Service Design
14 weeks project

Retail experience during epidemic

Stage 3 Project
Design Innovation
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04/2020-07/2020
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Desk research

Since lockdown was announced on March 23, only shops that sold food and other essential items were allowed to remain open, such as Tesco, M&S, poundland and so on.
Retail is one of the industries affected more seriously by the COVID-19. The retail industry has been hit hard by a combination of lower spending intentions, the closure of stores and a slowdown in regional tourism.

For consumers, the shopping experience during the epidemic is also different from ever before. How to improve user experience is an important issue at this stage. We also need to know that what problems will users face due to the epidemic.

In order to find out the real problems, we first need to do some research to understand the current environment and state of the retail industry.

So, we started with the data.

STATISTICS

Around a quarter (24%) of the retailers surveyed believe that if the virus persists it could lead to a permanent change in their business, including switching suppliers, investing more into online operations, reviewing contracts and risk mitigation.

Nearly two-fifths of retailers think damage to consumer confidence is the biggest threat to their business if the coronavirus persists. The three biggest threats to retail businesses are: damage to consumer confidence (38%), continuity of supply (31%) and shortages of labour (14%).

Food accounted for 45% of total spending in January, clothing and footwear accounted for 12% and 1%.

Clothing sales rose by 2.1% year-on-year. The overall trend for 2019 was upward. Scotland avg. weekly sales was £27 in clothing.
NRF reached out to six retail design specialists and consultants in markets, such as Mara Devitt (senior partner at retail design firm McMillanDoolittle), Candace Corlett (president of WSL Strategic Retail), Kirthi Kalyanam, (executive director of the Retail Management Institute at Santa Clara University), Doug Stephens (founder of consulting firm Retail Prophet)

They came up with some strategic designs for current situation.

Online sales rose by 7.4% year-on-year, accounting for 19.9% of all retail spend in January. January’s slowdown was above the three-month average of 6.2%, but underperformed the 12-month average of 10%.

A relatively strong comparison a year ago goes some way to explain the weakened January performance when sales rose 13.5%. Just two categories outperformed the overall rise in January; Non-Store (+15.2%) and other non-food (+13%)

Negative growth continued for Department Store (-13.8%) and Clothing & Footwear (-1.1%), both for three consecutive months.

Online sales for Clothing & Footwear accounted for 12% of total retail sales from 29 December 2019 to 1 February 2020.

**CONCLUSION**

Food and clothing are the two largest components of retail sales. Before the coronavirus, online retail was on the rise. In the part of online retail, non-store retail accounts for the largest proportion. During coronavirus, online retail becomes a large part of retail industry.

**EXPERT SUGGESTION**

NRF reached out to six retail design specialists and consultants in markets, such as Mara Devitt (senior partner at retail design firm McMillanDoolittle), Candace Corlett (president of WSL Strategic Retail), Kirthi Kalyanam, (executive director of the Retail Management Institute at Santa Clara University), Doug Stephens (founder of consulting firm Retail Prophet)

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Many design changes retailers make today could very well need to change again, within a matter of months.

It’s critical to build trust in terms of safety, cleanliness and maintenance. Retailers have a responsibility to make changes or explicitly set new rules.

Online sales will become an increasingly large component of overall sales.
CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Experts also suggest that retailers need to consider the customer experience more than ever before.

1. Encourage shopping appointments
   Shoppers may enter a specially reserved space where salespeople listen to their needs and then give away what they want.

2. Limit occupancy levels
   Some retailers might need to consider evolving the role of the store greeter to someone who counts and limits the number of customers in the store.

3. Create a better pickup experience
   Make an appointment to answer the phone that avoid long lines. Retailers may want to cover pickup areas to make drivers comfortable.

4. Avoid congestion at checkout
   Checkout stations should be closely monitored for safe customer spacing and constant cleaning.

5. Create transition space at the entrance
   Think of it as a decompression space that can serve as an educational check-in area, where shoppers are told what security measures the store is taking and what they need to take.

Case study

After searching for the information, I found a suitable case, which is the change of Rainbow Grocery during COVID-19. Rainbow Grocery Cooperative is a worker-owned and run food cooperative located in San Francisco, California. They did some changes and design of the store during the virus.

Rainbow has placed signage in appropriate places to help manage customers’ expectations, which is important when entering unfamiliar territory.

As it shown in pictures, Rainbow shows New store hours (which are temporary), What hours are reserved for high-risk shoppers, What time to arrive by to be guaranteed entry into the store through the sign. And also they use sign to remind customers maintain distance from other shoppers.

A final sign is appropriately placed once we’re ready to pay for our items to wait in line and to use the marked taped lines when standing behind other waiting shoppers.
As you can see, Rainbow Grocery has implemented a lot of changes due to the virus—
New store and government policies have dictated new changes that have resulted in removed services, additional precautionary steps, such as waiting in line to enter the store, wearing mask, using sanitizers, and there are also some behavioral changes. For example, maintaining 6ft distance away from others and avoidance of personal contact.

**Self-reflection**

This part examines the ability to find data, how to quickly find the data you need. However, since the project began after the lockdown shortly, specific data for the same period are difficult to find. And there’s a significant difference between the early data before coronavirus and the current data during coronavirus. It’d better come back to the search later in the project.
In terms of customers, there are multiple stakeholders. In order to manage and analyze the customers, here is a stakeholder map below. It shows that users, tools, supporters and experience during the service.

After doing lots of desk research, I divided the map into 4 parts, which is user, tools, supporter and experience. And I also decrease the correlation from the inside to the outside.

Firstly, a crucial question need to be considered: Who do costumers need to meet when they go to a retail store or shop online. What do they use or contact during the whole process? According to the customer journey I analyzed from case study, I summarize the users and tools.

And in terms of finding supporters, I read a lot of news and then conclude them. In terms of experience and emotion, I also speculate from the news and what some customers have said on social media.

Making a stakeholder map helps to clearly identify stakeholders, so as to be more focused with the subsequent investigation.
First interim review

At the beginning of my first speech, I told the story of my online shopping. I bought two pairs of trousers during the epidemic. When I looked at the photos of the model, I thought they looked very nice. However, when I got the items, I found the trousers were too big for me, so I had to return them. The whole shopping experience was not pleasant. Starting with a story helps to resonate with the audience. But it has a big problem, which is seems to be based on personal experience.

There’s a lot of statistics with little other evidence of experience, it’ better supply this data with real stories other than my own.

In the case study, clothing stores were not allowed to open because of the outbreak, no clothing stores were found. So it’s not clear whether rainbow grocery store signs and practices are unique and can be used in clothing stores.

There is also much deeper research required in order to progress – Is this a big concern for people? If so, is it a justified concern? Current desktop research lacks focus and needs to focus on one part of it in the next phase.
According to Scotland’s route map - indicative dates for the remainder of Phase 2 and early Phase 3 published by government, indoor (non-office) workplaces resume once relevant guidance is implemented on 29 June. Street-access retail can re-open.

In order to improve the customer experience, I need to understand the environment after the lockdown. So I choose observation as my research method first.

I walked through almost all the retail clothing stores downtown, including Primark, Zara, Topshop, Tk-Maxx, H&M, Nike, Clarks and so on. I found that most stores took similar measures, there are only a few differences. By observing the behavior and actions of consumers, I have gained a certain understanding of retailing after the epidemic.

- Observation

<table>
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<tr>
<th>ENTRANCE</th>
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- Long waiting line in front of the door
- Some stores have set up special waiting areas. There are also some signs on the ground
- In large and medium-sized retail stores, shop assistant guide customers in and out of the store. And in some large stores, there are police officers in front of the waiting area.

Because stores have policies that limit the number of people in their stores, there are long waiting lines in front of the store. I found a lot of people leaving the waiting line while they were waiting. The vast majority of the reasons is the long waiting time. And the length of the queue depends on the time period. Lines are shorter in the morning and at noon, as well as near the closing time, and longest in the afternoon.
BEFORE ENTER THE STORE

- Entrance and exit are separated by setting facilities in some retail store.
- Hand sanitizer near the entrance in every retail store.

Many shops put up signs outside their doors or put up notices on glass walls to tell customers what to do when they come in. Almost every consumer who enters the store would use hand sanitizer. Shop assistant standing in front of the door to guide customers in every store. Each store controls the number of people coming in. When the number of people in the store reaches a certain amount, new customers can only enter the store after one customer comes out. Customers all follow the rules. There is no one who intentionally breaks the rules.

IN THE STORE

- Signages can be seen throughout the store in order to remind customers to maintain the distance.
- The fitting room is closed.
- Long lines at the cash register.

Almost every store placed signages on the ground or on the wall. Most customers did not wear masks, but actively kept their distance. Unfortunately, no fitting rooms were open. The shop assistant said it was because confined spaces may cause more safety problems. Most of the customers were disappointed that the fitting rooms were closed. Because they can’t try it on or know immediately if it would fit them. The store’s solution is that customers could take the clothes home to try them on and offer a free return or exchange service within 30 days. When some customers know, they put the clothes back.
Quantitative Research

QUESTIONARE

In order to have a deeper understanding of consumers' thoughts and shopping experience, I conducted a questionnaire on the Internet. There are 48 samples, all of them bought clothes during the epidemic in UK. Based on the analysis of the previous observation, I have a certain understanding of the purchase process and some possible problems. The questionnaire focused on online and offline modes, purchasing experience, and delivery.

80% of people have recently bought clothes online. That's because clothing stores on the street are closed until June 29.

82% had bought clothes that didn't fit them online. Even if they use the size recommended by the site.

69% still prefer to buy clothes in stores rather than online.

25% found the delivery service disturbing.

Through the questionnaire survey, we have a certain understanding of the existing problems of customers, and we also have a clear direction for further investigation. The advantages of questionnaire survey are high standardization and quick effect. Questionnaire method can survey a lot of research objects in a short time, obtain a large number of data. And the data can be quantitative processing, economical and time-saving.

The disadvantage is that we don't get a deep understanding of the customer's needs and their true feelings. In order to simplify the questionnaire, there are only multiple choice questions in the whole questionnaire. For example, in the questionnaire, a quarter of the users choose delivery disturbing, but we cannot further know why they think delivery disturbing.
Qualitative Research

INTERVIEW

After quantitative research, we have a certain understanding of the problems existing around customers. So next, I interviewed five customers in order to get more accurate information.

1. the process of they buying clothing
2. the problem they face when buying clothing
3. feeling

1. the method to buy clothing online
2. suit or not
3. recommendation

1. the whole process
2. door-to-door delivery
3. feeling

“I didn’t find the dress I needed in the store, that cloths I have browsed on the Internet.”
“The spacing between the shelves is so small that it is difficult to find the clothes I want”
“When buying clothes online, I found that the recommended sizes were not accurate”
“Door-to-door delivery makes me very disappointed. I ordered three times and paid for it but no one came to pick it up”
“The fitting room is not open, so I don’t want to buy clothes in the store.”

Not suitable
When buying clothing online, they often get inappropriate clothes. Even if according to experience and online recommendations

Delivery
The delivery is slow, and it is troublesome to return the goods. They need to go to a specific place. The door-to-door service is terrible

Arrangement
It’s hard to find what you want because the clothes in the store are in a mess

Cannot Try on
It was troublesome to try on because the fitting room was closed. They can only take the clothes home to try them on and return them to the store if it doesn’t fit well.
Re-imagining the retail experience through technology with Halfords’ Group IT Director, Neil Holden. Neil put forward that retail is about delivering good service, but more and more it is about delivering memorable experiences.

The retail experience need to be special, not just predictive. Listen to needs of customers and colleagues.

Make the store safe, rethink the customer engagement.

1. AR/VR solutions and eCommerce
2. Increasing delivery options
3. Reconverting their production programs to make personal protective equipment

1. Marketing and advertising
2. Retail customers
3. Mobile app
4. Accelerating order management and CX
5. Customer-centric service delivery strategy

I took part in a seminar, which is SAP procurement’s Retail virtual forum – executive roundtable for innovators. The experts come up with some insights and some guidance about retail industry during COVID-19.
## 02 Define

### Customer Journey

Based on the preliminary research, I drew a user journey map. It shows what customer do and think, the emotion of the process and the pain point in the whole journey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGE</th>
<th>Aware</th>
<th>Prepare</th>
<th>Purchase</th>
<th>Pay</th>
<th>Reflect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DOING</td>
<td>1. read the new and know whether the store open</td>
<td>1. waiting for going into the store 2. use hand sanitizer</td>
<td>1. find items 2. want to use fitting room but are told that it does not open 3. maintain the distance</td>
<td>1. pay the clothing</td>
<td>1. try on the clothing and check whether suit or not 2. return to the store to exchange clothing with suitable size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THINKING</td>
<td>1. It’s great to see the store open 2. What do I need to buy 3. just want to go for a walk</td>
<td>1. It’s great to see the store open 2. What clothing need to buy 3. just want to go for a walk</td>
<td>1. can’t try on clothes. What if they don’t fit?</td>
<td>1. the price is great 2. it’s excited to get the new clothing</td>
<td>1. feel unexcepted with the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMOTION</td>
<td>🍁</td>
<td>🍁</td>
<td>🍁</td>
<td>🍁</td>
<td>🍁</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAIN POINT</td>
<td>1. long waiting time outside the retail store 2. cannot find the items browsing on the Internet</td>
<td>1. fitting room close</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Persona**

**Alice**

Age: 21  
Gender: female  
Occupant: university student  
Character: kind, active  
Economy: middle-class family  
Interest: hang out with friends/shopping

Description: Alice is a student in a university in Glasgow. She likes shopping and often buys clothes with her friends. She likes to hang out in the shops in the centre of Glasgow on weekends. During the epidemic, she was unable to go out to buy clothes and had to browse clothing on the Internet. She usually buys a lot of clothes online, but many of them don’t fit her after trying them on. After the store opened, she was happy to go to the store. However, she was annoyed that the fitting room was not open.

**need**

1. share with friends  
2. try on when buying clothing
Mike

Age: 23
Gender: male
Occupant: white-collar worker
Character: introvert, economical
economy: middle-class family
Interest: surf the Internet/musica

Description:
Mike is a white-collar worker who works in the south of Glasgow. He’s not usually a big clothes buyer, he only buys clothes when he needs them, and he likes to buy clothes during the sale season. He prefers to check prices and styles online before buying them in stores. If clothes are more expensive in a physical store than online, he will buy them online. He usually buys clothes in stores, because he doesn’t think he can buy the right clothes online.

1. cheap clothing
2. easy to find specific clothing in store
Insights

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pain point</th>
<th>Opportunity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cannot share items directly</td>
<td>find a way that can share items on the website to friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>waiting line is too long</td>
<td>Dynamic reservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hard to find specific clothing</td>
<td>Product placement planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fitting room closed</td>
<td>pre-book fitting room</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Self-reflection

At this stage, I only choose the direction with more potential development. I avoid the express service, because I think this part is not due to the problem of the epidemic, which has caused a lot of trouble to customers in the past.
Second interim review

Due to the impact of the epidemic, the preliminary investigation was completed in this interim review. I first take the observation approach to understand the current environment. During an epidemic, every place has different policies and approaches. Therefore, it is impossible to analyze the local apparel retail industry through online cases. At this stage, I started reaching out to users, but the process didn't go well. I cannot go out on the street to conduct a questionnaire survey. It's hard to make sure people who fill in questionnaires online tell the truth.

During the interview, I took 5 Whys approach in order to obtain more information and gain a deeper understanding of the essential issues. The interview works well, but it also brings up the problem that customers' needs are sometimes related to their preferences. This can also serve as an insight.

However, at this stage, I also faced a big problem. For example, in the quantitative survey, the data showed that 1/4 of the customers found express delivery disturbing, which was a large proportion. While in the following survey, I ignored the problems in express delivery. Someone pointed this out in the student evaluations.

During the interview and research, It is a pity that I did not get in touch with relevant people of user experience. Maybe they were too busy during the epidemic, but I also got a lot of useful information from many online papers, books and periodicals, as well as seminars held by experts.
Based on some case studies and research, I generate the design insights and opportunities to get the general concept. The concept combines online and offline service in order to improve the customers' experience during COVID-19.
In terms of new technologies, there are already mature products in the online retail market. Many companies use AR and VR technology to provide users with online fitting services. In order to get a deeper understanding of the technical field, I read several papers on VR and communicated with the author of the paper, which is a dual model of product involvement for effective virtual reality. We discussed whether VR technology can be applied to clothing retail. It would be suitable to help people try on clothes virtually, but retailers need to weigh the costs of implementing and offering the technology, and consumers need to be comfortable with using it.

After looking up the investment needed to realize VR technology and the specific equipment needed by users, I decided not to adopt VR technology in my service. I choose AR technology, which is a current relatively mature technology.
Finally, I create an application which has some new function to combine online and offline service. It named Clourney, which means clothing journey.

Clourney is a system that combine online and offline service when you buy clothing. You can browse the clothing online, find store and stock nearby. You can also check the number of people waiting outside in real-time, pre-book fitting rooms and use new technology to try on clothing online.
MAIN SERVICE

pre-book fitting room
You can book a fitting room in advance and then go to the store to try on clothes at the appointed time.

find store
You can look up nearby retail stores on the map and check stock in real-time.

Virtual try-on
Provide virtual fitting technology so you can buy clothes that fit better.
Storyboard

1. Browse clothing online and locate clothes in nearby stores.
2. Pre-book fitting rooms.
3. Check the number of people waiting outside in real-time, avoiding waiting for a long time.
4. Find the clothes at the designated location and use fitting room to try on.
5. Pay the clothing.
6. Writing evaluation.
Self-reflection

As a result of the epidemic, the clothing retail store opened in Scotland on June 29. In the early stages of the project, I could only do desktop research. And the rest of the time, because lack of direct access to users and unable to contact stakeholders, I didn’t do a good job of user research. And because time was limited, I only produced user systems. If I want to make this service system more complete, I should also consider the business and look at the problem from a business perspective.

As commented by my classmates, I have neglected many aspects. In the investigation, I found that there were many problems with the express service, but I did not carry out further investigation.

Reference


