

From Servicescape to Servicespace: Qualitative Research in a Post-Cartesian Retail Context

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Abstract : This study addresses the complex dynamics of the modern retail environment, focusing on how the ubiquitous nature of mobile communication technologies has reshaped the shopper experience and tested the limits of the conventional "servicescape" concept commonly used to describe retail experiences. The objective is to redefine the conceptualization of retail space by introducing an approach to space that aligns with a retail context where physical and digital interactions are increasingly intertwined. To offer a more shopper-centric understanding of the retail experience, this study draws from phenomenology, particularly Henri Lefebvre's work on the production of space. The presented protocol differs from traditional methodologies by not making assumptions about what constitutes a retail space. Instead, it adopts a perspective based on Lefebvre's seminal work, which posits that space is not a three-dimensional container commonly referred to as "servicescape" but is actively produced through shoppers' spatial practices. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the retail experience by capturing the everyday spatial practices of shoppers without preconceived notions of what constitutes a retail space. The designed protocol was tested with eight participants during 209 hours of day-long field trips, immersing the researcher into the shopper's lived experience by combining multiple data collection methods, including participant observation, videography, photography, and both pre-fieldwork and post-fieldwork interviews. By giving equal importance to both locations and connections, this study unpacked various spatial practices that contribute to the production of retail space. These findings highlight the relative inadequacy of some traditional retail space conceptualizations, which often fail to capture the fluid nature of contemporary shopping experiences. The study's emphasis on the customization process, through which shoppers optimize their retail experience by producing a "fully lived retail space," offers a more comprehensive understanding of consumer shopping behavior in the digital age. In conclusion, this research presents a significant shift in the conceptualization of retail space. By employing a phenomenological approach rooted in Lefebvre's theory, the study provides a more efficient framework to understand the retail experience in the age of mobile communication technologies. Although this research is limited by its small sample size and the demographic profile of participants, it offers valuable insights into the spatial practices of modern shoppers and their implications for retail researchers and retailers alike.

Keywords : shopper behavior, mobile telecommunication technologies, qualitative research, servicescape, servicespace

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