cognitive engagement	All on-site touchpoints	Enjoyment, surprise, satisfaction, disappointment, feelings of authenticity, ongoing evaluation and comparison between expectations and reality, brand meaning construction
	Social co-experience and interaction	Companions, staff, other visitors, shared activities	Enhanced enjoyment, shared meaning-making and emotional amplification, social facilitation of participation
Post-participation	Remembering and reflecting on the experience	Atmosphere, sensory memories, souvenirs, later encounters with the brand in retail and digital environments	Memorability, emotional recall, perceived worthwhileness, brand associations, increased awareness, improved impressions, perceived product credibility
	Sharing and extending the experience	Social media, WOM, conversations	Experience reactivation, social circulation, extended visibility, extension into new participation, invite others
	Continued engagement with the brand	Product encounters, brand channels, follow-up actions	Increased familiarity, noticing the brand, reduced uncertainty, lower threshold for future participation and brand consideration

Next, these empirical findings are discussed in relation to the theoretical background and mirrored with the previously introduced theoretical framework in Section 0. This way theoretical contribution and practical implications for marketing managers are created.

5 Conclusions

5.1 Theoretical contributions

This study set out to support existing literature on pop-ups across the customer journey (Rudkowski et al. 2020) and extend it by exploring how consumers experience experiential pop-ups across the customer journey. To understand the experiential pop-up customer journey and answer the main research question, this study addresses sub-questions on touchpoints, experiential responses, and experiential value. Through answering these objectives, the study contributes to customer journey, experiential marketing and experiential pop-up literature by offering a more processual and empirically grounded understanding of experiential pop-ups.

Prior research has acknowledged the importance of customer experience across multiple touchpoints (e.g. Lemon & Verhoef 2016; Becker & Jaakkola 2020), while experiential pop-ups have largely been examined as isolated brand activations or temporary retail formats with a focus on the on-site experience (e.g. Pomodoro 2013; Robertson et al. 2018; Warnaby et al. 2015). This study advances experiential pop-up literature by showing that *experiential pop-ups* are not experienced as isolated encounters in the on-site participation part, but *as multi-stage experiential processes unfolding across touchpoints in pre-participation, participation, and post-participation stages*. This processual view extends earlier notations on seeing pop-ups from a customer journey perspective (Rudkowski et al. 2020). From these results, experiential pop-up experiences are conceptualized as *experiences that begin before participation, intensify during participation, and continue after the physical visit*, extending prior definitions that have largely remained focused on the participation stage (e.g. Alexander & Bain 2016, Boustani 2025).

Within this processual perspective, the study refines customer journey theory by showing that *experiential pop-up touchpoints are spread across the different stages of the journey and differ in importance and influence on the experience depending on the stage*. Pre-participation is dominated by socially mediated and digital touchpoints, participation by brand-owned multisensory and activity-based touchpoints, and post-participation by customer-owned and social touchpoints that extend the experience. The findings thus demonstrate that experiential pop-ups are encountered through interconnected digital, physical, and social touchpoints that extend across the entire customer journey. These findings support prior research that highlights the importance of pre- and post-participation touchpoints in the experience and extend it with presenting specific experiential pop-up touchpoints (Rudkowski et al. 2020) and extend prior categorizations of touchpoints (e.g. Lemon & Verhoef 2016;

Towers & Towers 2022) by demonstrating how their relevance shifts across stages. By identifying which touchpoints function as key moments in shaping the overall experience, the findings extend prior literature and answers to customer journey needs to identify key moments (e.g. Reitsamer and Becker 2024; Baxendale et al. 2015; Lemon & Verhoef 2016). In particular, the results bring a new perspective by highlighting *the central role of social touchpoints*, such as word-of-mouth and social media, *in influencing experience formation across the journey*.

In addition, the findings deepen the understanding of customer journeys by showing that *experiential pop-up journeys are circular rather than merely linear*. Post-participation behaviours, such as sharing, recommending, and inviting others, feedback directly into new pre-participation stages. Thereby, experiential pop-ups can restart and extend the customer journey or result into new journeys for the participant or for other people. This supports prior conceptualizations of non-linear journeys (Mele et al. 2021) and refines prior pop-up journey models (Rudkowski et al. 2020) by demonstrating how *experiential marketing contexts generate continuous experiential loops in which later touchpoints actively shape future participation*. The study also makes transitions between stages more visible. While prior studies have acknowledged that earlier touchpoints shape later perceptions (Lemon & Verhoef 2016; Micheaux & Bosio 2018), the findings show how expectations formed in pre-participation are later confirmed, exceeded, or disconfirmed during participation, while lived experiences during participation are then transformed into memories, reflections and socially shared meanings in the post-participation stage. These transitions show critical moments in which experiential value is reinforced, reinterpreted, or weakened, thereby this study extends customer journey theory by specifying that *the experiential pop-up journey is not only a sequence of stages, but also a process in which experiences evolve, and meanings are continuously reinterpreted*.

This study further contributes to experiential marketing literature by extending the understanding of experiential responses beyond the participation stage. This contribution is particularly relevant in relation to earlier experiential pop-up literature which has predominantly focused on on-site experiences and responses (e.g. Alexander & Ling 2023; Lowe et al. 2018; Robertson et al. 2018), the findings show that *experiential responses are not restricted to the participation stage alone and emerge across all stages of the customer journey*. Experiential responses emerge already in the pre-participation stage through anticipation, curiosity, uncertainty, and expectation formation, extending prior literature highlighting anticipatory and imaginary consumption experiences (e.g. Kranzbühler et al. 2018; Schmitt 1999), and continue in the post-participation stage through reflection, memory construction and social sharing. During participation, experiential responses are multidimensional and simultaneous, involving sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and social elements,

extending prior findings on experiential environments as experience creators (e.g. Brakus et al. 2009; Boustani 2025, Rudkowski et al. 2020) with empirical findings. By demonstrating that experiential responses unfold across interconnected touchpoints over time, the study supports a process-based view of customer experience (e.g. Lemon & Verhoef 2016; Becker & Jaakkola 2020) and shifts experiential marketing focus from momentary brand encounters or experiential activations towards *continuous experience formation as a result of experiential responses to multiple interconnected touchpoints unfolding across the customer journey*. The findings do not challenge the importance of the participation stage but broaden the perspective by showing that the experience begins before direct participation and continues after it as experiential responses to touchpoints.

Furthermore, the study advances experiential value literature by demonstrating that *experiential value is cumulative and interpretative across the experiential pop-up customer journey*. Value develops through the integration of anticipatory expectations, lived experiences, and post-experience reflections, suggesting its formation to develop across stages rather than from any single interaction. Empirically, *experiential value manifests primarily as hedonic, social, and cognitive value, while being constructed through consumers' interpretations of their experiences* rather than explicitly articulated categories. Importantly, the findings also show that *experiential value is not automatically positive nor guaranteed*. Although prior literature has often emphasized the engaging, memorable, and enjoyable qualities of experiential pop-ups (Lowe et al. 2018; Boustani 2025), their value may be weakened when expectations are not met, when experiences lack personal relevance, or when friction such as queues or limited interactivity disrupts the experience. This shows that *experiential value depends on how well different touchpoints and stages align with consumers' expectations and perceived relevance*. This adds to prior literature (e.g. Mathwick et al. 2001; Yuan & Wu 2008; Brakus et al. 2009) by highlighting the conditional and potentially negative nature of experiential value formation and by linking value more explicitly to customer journey processes.

This perspective also clarifies how the study contributes to the discussion on experiential outcomes (e.g. Alexander & Ling 2023) by refining the understanding of what experiential pop-ups primarily achieve. While experiential pop-ups strengthen awareness, familiarity, and brand associations, their effect on purchase or loyalty remains indirect and conditional. Behavioural outcomes are mediated by personal relevance and perceived benefits, suggesting that *the primary effect of experiential pop-ups lies in shaping cognitive and affective brand-related responses, such as such as brand awareness, familiarity and positive associations rather than immediate behavioural change*. As prior literature has suggested that experiential marketing enhances memorability, engagement, and positive brand perceptions (Yuan & Wu 2008; Klein et al. 2016) but can also encourage rapid consumer action such

as willingness-to-pay (Zogaj et al. 2019), this refines assumptions about experiential marketing effectiveness by distinguishing more clearly between experiential outcomes and behavioural outcomes.

Across these processes, the findings highlight the central role of social embeddedness in experiential pop-up experiences, also acknowledged by earlier studies (Boustani 2025; Overdiek 2017; Kim et al. 2010). Prior literature has recognized social interaction as one dimension of experience (e.g. Schmitt 1999; Gentile et al. 2007) and its role in value creation (Kim et al. 2010), this study demonstrates that *social processes operate across all stages of experiential pop-up journey*, rather than being confined to post-consumption sharing (Shi et al. 2021). Social influence shapes awareness and participation decisions in the pre-participation stage, enhances engagement during participation, and extends the experience after participation through sharing and collective remembering. The findings also indicate that consumers actively involve others in the experience, thus experiential value is amplified through social processes. Thus, social embeddedness does not merely function as dimension of experience and value (Schmitt 1999), but this study suggests a stronger role as *social embeddedness functions as a cross-cutting mechanism through which experiences are constructed, amplified and sustained over time*, extending what Kim et al. (2010) and Shi et al. (2021) have lightly indicated in their previous findings. This reconceptualization positioning social interaction not merely as a characteristic of experiential pop-ups, and positions *experiential pop-ups as inherently socially co-constructed experiences*.

This study contributes to experiential pop-up literature as the findings also refine the understanding of experiential pop-ups themselves. Rather than treating experiential characteristics, such as immersion, interactivity and multisensory design as abstract features of experiential pop-ups (e.g. Pomodoro 2013; Alexander & Bain 2016; Boustani 2025), this study shows how these characteristics are realized in practice through concrete touchpoints such as spatial design, interactive activities, product interaction, and social interaction. The findings support these characteristics found by earlier literature but also show considerable variation in how strongly they are realized in practice. The findings also show that there is considerable variation in how strongly these characteristics are realized in practice, which in turn affects the experiential responses and value created. Some experiential pop-ups were experienced as highly immersive, interactive, and socially engaging, while others were described as visually plain, less interactive, or less meaningful. This suggests that experiential pop-ups are better understood as *experiential platforms that vary in execution and effectiveness, thus the degree to which they activate experiential responses and create value*, rather than as a uniform, homogeneous, format. This shifts the knowledge of experiential pop-ups from

descriptive characteristics to empirically grounded experiential platforms through which consumers actually experience experiential pop-ups.

In line with this, the findings challenge the centrality of temporariness as a central driver of pop-up attractiveness, frequently emphasized in prior literature (e.g. Surchi 2011; Zogaj et al. 2019; Alexander & Bain 2016). The findings are not able completely dismiss temporariness as contributing to the nature of pop-ups but indicate that *temporariness alone does not sufficiently explain participation or value creation*. Instead, *experiential richness, personal relevance, expected benefits, and social embeddedness appear more central in shaping how experiential pop-ups are experienced and valued*. This is notable, as temporariness has been seen as key to pop-up appeal, and has further explained their ephemeral nature, conceptualized in the name “pop-up” (Robertson et al. 2018, 425; Klein et al. 2016, 5761). This shifts the conceptualization of experiential pop-ups away from temporary retail formats and *toward processual experiential systems embedded within the broader customer journey*. In this sense, this study extends the understanding of experiential pop-ups by integrating them more closely to experiential marketing and customer journey theory.

Overall, this study answers the main research question by showing that *experiential pop-ups are experienced through stage-specific touchpoints that evoke distinctive multidimensional experiential responses, which cumulatively form experiential value before, during, and after participation*. By integrating customer journey and experiential marketing perspectives, this study responded to calls for a more integrated understanding of how customer experience evolves across touchpoints and contexts (Lemon & Verhoef 2016; Kranzbühler et al. 2018) and supports prior research indicating that pop-ups begin before visiting and extend via post-event engagement (Rudkowski et al. 2020), extending this as by giving understanding of *experiential pop-ups as cumulative, socially embedded, and dynamically evolving experiential processes*.

Based on these contributions, the conceptual framework in Figure 5 is revised to reflect the contributions of this study and answers to the research questions and show how consumers experience experiential pop-ups across the customer journey. Figure 6 shows a processual view of experiential pop-up experiences in which experiential value emerges cumulatively across stages, social embeddedness operates along the entire journey, and post-participation feeds back into new pre-participation through recursive dynamics.

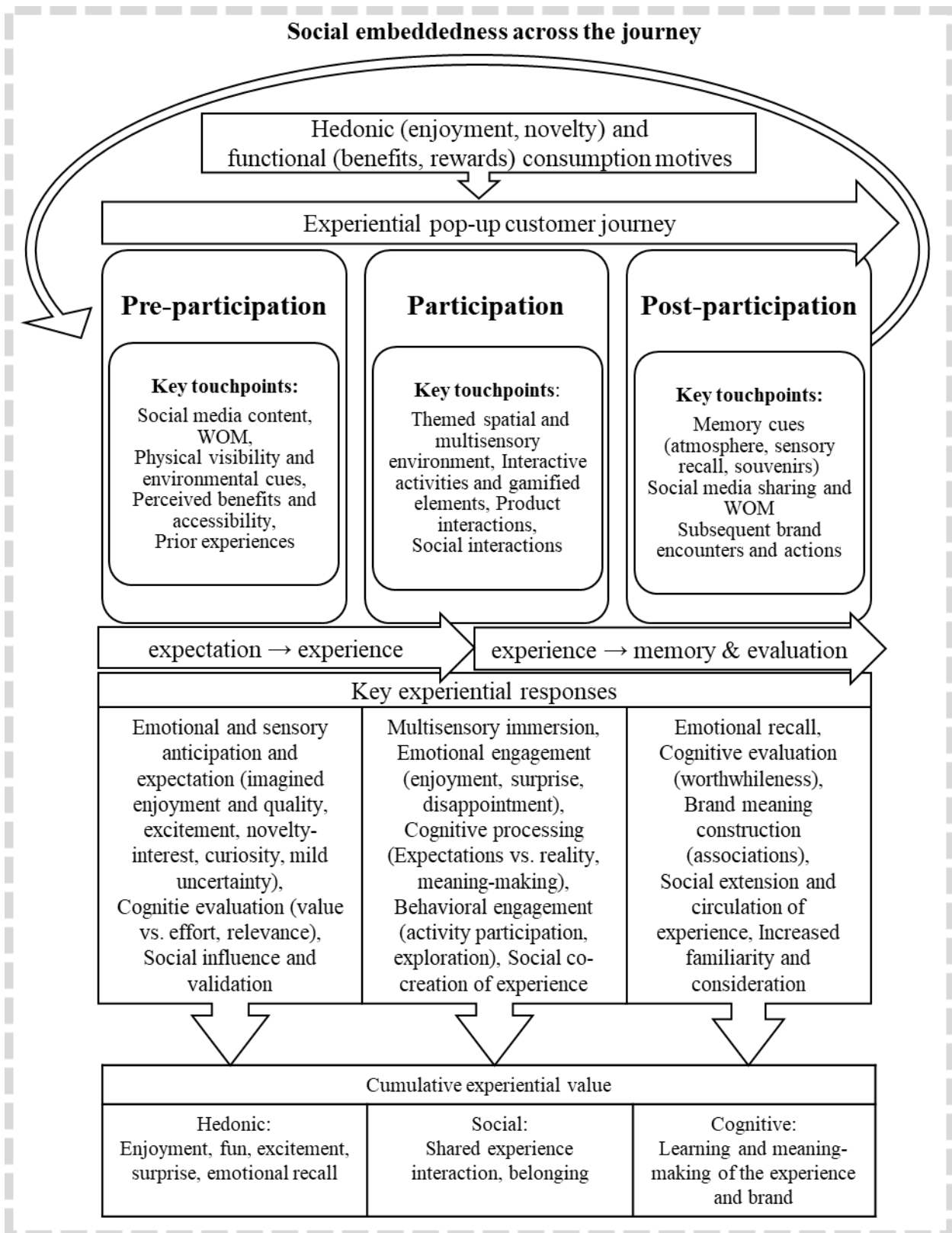


Figure 6 Processual model of experiential pop-ups across the customer journey

The figure advances existing research by offering a more comprehensive and empirically grounded understanding of experiential pop-ups as processual brand experiences, that are constructed, sustained, and sometimes weakened across time, touchpoints, and social interaction.

5.2 Managerial implications

In addition to the theoretical contributions discussed in the previous section, this study provides several important managerial implications for practitioners wanting to leverage or are already designing and managing experiential pop-ups as a part of their brand or marketing strategy. The findings of this thesis can be relevant for retail and brand managers, marketing and communication professionals, as well as third-party agencies who are responsible for executing experiential marketing initiatives, such as experiential pop-ups.

The results indicate that to effectively manage experiential pop-ups, this requires a shift from single-event thinking toward thinking of managing the overall experience journey design, where value is created through multiple coordinated touchpoints, social interaction, and continuous engagement across stages. Therefore, the key managerial implication of this study is that *experiential pop-ups should not be seen as isolated brand activations but be approached and managed as multi-stage experiential processes within the customer journey, requiring coordinated management across pre-participation, participation, and post-participation stages*. This study therefore agrees with Rudkowski et al. (2020) in that managers ought to consider how to maintain connections and engage with customers prior to the opening of the pop-up and after its closure. As the findings demonstrate that the experience is not just happening in the moment of the physical pop-up participation but begins before participation and continues after the physical encounter, firms should design experiential pop-ups as integrated processes that extend across pre-participation, participation, and post-participation stages. This requires coordinating communication, experience design, and follow-up activities to ensure continuity and consistency across the journey.

Because of this perspective, the findings emphasize for managers that *the pre-participation stage is already experiential and plays a critical role in driving attendance, highlighting that it is important to actively manage the pre-participation stage*. This study therefore suggests that managers should not treat awareness generation as only providing information, but as an experiential phase in itself, where the experience formation begins. Managers responsible of the pre-participation stage, such as communications managers, ought to design pre-event communication to evoke anticipation and emotional engagement, as these play a significant role in shaping the overall expectations and motivations to even attend the experiential pop-up. This includes investing in visually compelling and sensory-rich social media content, leveraging influencer collaborations and creating shareable pre-pop-up material. Also, as pop-ups can include spontaneous participation due to exterior cues, this study suggests that managers ought to invest in the exterior visual design of the pop up to grab

attention of passers-by. Additionally, since findings show that participation decisions are inherently social, firms should facilitate shared planning and group participation, for example by encouraging inviting others, group bookings, or shareable pre-event content. This can increase participation and perceived value even before the physical experience takes place.

A further implication for the pre-participation stage is the importance of perceived relevance in shaping participation decisions. The findings indicate that consumers do not automatically engage with experiential pop-ups, but instead actively evaluate whether the experience is personally relevant and worth the required time and effort, meaning that even pop-ups that utilize the implications said before may fail to attract visitors if perceived relevance is insufficient. Participation is more likely when the pop-up offers clear and appealing benefits, aligns with consumers' interests, or is perceived as sufficiently attractive or novel. Therefore, managers should emphasize *designing and communicating relevance to target audience in the pre-participation stage*. This can be achieved by clearly signaling the experiential benefits, tailoring the concept to specific audiences, and ensuring that the pop-up resonates with consumers' interests, lifestyles, or needs. In addition, reducing perceived barriers such accessibility, by having the pop-up in a central location, or expected queues can strengthen the perceived worthwhileness for participation.

In the participation stage, according to the findings experiential pop-ups are valued for their multisensory, immersive, thematically coherent and interactive design. For managers responsible of the actual participation stage and the design of the experiential pop-up environment, such as experience designers and event managers, this study suggest that *the participation stage should be designed to support and prioritize active, multisensory and interactive engagement and managers should create experiential pop-ups that are thematically coherent*. Such doing, interacting, and exploring can be encouraged through activities like games, product trials, and interactive installations that support more than observing. Importantly, as the findings indicate that participants constantly compare expectations formed before participation with the actual experience itself, making consistency between communication and execution is critical for managers. Overpromising in pre-event communication may lead to disappointment, whereas alignment enhances perceived experiential quality and satisfaction, thus experiential value. Thus, this study suggests *clear alignment between pre-participation stage communication and participation stage experiential pop-up execution*.

Furthermore, for managers, this study highlights the *central role of social interaction as a key driver of experiential value, and experiential pop-ups ought to facilitate social interaction and shareability*

of the experience. The findings highlight that customers value experiential pop-ups predominately, across stages, because of their shared value. Experiential pop-ups should therefore be designed as social environments that facilitate interaction not only between consumers and the brand, but also among participants. This can be achieved through spatial design that encourages co-presence, interactive group activities, and staff that actively engage visitors. Importantly, managers should recognize that participants often act as co-creators and amplifiers of the experience, both on-site and beyond it, therefore managers ought to design “shareable” moments and visually appealing elements that encourage user-generated-content that consumers to share later on with others.

When it comes to the post-participation stage, this study highlights for managers *the need to better leverage the post-participation stage*, which is often underutilized according to prior literature (Rudkowski et al. 2020). The results show that post-participation behaviours, such as sharing and inviting others, can directly generate new engagement, and *firms should therefore actively design participation touchpoints that encourage continued engagement after the visit* by facilitating easy social media sharing, providing follow-up communication, providing memorable elements to the post-participation stage (e.g. souvenirs or distinctive sensory cues) and maintaining engagement through brand channels. The findings also show that consumers invite others and revisit the experience, suggesting that *post-participation stage has a direct influence to generate new pre-participation engagement*. This could be further elaborated by brands by encouraging participants to come again with friends by offering incentives for revisiting with friends, which further supports earlier implication on social embeddedness.

In addition, for the post-participation stage the findings indicate that consumers have formed specific brand associations that are closely tied to the experiential pop-up, which are activated in the post-participation stage. In the post-participation stage, products and the brand are often remembered through the lens of the pop-up experience, including its atmosphere, visuality, and thematic elements. This suggests that post-participation brand encounters play a critical role in either reinforcing or weakening these associations. Therefore, managers should *ensure communicational, visual and thematic consistency between the experiential pop-up and subsequent brand touchpoints, including retail environments and digital channels*. This can mean concretely aligning visual identity, messaging, and thematic elements, by for example using same colors, design elements or marketing messages across channels to reinforce the created familiarity and strengthen the associations formed during the pop-up experience. A disconnect between the pop-up and later brand encounters may in contrast hinder the experiential value and reduce the long-term impact of the experience created in the participation stage.

Finally, the findings suggest that experiential pop-ups are more effective in generating experiential outcomes, such as memorability and positive associations than immediate behavioural outcomes. Thus, while experiential pop-ups enhance brand awareness, familiarity, and potential future engagement, their impact on purchase or loyalty is conditional. Therefore, *managers should align objectives accordingly and evaluate experiential pop-up success using metrics such as engagement, memorability, brand perception, and word-of-mouth, rather than focusing on immediate sales and accordingly use them for these purposes*, if utilizing experiential pop-ups.

5.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research

While this study provides valuable insights into how consumers experience experiential pop-ups across the customer journey, several limitations should be acknowledged to provide suggestions for future research. To start, the study adopts a qualitative approach with a relatively small and homogeneous sample consisting of young Finnish women. While this enables exploration of experiences and aligns with typical pop-up visitors (Niehm et al. 2006), it limits the transferability of the findings to broader consumer groups. As prior research has identified that experiential pop-ups do attract diverse consumer segments (Niehm et al. 2006, 23), the absence of demographic diversity, for example males and older participants, may have shaped the experiential perspectives captured in this study. Therefore, future research could examine more diverse participants, particularly regarding gender and age.

Although the study is grounded in a customer journey perspective, the data collected in this study is cross-sectional and based on retrospective accounts. This means that the study does not directly observe how experiences unfold in real-time over time but relies on participants' reflections and memories after the experience. This might introduce recall bias and selective memory, therefore emphasize might be put on particularly memorable aspect of the experience and this can dismiss more subtle elements. Thus, experiential responses remain only partially captured in this study. Future research could tackle this limitation by using long-standing or real-time methods, such as observations or diary studies, to capture experiential responses in the moment that they occur and progress across different journey stages. Additionally, as this study focuses exclusively on consumer perspectives and thus, does not examine how experiential pop-ups are designed or managed by firms. Findings provide insight into experiences, but limit understanding of how managerial intentions align with actual customer experiences. Future research could adopt a managerial perspective or compare planned and experienced customer journeys to better understand how value is created.

To add, experiential pop-ups are examined in this study as a general phenomenon, not focusing on specific industries, brand types, or levels of consumer involvement. However, the findings suggest that experiential value is influenced by factors such as personal relevance and expected benefits, indicating that contextual differences can be influential. Future studies could investigate experiential pop-ups within specific industries or compare different brand types to understand how experiential value varies across settings.

Finally, this study identifies that experiential pop-ups generate experiential outcomes in relation to the emotional, sensory, cognitive and social dimensions such as memorability and positive brand associations but does not directly measure long-term behavioural outcomes such as purchase behaviour or loyalty. The findings suggest that the impact on purchase or loyalty is indirect and conditional but does not empirically measure this over time. Future research could examine how experiential value results into behavioural outcomes over time or how experiential pop-ups influence long-term consumer behaviour. Therefore, while this study offers a holistic understanding of experiential pop-ups within the customer journey, further research is needed to extend these findings.

6 Summary

This study examined how consumers experience experiential pop-ups across the customer journey. The starting point for this study was the broader transformation in marketing, where firms increasingly move from transactional approaches toward experience-driven value creation. In this context, experiential pop-ups have evolved from temporary sales points into experiential marketing platforms used by brands to generate immersive and engaging brand experiences. At the same time, customer experience research emphasizes that experiences unfold over time across multiple touchpoints rather than as isolated encounters. However, prior research has typically focused either on pop-ups as single encounters or on single phases of the journey, leaving a gap in understanding how these experiences develop across the full customer journey. This study addressed that gap by adopting a customer journey perspective and explored how consumers experience experiential pop-ups across pre-participation, participation, and post-participation stages.

The theoretical framework of this study combined experiential marketing and customer journey perspectives. The study was strongly guided by Schmitt's (1999) experiential marketing framework that conceptualizes value creation through sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and social dimensions of experience, and the study positioned pop-ups as immersive environments that activate these responses. The customer journey perspective complemented this by framing customer experience as a process unfolding across time through interactions with multiple brand-owned, customer-owned, and social/external touchpoints. Together, these perspectives formed a framework in which experiential pop-ups are understood as high-intensity touchpoints embedded within a broader journey, consisting of pre-participation, participation, and post-participation stages, shaping experiential responses and lead to experiential value. This framework guided the empirical analysis by focusing on touchpoints, experiential responses, and perceived value across the journey.

The study employed an exploratory qualitative research design grounded in an interpretivist philosophy focusing on participants' subjective experiences, interpretations, and meaning-making processes. The empirical data were collected through semi-structured interviews with participants who had prior experience of experiential pop-ups. The interviews were designed based on a theory-informed operationalization and structured around the stages of the experiential pop-up customer journey to help answer the research questions. The analysis followed a theory-guided content analysis approach, structured around customer journey stages and experiential dimensions. The analysis involved coding, categorisation, and abstraction to identify recurring patterns in how experiential pop-up experiences are formed and interpreted across time. Trustworthiness in the study was

supported through transparently documenting the research process and reflexive awareness, and ethical conduct was ensured throughout the research and guided by principles such as informed consent, anonymity and research integrity ensured throughout the research process.

The findings indicate that experiential pop-ups are not isolated events but experienced as continuous, multi-stage processes along the entire customer journey. In the pre-participation stage, consumers form expectations through social, digital, and physical touchpoints, which evoke anticipation and shape participation decisions based on perceived relevance and expected value. During participation, expectations are either confirmed or challenged as consumers engage in immersive, multisensory and interactive environments that elicit simultaneous sensorial, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and social responses through active participation. While experiences are generally positive, variations occur, particularly when expectations are not met or when situational constraints such as queues affect engagement. In the post-participation stage, the experience extends through memory, reflection, and social sharing, which sustain and amplify brand-related perceptions beyond the physical encounter. The findings overall indicate that experiential pop-ups primarily generate experiential outcomes, such as memorability, brand awareness, and positive associations, while direct behavioural outcomes remain indirect and conditional.

This study contributes to existing literature by conceptualising experiential pop-ups as experiential processes embedded within the customer journey. It demonstrates that experiential responses emerge across all stages, that touchpoints are distributed and stage-specific, and that experiential value is cumulative. The findings also highlight the role of social embeddedness as a cross-cutting mechanism shaping experience across the journey. Also, the study shows that experiential value is dependent on aligning expectations and different contextual factors, meaning it is not inherently positive. Due to the explanatory nature of this study, suggestions for future research were also presented, including exploring experiential pop-ups in different industries and contexts, exploring findings with more diverse participants, and examining managerial perspectives of designing and managing experiential pop-ups across the customer journey.

To conclude this thesis, the study provides a more comprehensive and empirically grounded understanding of experiential pop-ups as multi-stage, socially embedded, and evolving experiential processes. It suggests that experiential pop-ups are particularly effective in shaping cognitive and affective brand outcomes and perceptions, such as awareness, familiarity and positive associations, rather than directly driving immediate behavioural outcomes, such as purchases.

References

- Achar, C. – So, J. – Agrawal, N. – Duhachek, A. (2016) What we feel and why we buy: The influence of emotions on consumer decision-making. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, Vol. 10 (February), 166–170.
- Agile Retail (25.6.2025) Pop-ups with purpose: How temporary stores are reshaping retail. *Agile Retail 2.0*. <<https://www.agileretail.co.uk/post/pop-ups-with-purpose-how-temporary-stores-are-reshaping-retail>>, retrieved 3.11.2025.
- Ahmed, R. R. – Qureshi, J. A. – Štreimikienė, D. – Vveinhardt, J. – Soomro, R. H. (2020) Guerrilla marketing trends for sustainable solutions: Evidence from SEM-based multivariate and conditional process approaches. *Journal of Business Economics and Management*, Vol. 21 (3), 851–871.
- Alexander, B. – Bain, J. K. (2016) Small store design and marketing effects: Experiential developments in SME fashion pop-up store strategies. In: *Multi-Channel Marketing, Branding and Retail Design: New Challenges and Opportunities*, 1st ed, eds. C. McIntyre – T. C. Melewar – C. Dennis, 163–192. Emerald Group Publishing Limited, Howard House, Wagen Lane, Bingley WA, UK.
- Alexander, B. – Ling, H. L. (2023) Exploring the Influence of Experiential Characteristics in Fashion Pop-Ups on the Retail Experience of UK Millennial Consumers. In: *Brandstrup, The Garment Economy*. Springer Texts in Business and Economics. eds. M. – Dana, L.-P. – Ryding, D. – Vignali, G. – Caratù, M., Cham, 475–513.
- Baxendale, S. – Macdonald, E. K. – Wilson, H. N. (2015) The impact of different touchpoints on brand consideration. *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 91 (2), 235–253.
- Bazen, A. – Barg, F. K. – Takeshita, J. (2021) Research techniques made simple: An introduction to qualitative research. *Journal of Investigative Dermatology*, Vol. 141 (2), 241–247.e1.
- Becker, L. (2018) Methodological proposals for the study of consumer experience. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, Vol. 21 (4), 465–490.
- Becker, L. – Jaakkola, E. (2020) Customer experience: Fundamental premises and implications for research. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 48 (4), 630–648.
- Berry, L. – Carbone, L. – Haeckel, S. H. (2002) Managing the total customer experience. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, Vol. 43 (3), 85-89.
- Boustani, G. (2025) *Understanding pop-up stores through passion and practice*. Taylor & Francis, by Routledge, New York.

- Brakus, J. – Zarantonello, L. – Schmitt, B. H. (2009) Brand experience: What is it? How is it measured? Does it affect loyalty? *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 73 (3), 52–68.
- Braun, V. – Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Vol. 3 (2), 77–101.
- Burney, C. (23.12.2024) In review 2024: Fashion’s best pop-ups. *The Industry Fashion*. <<https://www.theindustry.fashion/in-review-2024-fashions-best-pop-ups/>>, retrieved 12.2.2026.
- Cho, J. – Lee, E.-H. (2014) Reducing confusion about grounded theory and qualitative content analysis: Similarities and differences. *The Qualitative Report*, Vol. 19 (32), 1–20.
- Court, D. – Elzinga, D. – Mulder, S. – Vetvik, O. J. (2009) The consumer decision journey. *McKinsey Quarterly*, 2009 (3), 96–107.
- Creswell, J. W. – Creswell, J. D. (2023) *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. 6th ed. SAGE Publications, Inc. 2455 Teller Road Thousand Oaks, California.
- Crosier, A. – Handford, A. (2012) Customer journey mapping as an advocacy tool for disabled people: A case study. *Social Marketing Quarterly*, Vol. 18 (1), 67–76.
- De Keyser, A. – Verleye, K. – Lemon, K. – Keiningham, T. – Klaus, P. (2020) Moving the customer experience field forward: Introducing the touchpoints, context, qualities (TCQ) nomenclature. *Journal of Service Research*, Vol. 23 (4), 433–455.
- Dhebar, A. (2013) Toward a compelling customer touchpoint architecture. *Business Horizons*, Vol. 56 (2), 199–205.
- elbelindblom (25.3.2025) Näin täst eilen Tiktokis ja oli pakko käydä kattoo mitä tapahtuu. TikTok. <https://www.tiktok.com/@elbelindblom/video/7485673633071893782?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7574055409640670742>, retrieved 1.3.2026.
- Elo, S. – Kyngäs, H. (2008) The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, Vol. 62 (1), 107–115.
- Eriksson, P. – Kovalainen, A. (2015) *Qualitative methods in business research: A practical guide to social research*. 2nd ed. Vols. 1-0. City Road: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Farias, S. A. D. – Aguiar, E. C. – Melo, F. V. S. (2014) Store atmospherics and experiential marketing: A conceptual framework and research propositions for an extraordinary customer experience. *International Business Research*, Vol. 7 (2), 87–99.
- Følstad, A. – Kvale, K. (2018) Customer journeys: A systematic literature review. *Journal of Service Theory and Practice*, Vol. 28 (2), 196–227.

- Frechtling, J. A. – Sharp, L. M. (1997) *User-friendly handbook for mixed method evaluations*. NSF Program Officer, Directorate for Education and Human Resources, Division of Research, Evaluation, and Communication.
- Gentile, C. – Spiller, N. – Noci, G. (2007) How to sustain the customer experience: An overview of experience components that co-create value with the customer. *European Management Journal*, Vol. 25 (5), 395–410.
- Ghauri, P. – Grønhaug, K. – Strange, R. (2020) *Research methods in business studies*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Grewal, D. – Roggeveen, A. L. (2020) Understanding retail experiences and customer journey management. *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 96 (1), 3–8.
- Haas, S. – Schmidt, L. (2016) What drives the success of pop-up stores? *Wissenschaftliche Beiträge / Technische Hochschule Wildau*. Vol. 20 (March), 89–95.
- Halvorsrud, R. – Kvale, K. – Følstad, A. (2016) Improving service quality through customer journey analysis. *Journal of Service Theory and Practice*, Vol. 26 (6), 840–867.
- Hamilton, R. – Price, L. L. (2019) Consumer journeys: Developing consumer-based strategy. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 47 (2), 187–191.
- Harris, E. (2015) Navigating pop-up geographies: Urban space-times of flexibility, interstitiality and immersion. *Geography Compass*, Vol. 9 (11), 592–603.
- Harris, P. – Pol, H. – van der Veen, G. (2020) Customer journey: From Practice to Theory. In: *The Routledge Companion to Strategic Marketing*. 1st ed. eds. B. B. Schlegelmilch – R. S. Winer, 67-90. Routledge, New York.
- Herhausen, D. – Kleinlercher, K. – Verhoef, P. C. – Emrich, O. – Rudolph, T. (2019) Loyalty formation for different customer journey segments. *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 95 (3), 9–29.
- Holbrook, M. B. – Hirschman, E. C. (1982) The experiential aspects of consumption: Consumer fantasies, feelings, and fun. *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 9 (2), 132–140.
- Homburg, C. – Jozić, D. – Kuehnl, C. (2017) Customer experience management: Toward implementing an evolving marketing concept. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 45 (3), 377–401.
- Hsieh, H.-F. – Shannon, S. E. (2005) Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, Vol. 15 (9), 1277–1288.
- Istituto Marangoni Miami (16.6.2025) Brand pop-ups are the new power move—The Miami School of Fashion & Design. <<https://www.istitutomarangonimiami.com/blog/brand-pop-ups-are-the-new-power-move/>>, retrieved 1.2.2025.

- Jaakkola, E. – Becker, L. – Panina, E. (2022) Understanding and managing customer experiences. In: *The Palgrave Handbook of Service Management*. eds. B. Edvardsson – B. Tronvoll, 655–675. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, Switzerland.
- Kargin, S. – Lamey, L. (2025) The impact of a flagship store opening on firm value: Evidence from an event study. *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 199 (October), 115583.
- Kim, H. – Fiore, A. – Niehm, L. – Jeong, M. (2010) Psychographic characteristics affecting behavioral intentions towards pop-up retail. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, Vol. 38 (2), 133–154.
- Klein, J. F. – Falk, T. – Esch, F.-R. – Gloukhovtsev, A. (2016) Linking pop-up brand stores to brand experience and word of mouth: The case of luxury retail. *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 69 (12), 5761–5767.
- Korea.net (2023) Korea.net writer visits pop-up store hub in Seoul. *Korea.net*. <<https://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/FoodTravel/view?articleId=237459>>, retrieved 20.11.2025.
- Kranzbühler, A. M. – Kleijnen, M. H. P. – Verlegh, P. W. J. (2019) Outsourcing the pain, keeping the pleasure: Effects of outsourced touchpoints in the customer journey. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 47 (2), 308–327.
- Kranzbühler, A. M. – Kleijnen, M. P. – Morgan, R. – Teerling, M. (2018) The multilevel nature of customer experience research: An integrative review and research agenda. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, Vol. 20 (2), 433–456.
- kriseld (13.9.2025) Mainos @lorealparis Nyt se on täällä! Kampin Narinkkatorilta löytyy L’Oréal Paris’n “Our science is worth it” -pop up... Instagram. <<https://www.instagram.com/kriselda/reel/DOicBR4jbYI/>>, retrieved 2.2.2026.
- Kuehnl, C. – Jozic, D. – Homburg, C. (2019) Effective customer journey design: Consumers’ conception, measurement, and consequences. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 47 (3), 551–568.
- Leavy, P. (2017) *Research design: Quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, arts-based, and community-based participatory research approaches*. Guilford Press, New York.
- Lee, S.-H. – Chang, S.-C. – Hou, J. – Lin, C.-H. (2008) Night market experience and image of temporary residents and foreign visitors. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, Vol. 2 (3), 217–233.
- Lemon, K. N. – Verhoef, P. C. (2016) Understanding customer experience throughout the customer journey. *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 80 (6), 69–96.
- Lincoln, Y. S. – Guba, E. G. (1985) *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage, Beverly Hills, CA.

- Lingqvist, O. – Plotkin, C. L. – Stanley, J. (2015) Do you really understand how your business customers buy? *McKinsey Quarterly*. <<https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/growth-marketing-and-sales/our-insights/do-you-really-understand-how-your-business-customers-buy>>, retrieved 2.2.2026.
- Lowe, J. – Maggioni, I. – Sands, S. (2018) Critical success factors of temporary retail activations: A multi-actor perspective. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol. 40 (4), 74–81.
- Mathwick, C. – Malhotra, N. – Rigdon, E. (2001) Experiential value: Conceptualization, measurement and application in the catalog and Internet shopping environment. *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 77 (1), 39–56.
- Mele, C. – Hollebeek, L. D. – Di Bernardo, I. – Russo Spena, T. (2025) Unravelling the customer journey: A conceptual framework and research agenda. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, Vol. 211 (December), 123916.
- Mele, C. – Russo Spena, T. – Tregua, M. – Amitrano, C. C. (2021) The millennial customer journey: A phygital mapping of emotional, behavioural, and social experiences. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, Vol. 38 (4), 420–433.
- Merriam, S. B. – Tisdell, E. J. (2016) *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. 4th ed, Jossey-Bass, A Wiley Brand, San Francisco, CA.
- Micheaux, A. – Bosio, B. (2018) Customer journey mapping as a new way to teach data-driven marketing as a service. *Journal of Marketing Education*, Vol. 41 (2), 127–140.
- Moon, H. – Han, S. H. – Chun, J. – Hong, S. W. (2016) A design process for a customer journey map: A case study on mobile services. *Human Factors and Ergonomics in Manufacturing & Service Industries*, Vol. 26 (4), 501–514.
- Nardini, G. – Lutz, R. J. – LeBoeuf, R. A. (2019) How and when taking pictures undermines the enjoyment of experiences. *Psychology & Marketing*, Vol. 36 (5), 520–529.
- Nguyen, D. C. – Welch, C. (2026) Generative artificial intelligence in qualitative data analysis: Analyzing—Or just chatting?. *Organizational Research Methods*, Vol. 29 (1), 3–39.
- Niehm, L. S. – Fiore, A. – Jeong, M. – Kim, H. (2006) Pop-up retail's acceptability as an innovative business strategy and enhancer of the consumer shopping experience. *Journal of Shopping Center Research*, Vol. 13 (2), 1–30.
- Norton, D. – Pine II, B. (2013) Using the customer journey to road test and refine the business model. *Strategy & Leadership*, Vol. 41 (2), 12–17.
- Overdiek, A. (2017) Fashionable interventions: The pop-up store as differential space. *Organizational Aesthetics*, Vol. 6(1), 116–134.

- Overdiek, A. – Warnaby, G. (2020) Co-creation and co-design in pop-up stores: The intersection of marketing and design research? *Creativity and Innovation Management*, Vol. 29 (S1), 63–74.
- Parasolprojects.com (20.2.2025) The future of pop-ups: 2025's hottest trends. *Parasol Projects*. <<https://parasolprojects.com/2025/02/the-future-of-pop-ups-2025s-hottest-trends/>>, retrieved 1.11.2025.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015) *Qualitative research and evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice*. 4th ed. SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks, Ebook.
- Perttunen, M. (30.9.2025) Kehtaatko kuolata keskellä kauppakeskusta? Fazer avasi Kamppiin Suklaahimokoneen. *Markkinointiuutiset*. <<https://www.markkinointiuutiset.fi/artikkelit/kehtaatko-kuolata-keskella-kauppakeskusta-fazer-avasi-kamppiin-suklaahimokoneen>>, retrieved 25.1.2025.
- Petkus Jr, E. (2004) Enhancing the application of experiential marketing in the arts. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, Vol. 9 (1), 49–56.
- Picot-Coupey, K. (2014) Pop-up store as a foreign operation mode (FOM) for retailers. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, Vol. 42 (7), 643–670.
- Pine, B. J. – Gilmore, J. H. (1998) Welcome to the experience economy. *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 76 (4), 97–105.
- Pizzutti, C. – Gonçalves, R. – Ferreira, M. (2022) Information search behavior at the post-purchase stage of the customer journey. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 50 (5), 981–1010.
- Pomodoro, S. (2013) Temporary retail in fashion system: An explorative study. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 17 (3), 341–352.
- Poorrezaei, M. – Pich, C. – Resnick, S. (2023) A framework to improve retail customer experience: A qualitative study exploring the customer journey. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, Vol. 26 (5), 663–686.
- Reitsamer, B. F. – Becker, L. (2024) Customer journey partitioning: A customer-centric conceptualization beyond stages and touchpoints. *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 181 (August), 114745.
- Robertson, T. S. – Gatignon, H. – Cesareo, L. (2018) Pop-ups, ephemerality, and consumer experience: The centrality of buzz. *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, Vol. 3 (3), 425–439.
- Rosenbaum, M. – Otálora, M. – Ramirez, G. (2016) How to create a realistic customer journey map. *Business Horizons*, Vol. 60 (1), 143–150.

- Rosenbaum, M. S. – Edwards, K. – Ramirez, G. C. (2021) The benefits and pitfalls of contemporary pop-up shops. *Business Horizons*, Vol. 64 (1), 93–106.
- Rudkowski, J. – Heney, C. – Yu, H. – Sedlezky, S. – Gunn, F. (2020) Here today, gone tomorrow? Mapping and modeling the pop-up retail customer journey. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol. 54 (May), 101698.
- Russo Spena, T. – Caridà, A. – Colurcio, M. – Melia, M. (2012) Store experience and co-creation: The case of temporary shop. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, Vol. 40 (1), 21–40.
- Ryu, J. (2011) Consumer attitudes and shopping intentions toward pop-up fashion stores. *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, Vol. 2 (3), 139–147.
- Same, S. – Larimo, J. (2012) Marketing theory: Experience marketing and experiential marketing. Paper presented at the 7th International Scientific Conference “Business and Management 2012”, Vilnius, Lithuania, May 10–11, 2012, 480-488.
- Saunders, M. – Lewis, P. – Thornhill, A. (2023) *Research methods for business students*. 9th ed. Pearson, Harlow, UK.
- Schmitt, B. (1999) Experiential marketing. *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 15 (1–3), 53–67.
- Schmitt, B. (2011) Experience marketing: Concepts, frameworks and consumer insights. *Foundations and Trends in Marketing*, Vol. 5 (2), 55–112.
- Schmitt, B. – Zarantonello, L. (2013) Consumer experience and experiential marketing: A critical review. In: *Review of marketing research*, Vol. 10, ed. N. K. Malhotra, 25–61. Emerald Group Publishing Limited, Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16, 1WA, UK.
- Schreier, M. (2012) *Qualitative content analysis in practice*. SAGE Publications Ltd, London.
- Selfridges.com (n.d.) Selfridges, London Oxford St events & experiences. <<https://www.selfridges.com/GB/en/stores/events/london-events/>>, retrieved 2.3.2026.
- Shahid, S. – Paul, J. – Gilal, F. G. – Ansari, S. (2022) The role of sensory marketing and brand experience in building emotional attachment and brand loyalty in luxury retail stores. *Psychology & Marketing*, Vol. 39 (7), 1398–1412.
- Shenton, A. K. (2004) Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, Vol. 22 (2), 63–75.
- Shi, C. – Warnaby, G. – Quinn, L. (2021) Territorialising brand experience and consumption: Negotiating a role for pop-up retailing. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, Vol. 21 (2), 359–380.
- Shin, D. S. – Kim, K. J. (2023) A study on brand storytelling marketing of pop-up store applied flow/immersion theory. *Journal of the Korea Contents Association*, Vol. 23 (5), 205–219.

- Siebert, A. – Gopaldas, A. – Lindridge, A. – Simões, C. (2020) Customer experience journeys: Loyalty loops versus involvement spirals. *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 84 (4), 45–66.
- Smilansky, S. (2009) *Experiential marketing: A practical guide to interactive brand experiences*. Kogan Page, London.
- Smith, K. – Hanover, D. (2016) *Experiential marketing: Secrets, strategies, and success stories from the world's greatest brands*. John Wiley & Sons, inc., Hoboken, New Jersey.
- Spitzkat, A. – Fuentes, C. (2019) Here today, gone tomorrow: The organization of temporary retailscapes and the creation of frenzy shopping. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol. 49 (July), 198–207.
- Srivastava, P. – Hopwood, N. (2009) A practical iterative framework for qualitative data analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Vol. 8 (1), 76–84.
- Surchi, M. (2011) The temporary store: A new marketing tool for fashion brands. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 15 (2), 257–270.
- Taube, J. – Warnaby, G. (2017) How brand interaction in pop-up shops influences consumers' perceptions of luxury fashion retailers. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 21 (3), 385–399.
- TENK (2023) The Finnish code of conduct for research integrity and procedures for handling alleged violations of research integrity in Finland 2023. *Publications of the Finnish national Board on Research Integrity TENK*, 4/2023. <https://tenk.fi/sites/default/files/2023-05/RI_Guidelines_2023.pdf>, retrieved 4.3.2025.
- The Economist (2009) Gone tomorrow. *The Economist* 25.7.2009, Vol. 392 (8641), 66.
- Towers, A. – Towers, N. (2022) Framing the customer journey: Touch point categories and decision-making process stages. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, Vol. 50 (3), 317–341.
- Tueanrat, Y. – Papagiannidis, S. – Alamanos, E. (2021) Going on a journey: A review of the customer journey literature. *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 125 (March), 336–353.
- Tuomi, J. – Sarajärvi, A. (2009) *Laadullinen tutkimus ja sisällönanalyysi*. 6th revised ed. Tammi, Helsinki.
- Verhoef, P. – Lemon, K. – Parasuraman, A. – Roggeveen, A. – Tsiros, M. – Schlesinger, L. (2009) Customer experience creation: Determinants, dynamics and management strategies. *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 85 (1), 31–41.
- Villani, I. (2019) *Transform customer experience: How to achieve customer success and create exceptional CX*. 1st ed. John Wiley and Sons, Inc, Milton Qld 4064, Australia.

- Vogt, W. P. – Gardner, D. C. – Haeffele, L. M. (2012) *When to use what research design*. Guilford Press, New York.
- Warnaby, G. – Kharakhorkina, V. – Shi, C. – Corniani, M. (2015) Pop-up retailing: Integrating objectives and activity stereotypes. *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, Vol. 6 (4), 303–316.
- Warnaby, G. – Shi, C. (2019) Pop-up retailing objectives and activities: A retrospective commentary. *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, Vol. 10(3), 1–11.
- Weidig, J. – Weippert, M. – Kuehnl, C. (2024) Personalized touchpoints and customer experience: A conceptual synthesis. *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 177 (1), 114641.
- Wiedmann, K.-P. – Labenz, F. – Haase, J. – Hennigs, N. (2018) The power of experiential marketing: Exploring the causal relationships among multisensory marketing, brand experience, customer perceived value and brand strength. *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 25 (2), 101–118.
- Wiles, R. (2012) *What are qualitative research ethics?* Bloomsbury Academic, London.
- Yuan, Y.-H. – Wu, C. (2008) Relationships among experiential marketing, experiential value, and customer satisfaction. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, Vol. 32 (3), 387–410.
- Zeithaml, V. A. – Jaworski, B. J. – Kohli, A. K. – Tuli, K. R. – Ulaga, W. – Zaltman, G. (2020) A theories-in-use approach to building marketing theory. *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 84 (1), 32–51.
- Zogaj, A. – Olk, S. – Tscheulin, D. K. (2019) Go pop-up: Effects of temporary retail on product- and brand-related consumer reactions. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol. 50 (September), 111–121.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Interview guide

Interview guide

Background

1. What is your age, gender and current occupation?
2. Can you briefly describe the experiential pop-up you participated in?
3. What kind of brand or industry was the pop-up related to?
4. When did this experience take place?

Pre-participation stage

Aim: Explore pre-participation touchpoints: awareness, expectations, anticipation, and early experiential responses before participation.

1. How did you first become aware of the pop-up?
2. What motivated you to attend the pop-up?
3. What expectations of the pop-up did you have before visiting?
4. What kinds of impressions, if any, did you have about the brand/company/products before attending?

Ideas for pre-participation probes:

- Did the communication or promotion stand out to you in any way?
- Did you talk about the pop-up with anyone beforehand?
- If at all, did the pop-up create any specific feelings before attending?
- Did you imagine what the experience would be like?

Participation stage

Aim: Explore on-site touchpoints and experiential responses during on-site participation.

1. Can you walk me through your experience at the pop-up from arrival to departure?
2. What were the most memorable elements of the experience?
3. How did you interact with the space, staff, products, or activities (did you make a purchase)?

Ideas for participation probes (linked to experiential dimensions):

- Sensory: What did you notice about the atmosphere, visuals, sounds, scents, or layout?
- Emotional: How did the experience make you feel while you were there?
- Cognitive: Did the pop-up change or reinforce how you think about the brand?
- Behavioural: Did you participate in activities, try products, or make a purchase?
- Social: Did you interact with others or share the experience with someone?
- Were there any moments that stood out to you as unexpected?
- Did you feel encouraged to participate actively, or not? Can you describe what influenced this?

Post-participation stage

Aim: Explore post-participation touchpoints: reflection, memory, and longer-term experiential effects after participation.

1. How did you feel about the experience after leaving the pop-up/now?
2. Did the experience lead to any actions afterward? For example, purchasing, following the brand, or sharing the experience online or talking about it to others.

3. In what ways, if any, did the experience influence your perception of the brand/company/products?

Ideas for post-participation probes:

- Do you still think about the experience/Was the experience memorable to you?
- Did it change how likely you are to engage with the brand in the future (buy products)?

Overall Reflection

1. Looking at the whole experience, how would you describe the role of the pop-up in your overall perception of the brand/company/products?
2. How does this pop-up compare to other brand experiences you have had?
3. Would you be interested in visiting experiential pop-ups in the future? Why or why not?
4. What kind of pop-ups would you find particularly interesting or appealing in the future?
5. Is there anything else about the experience that you feel is important, but we haven't discussed?

Appendix 2 Interview information sheet

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

Name of the research

The rise of experiential pop-ups: How experiential characteristics of pop-ups shape the customer journey

Invitation to participate in the research

This study aims to examine how consumer participation in experiential pop-up events influences customer journeys. The focus is on identifying experiential pop-up touchpoints and understanding the sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and social responses evoked across different stages of the customer journey. The research data will be collected through interviews.

Participants are invited based on their experience of attending an experiential pop-up event, as their first-hand experiences are central to the research topic. Approximately 8 participants will be interviewed.

Voluntary consent

Participation in this research is voluntary. You can withdraw from the research or cancel your participation at any time without assigning a reason for this decision. Withdrawing or cancelling your participation does not result in any negative consequences. In case you decide to withdraw your consent, the data collected until that point will be used for the purpose of this study in an anonymized and confidential form.

Please, read this description of research with care. If you have any questions, you can be in contact with the researcher. The contact details are provided at the end of this document. If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to confirm your consent separately.

Responsible researcher

The responsible researcher of this study is Sanna Kristeri, a Master's student with International Business major at the Turku School of Economics at the University of Turku. The study is conducted as an independent Master's thesis.

The researcher operates as the keeper of the register, and thereof is responsible of the lawful processing of the personal information gathered within the research. In scientific research the processing of personal data is based on the societal task of universities defined in the university law and it progresses public good.

The research method

The study uses a qualitative research approach with semi-structured interviews. Each interview lasts approximately 45-60 minutes and focuses on participants' experiences and perspectives related to experiential pop-ups within the customer journey.

With the permission of the interviewee, the interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed to text.

The possible harm and discomfort related to the research

The research does not address sensitive or distressing topics. However, participants may pause or discontinue the interview at any time.

If participation causes discomfort, you may contact the researcher for guidance or support.

Confidentiality and data privacy

In this study, your identity is known only to the researcher, who, as the author of the Master's thesis, is bound by a duty of confidentiality. All data collected from you will be treated confidentially, and it will not be possible to identify you from the research results or publications related to the study.

Only personal data that is necessary for the purpose of the research will be stored in the research register. The researcher will not disclose your name or contact details to any third parties. In the research results and other documents, you will be referred to only by an identification code, such as initials or a pseudonym. The register will be stored on the University of Turku's network drive and in the researcher's iCloud cloud service in password-protected folders until the research has been completed. Personal data and research data will be stored separately.

Costs of research and funding

Participation in the study is free of charge, and no compensation will be paid. The research is funded by the researcher.

Further information

If you have any questions about the study, you may contact the researcher. You can discuss with them any questions that may arise during the research process or any other matters that concern you.

Contact details:

Sanna Kristeri, xx.xx@xx.xx, +358xxxx

Appendix 3 Interview consent form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN AN INTERVIEW STUDY

I have been invited to participate in this research study and have familiarized myself with the research approach. I have received sufficient information about the purpose and implementation of the study, as well as the processing of personal data, and I have had the opportunity to ask the researcher questions regarding the study. I have been informed of the following aspects related to the conduct of the research and the analysis of the data:

- Participation in the study is entirely voluntary.
- The interview will be audio-recorded, and the recording will be used solely by the researcher.
- The data will be treated confidentially, and the person processing the data is committed to protecting the data and any personal information contained therein from unauthorized access. The data will be destroyed after the completion of the research.
- In the published thesis, any personal data will be modified so that names or other identifiable information cannot be disclosed.
- I may withdraw from the study before or during the research without providing a reason. However, participation cannot be removed retrospectively from the completed thesis.

Please confirm by email that you accept these terms and that your interview will be audio recorded.

Appendix 4 Data management plan

Research data

Research data type	Contains personal details/information	I will gather/produce the data myself	Someone else has gathered/produced the data	Other notes
Interviews	x	x		

Processing personal data in research

The researcher complies with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Finnish Data Protection Act. For data that contains personal details, the researcher has prepared a Data Protection Notice for research participants and determined the controller for the research data.

- The researcher prepared a Data Protection Notice and provided it to all research participants prior to data collection
- The controller for the personal data is the researcher themselves

Permissions and rights related to the use of data

All interview participants were asked for permission to use their responses for research purposes and to record the interviews. Informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to the interviews. Consent was provided in written form via email and confirmed verbally at the beginning of each interview. Participants were informed that anonymized quotations may be used in the thesis.

Storing the data during the research process

During the research process, all data will be stored securely:

- In the university's network drive

Documenting the data and metadata

Throughout the research process, the data were systematically documented and organized. Interview transcripts and analytic notes were stored in clearly labelled folders, and coding and thematic analysis were documented in structured Excel files. The Excel files contained anonymized data extracts organized according to emerging key themes and customer journey stages. No personal or identifiable information was included in these files, ensuring compliance with ethical and data protection standards. Documentation practices ensured traceability of analytic decisions while maintaining participant anonymity.

Data arrangement and integrity

- The researcher will keep the original data files separate from the data used in the research process, so that they can always revert back to the original, if need be.
- The researcher will plan before starting the research how they will name the different data versions and will adhere to the plan consistently.
- The researcher recognises the life span of the data from the beginning of the research and is already prepared for situations, where the data can alter unnoticed, for example while recording, transcribing, downloading, or in data conversions from one file format to another, etc.

Metadata

- The researcher will not store my data into a public archive/repository and therefore will not need to create any metadata.

Data after completing the research

After completion of the thesis, all personal data including audio recordings, interview transcripts, consent forms, and any files that could directly or indirectly identify participants will be permanently deleted. However, summary file related to the thesis findings will be retained for a maximum of five years for academic reference purposes. This file will not contain any personal or identifiable information and will be stored securely in the researcher's personal cloud storage.

Appendix 5 Explanation of the use of AI

In the creation of this thesis, generative artificial intelligence was used as a supportive tool during selected stages of the research and writing process. The purpose of using AI was to assist with ideation, structuring, and language refinement, while all academic decisions, interpretations, analyses, and conclusions remain the sole responsibility of the author. The use of AI was limited to supportive tasks and did not replace critical thinking, academic judgment, or engagement with scholarly sources. The tools, their purpose, and the verification measures are detailed below. I confirm that the use of AI tools has been conducted with the necessary care, caution and transparency, and their use is fully disclosed in accordance with university policy, and I take full responsibility for all content presented in this thesis.

Tool used: OpenAI's ChatGPT (GPT-4 and GPT-5 versions)

- Stage of use 1: Ideation and research planning
 - Purpose of use: I used ChatGPT to brainstorm potential thesis topics, theoretical frameworks and to rephrase the research questions. This was done to improve clarity and focus.
 - Example prompt: “I am interested in consumer behaviour and pop-up stores; can you suggest me perspectives to study these together in a master’s thesis?” 23.9.2025
 - Verification: All suggestions generated by the AI were critically evaluated against academic literature and were only used as inspiration. Decisions regarding the final research topic, theoretical framework, and methodology were made independently by the author based on and supported by prior literature.
- Stage of use 2: Summarizing, editing, translation and revision
 - Purpose of use: I used ChatGPT to support the writing process by proofreading individual sentences or short passages for grammatical accuracy, academic tone, and clarity. The tool was used to assist in rephrasing draft text to improve coherence and readability, particularly in the literature review. AI was also used in the finding section to translate individual quotes from Finnish to English used in findings section. AI was used to help summarize text, especially helping in deleting unnecessary sentences. AI was not used to generate original academic arguments or interpretations.
 - Example prompt: “Which one of these research questions fit the academic language of my master’s thesis: How does consumer participation in experiential pop-ups influence the customer journey? or How do experiential pop-ups shape customer experience across journey stages?” 9.3.2026
 - Verification: All AI-generated revisions were carefully reviewed and edited by the author. The author ensured that the original meaning, theoretical positioning, and academic accuracy of the text were preserved. Final decisions regarding wording, structure, and content were always made by the author.
- Stage of use 3: Theme and table summarizing
 - Purpose of use: I used ChatGPT during the data analysis process, with initial themes developed from the data reviewed with its assistance. Since nearly 400 concepts

were initially generated, AI was used to identify overlapping or similar codes, resulting in the final themes. Similarly, for tables, ideas were summarized and put together to fit large content of information into smaller tables presented in the study.

- Example prompt: “Find similarities or overlaps in these concepts: “list” and merge them together” 19.3.2026.
- Verification: No sensitive data was provided to the AI at any stage, and AI was limited to identifying overlapping or similar themes and these were reviewed by the researcher.

Tool used: UTU transcribe

- Stage of use: Transcription
 - Purpose of use: I used UTU transcribe to transcribe audio-recorded interviews with participants. This was done to save time in transcription.
 - Verification: All transcription generated by the AI were evaluated against the original audio-recordings.