

Synergistic CX

The Customer Experience Magazine

TURN CX INSIGHT INTO
BUSINESS IMPACT WITH

**ABDEL WAHAB
CHAOU**

1 Behind the Purchase
**Decoding What Shapes
Fashion Retail CX**

2 Fashion Ecosystems Uncovered
**Expert Perspectives on CX
Strategy and Intelligence**

3 From Insight to Action
**Maximizing the
Return on Research**

May 2026

The Decision Bridge

Closing the Gap Between Inspiration and Purchase

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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Dear reader,

In fashion retail, customer experience is one of those industries that carries a deeply emotional connections between customers and brands.

This month's theme, From Insight to Action, focuses on the link between what customers feel, what research reveals, and what organizations choose to improve.

This edition features an online study using Aspect-Based Sentiment Analysis (ABSA), examining 26,000 customer reviews worldwide. The findings show how the experience depends on People, Product, and Place, and how quickly confidence weakens when fitting, payment, or post-purchase support lose continuity.

Our guest expert, Abdel Wahab Chaoui, Associate Director of C&O Marketing and Board Member of MSPA Europe/Africa, brings a research-led perspective on fashion brands and shopping malls. Combining different methodologies, his case study shows that a store is never experienced in isolation. The mall, its visitors, circulation, neighboring brands, and visibility influence performance.

In the Business Perspective section, an interview with KIABI Master Franchiser in Morocco shows how measurement, accountability, and execution discipline keep a customer promise consistent across stores. In Excellence in Practice, Emirates Skywards illustrates how loyalty strengthens when recognition and continuity are part of the experience.

Research matters because it shows where confidence is built, where hesitation begins, and what must change next. That is how insight becomes action.

Cristiani Oliveira
CX Strategy Ambassador, Research Metrics
Together with the CX Channel Team

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PREVIOUSLY ON SYNERGISTIC CX

The April edition explores the bars industry through the lens of execution, consistency, and human connection. Darren Denington, Founder of Service With Style, brings a practical hospitality perspective on how customer experience is shaped in real time – through staff behavior, leadership discipline, clear service standards, and continuous training. The issue highlights how atmosphere and product may attract guests, but people, communication, and operational alignment define whether experiences become memorable, repeatable, and worthy of loyalty.



KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM DARREN DENINGTON

DRIVEN BY PEOPLE: TURNING SERVICE INTO UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCE

In bars, memorable experiences are shaped less by process and more by human interaction. Genuine staff engagement, personal attention, emotional connection, and authentic moments turn visits into experiences guests remember, talk about, and return for.

FROM VISION TO EXECUTION: BUILDING A SERVICE PLAN THAT DRIVES CONSISTENCY

Consistent customer experience depends on clear direction, aligned teams, and continuous communication. Strong service plans turn expectations into repeatable actions that reduce inconsistency and strengthen execution across every interaction.

TURNING STANDARDS INTO SKILLS: TRAINING STAFF FOR CONSISTENT SERVICE

Consistent service depends on turning expectations into practical skills through structured training, clear communication, and continuous reinforcement. When standards are actively embedded into daily operations, teams deliver more confident and reliable experiences.



Darren Denington,
Founder of Service With Style



SERVICE WITH STYLE
SECRET SHOPPING & CONSULTING

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PODCAST REACTIONS FROM THE CX CHANNEL TEAM

Our April edition, focused on the bars industry, examining customer experience in one of the most immediate and human service environments. The discussion showed that memorable experiences are rarely created by atmosphere or product alone. They depend on the way teams translate standards into behavior, respond to customers in real time, and create moments that feel personal, natural, and worth repeating. Darren Denington's perspective reinforced an important leadership lesson: service quality becomes sustainable when human interaction is supported by structure, training, and clear execution.



EMIL TSANKOV

"Darren's interview is a strong reminder that customer experience becomes scalable only when leadership turns intention into operating discipline. In high-contact environments, good service cannot depend on individual instinct alone. It requires clear priorities, shared expectations, and management routines that make the desired experience repeatable across teams and moments."

CEO & Co-founder
Research Metrics



CRISTIANI OLIVEIRA

"What I value in this discussion is the way it connects emotion with execution. Customers may not notice every process behind the experience, but they feel when service is prepared, human, and consistent. For CX research, this is exactly where observation becomes valuable: it helps organizations see whether the experience they intended is the one customers actually live."

CX Strategy Ambassador
Research Metrics



ERIK BROOKS

"The episode highlights a practical challenge many organizations face: standards do not create consistency unless they are translated into behavior. From a technology and data perspective, the opportunity is to make execution more visible, track where variation appears, and help teams improve before inconsistency becomes part of the customer experience."

Vice President
Research Metrics

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INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT:

The Decision Bridge

Closing the Gap Between
Inspiration and Purchase

INTRODUCTION

Fashion retail is shaped by personal taste, self-expression, and the search for confidence in every choice. Customers enter stores looking not only for products, but for reassurance that what they select reflects who they are, how they want to feel, and how they want to be perceived. Because of this, the path to purchase is often filled with comparison, hesitation, experimentation, and emotional evaluation rather than quick transactional decisions.

In this environment, the human element becomes one of the strongest differentiators. Customers expect more than assistance – they look for guidance, styling advice, honest recommendations, and support that helps them navigate fit, combinations, trends, and value without feeling pressured. The ability of store teams to create confidence throughout this process often determines whether interest turns into commitment.

At the same time, expectations continue to rise around product relevance and execution. Shoppers want assortments that feel curated to their preferences, sizes that are consistently available, and a journey that flows smoothly from fitting room to checkout, and to returns (if needed). Even smaller friction points, such as unclear pricing, missing sizes, long waits, or disconnected online and in-store experiences, can quickly weaken confidence and interrupt the buying decision.

Yet this complexity also creates one of fashion retail's greatest opportunities. When customers feel understood, inspired, and comfortable in their choices, the experience becomes more than transactional. It becomes personal. Retailers that successfully combine strong human interaction, relevant assortments, and seamless execution create environments that customers trust, return to, and emotionally connect with over time.

This edition explores the customer experience dynamics shaping modern fashion retail and the factors that influence how shoppers move from inspiration to confident purchase decisions. The focus is on understanding how human interaction, assortment relevance, store experience, and operational execution work together to reduce hesitation, strengthen confidence, and build long-term preference. In this issue, we will:

- **Understand Influence**
Examine how online reviews, social media, digital inspiration, and customer feedback shape expectations, influence purchase intent, and impact how fashion brands attract and retain attention.
- **Identify What Matters Most**
Evaluate the moments that have the greatest influence on customer confidence and uncover where engagement creates the strongest impact.
- **Optimize the 7P Marketing Mix**
Analyze the 7Ps: empowering staff performance, aligning assortment and product quality, pricing perception, store accessibility and environment, promotional strategy, operational flow, and the physical elements shaping the in-store experience.
- **Optimize the Shopping Journey**
Review the complete fashion retail experience to uncover friction points, strengthen confidence, and improve journey continuity.
- **Explore Growth Drivers**
Examine how personalization, omnichannel integration, curated assortments, and experience-driven retail strategies are reshaping fashion stores and helping brands create stronger emotional connection and customer loyalty.

INDUSTRY STUDY SAMPLE

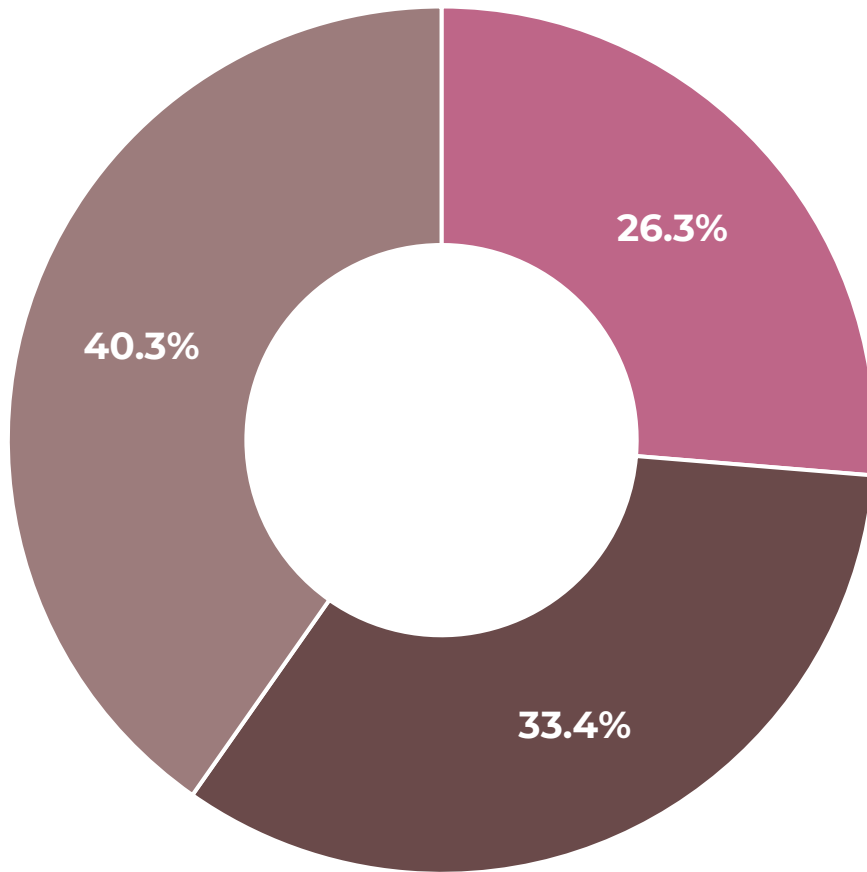
The study sample establishes the foundation of the insights. It defines **the set of places** analyzed. Its key parameters include:

- Number of Places **2156**
- Confidence Level **99.50%**
- Margin of Error **2.50%**
- Number of Reviews **26,504**

Our sample's worldwide geographic structure is separated into three primary zones: the Americas, APAC (Asia-Pacific), and EMEA (Europe, the Middle East, and Africa). Each zone is further broken down into specific regions, as visualized here.

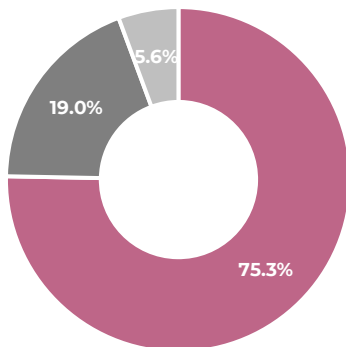
The global sample is led by APAC, which holds the largest share at 40.3%, followed by the Americas at 33.4%, while EMEA represents a smaller portion at 26.3% of the dataset.

GLOBAL



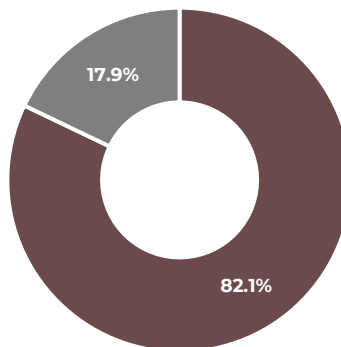
EMEA AMERICAS APAC

EMEA



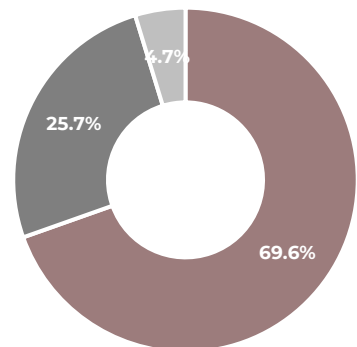
Europe
Africa
Middle East

AMERICAS



North America
Latin America

APAC



East Asia
Central and South Asia
Oceania

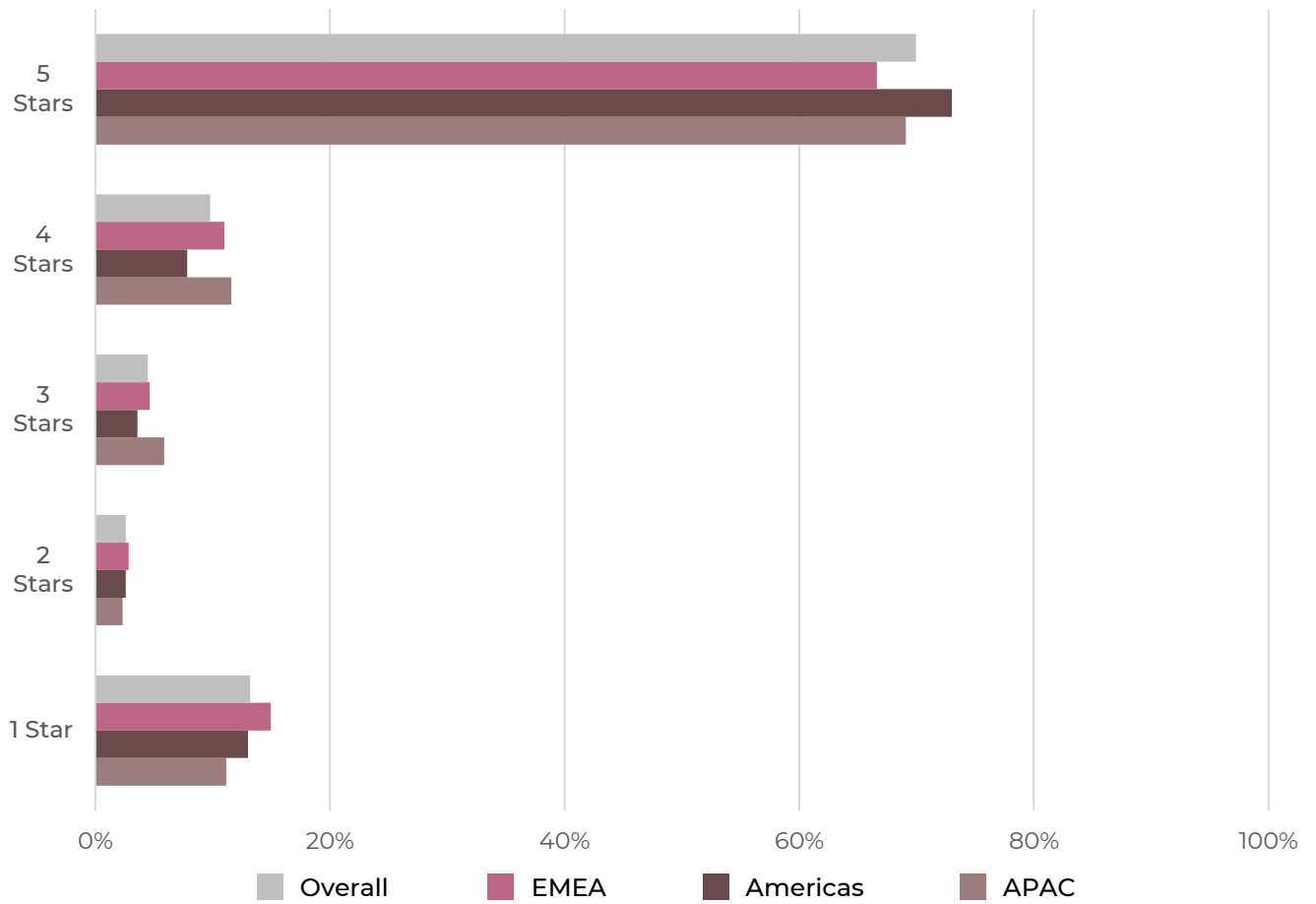
STAR RATINGS

Top ratings clearly dominate the landscape of fashion stores reviews, with nearly **seven in ten reviews reaching five stars globally**. The **Americas** stand out with the strongest share of **top scores (73.0%)**, while **APAC (69.1%)** and **EMEA (66.6%)** follow closely. Mid-range ratings (2 to 4 stars) remain relatively limited across regions, while one-star reviews account for **13.2% overall**, indicating a consistent but contained share of negative feedback.

Regional performance remains closely aligned, with the Americas and APAC sharing the highest average rating at 4.25, while EMEA follows slightly behind at 4.12. Overall, the global average stands at 4.21, reflecting a consistently strong level of customer satisfaction across markets.

"Star ratings" in online reviews and ratings are a system that allows customers to evaluate a product, service, or business on a scale, typically from one to five stars. Each star represents a level of satisfaction, with one star being the lowest (very dissatisfied) and five stars being the highest (very satisfied).

STAR RATINGS DISTRIBUTION



AVERAGE STAR RATING



CRITICAL REVIEW RESPONSE TIME (CRRT)

Response to critical feedback remains a significant challenge, with most negative reviews receiving no follow-up at all. Globally, **more than 85%** fall into the **critical (unanswered) category**, while only **12% are addressed within 24 hours**.

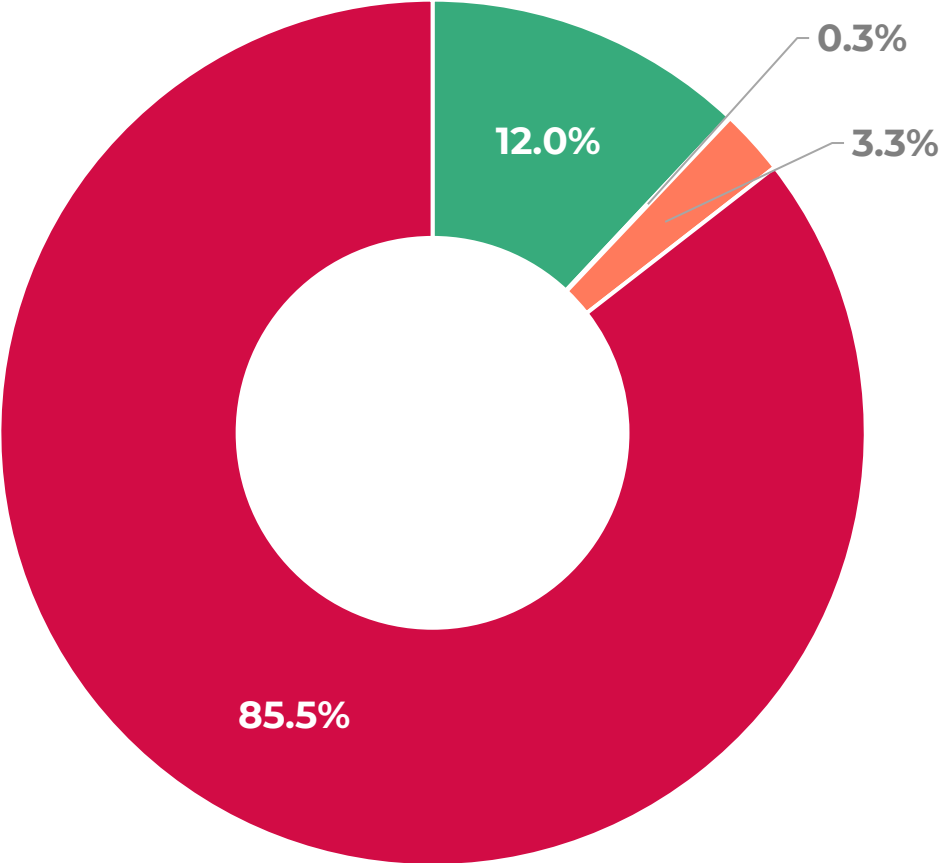
This pattern holds across regions, with **EMEA at 86.5% unanswered**, the **Americas at 85.7%**, and **APAC slightly lower at 83.4%**. Timely responses remain limited, and the results point to a clear need for more consistent and proactive engagement with dissatisfied customers.

The **Critical Review Response Time (CRRT)** KPI measures how quickly a business responds to critical reviews – those with a rating of **1 or 2 stars**. This KPI is key in customer relationship management, as it reflects the business's dedication to addressing customer complaints and issues promptly.

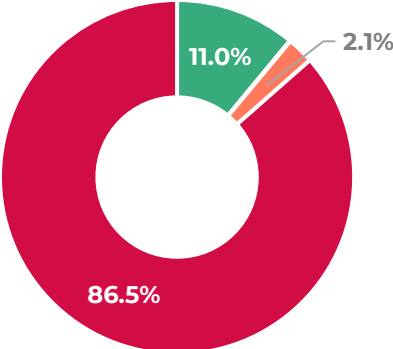
CRRT KPI bands:

- **Excellent**: within 24 hours
- **Fair**: within 72 hours
- **Attention**: more than 72 hours
- **Critical: Not Responded**

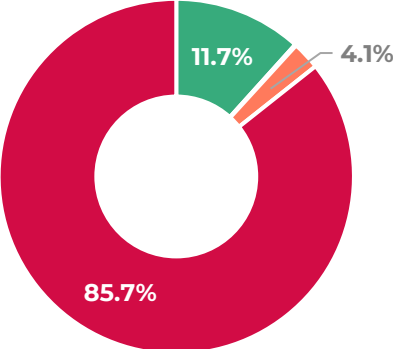
GLOBAL



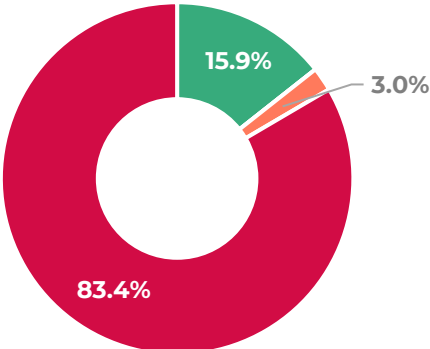
EMEA



AMERICAS



APAC



■ Excellent ■ Fair ■ Attention ■ Critical

REVIEWS WITH COMMENTS VS RATING-ONLY

Written feedback does prompt slightly higher engagement, but the **overall response gap remains substantial**. Globally, **84.9%** of reviews **with comments receive no reply**, compared to an even higher **89.8% among rating-only entries**. Across regions, the pattern is consistent. **EMEA** shows the highest share of unanswered commented reviews (**86.7%**), followed by the **Americas (84.9%)**, and **APAC (81.4%)**. Overall, even when customers invest effort in providing detailed feedback, it does not translate into a meaningful increase in response rates.

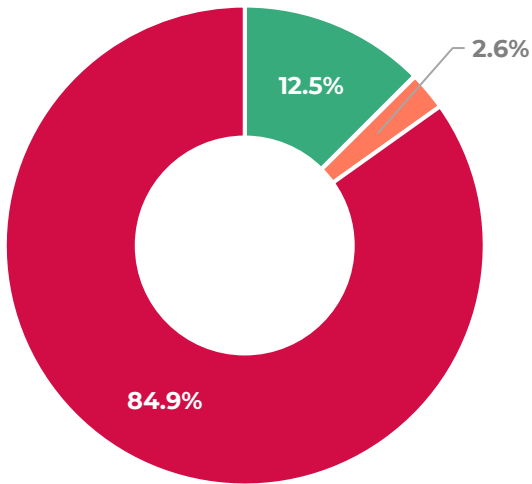
Reviews with Comments: These are the reviews where customers provide written feedback along with their rating. These provide context and a chance to address specific concerns.

Rating-only Reviews: These are reviews where the customer only leaves a star rating without any additional comments or details.

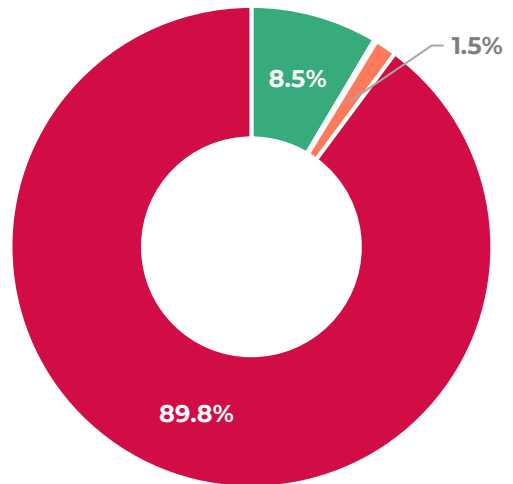
CRRT KPI bands:

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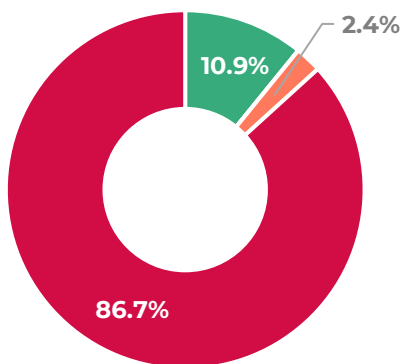
CRRT: REVIEWS WITH COMMENTS



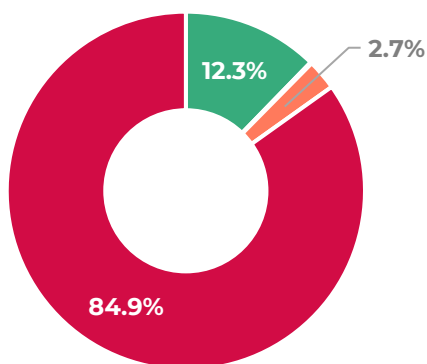
CRRT: REVIEWS WITH RATING-ONLY



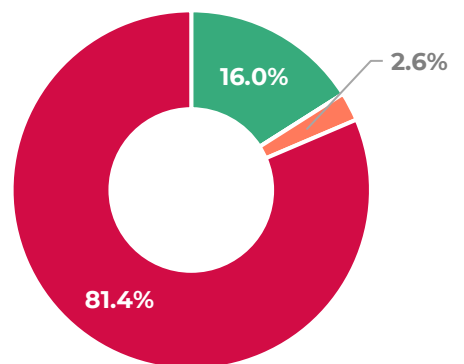
EMEA



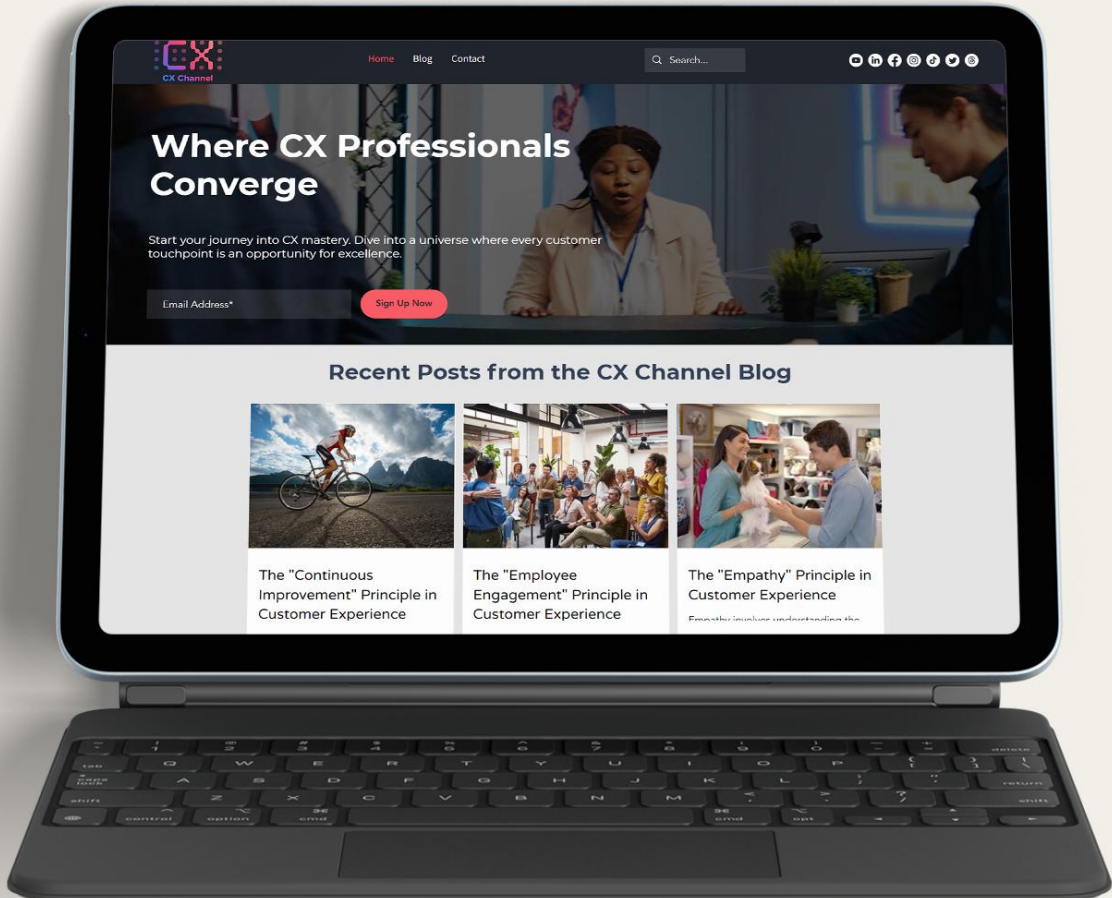
AMERICAS



APAC



■ Excellent
 ■ Fair
 ■ Attention
 ■ Critical



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Fashion Stores: **Marketing Mix**

Customer feedback in fashion retail highlights what shoppers notice and value most across their experience, structured through the lens of the 7P marketing mix. Comments tend to cluster around key touchpoints – how relevant the assortment feels, how easy it is to explore and try items, and how effectively staff support decisions through styling advice and fit guidance.

In this section, we examine how feedback distributes across these areas. Customers focus on assortment, sizing, and availability, while also reacting to store environment and staff interactions. Pricing, promotions, and checkout efficiency shape the final impression, revealing where expectations are met and where friction remains.

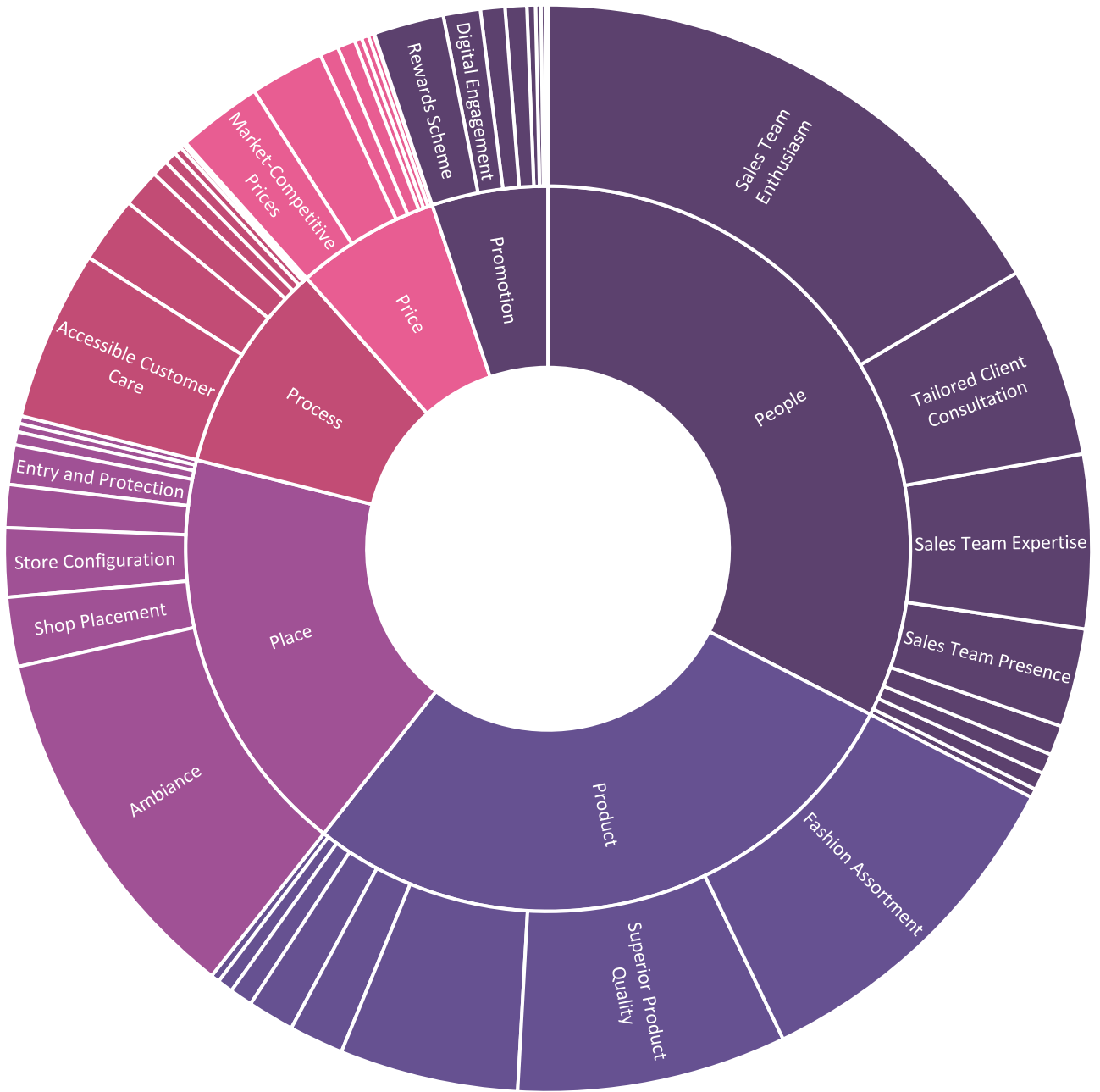
MARKETING MIX ELEMENTS

What Do Customers Talk [Care] About?

Customer feedback is heavily concentrated around three key areas – **People (33%), Product (28%), and Place (18%)** – which together account for **79% of all mentions**. This distribution shows that the fashion retail experience is driven primarily by interactions with staff, followed by the relevance and quality of the assortment, and then the in-store environment. These elements clearly dominate customer attention, while the remaining factors play a more supportive role in shaping the overall perception.

A closer look highlights the leading drivers behind these mentions. Interactions with sales associates stand out, especially in terms of enthusiasm, expertise, and personalized guidance. Product-related feedback focuses on assortment and perceived quality, while the store environment is defined largely by ambiance, layout, and overall feel. Together, these elements shape how confident customers feel in their choices and how smoothly the experience unfolds.

The 7P Marketing Mix is an extended version of the traditional 4P concept. It includes the following seven elements: Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, and Physical Evidence. This model provides a more comprehensive framework for businesses to evaluate and improve their marketing strategies.



Explore the top 5 features within each marketing mix element on the next page. ►

MARKETING MIX ELEMENTS AND FEATURES

Which Details Do Customers Prioritize?

Customer feedback in fashion retail is clearly driven by the human element and the product offering, with **Sales Team Enthusiasm (16.5%)** and **Fashion Assortment (15.6%)** standing out as the strongest contributors. These are followed by **Ambiance (10.9%)** and **Product Quality (8.0%)**, showing that both emotional engagement and the perceived value of the offer play a central role. Customers consistently highlight the importance of engaged staff, relevant product assortment, and an inviting store environment in shaping their experience.

At the core is the interaction with sales associates. Enthusiasm, expertise, and personalized consultation influence how confident customers feel when making choices. This is reinforced by the product, where assortment breadth and quality drive both interest and trust. The store environment complements this dynamic, with ambiance setting the tone and encouraging exploration.

Supporting these primary drivers, elements such as accessible customer care, pricing perception, and promotional activity contribute to how smoothly the experience unfolds. When staff interaction feels genuine, the assortment aligns with expectations, and the environment supports discovery, the result is a journey that reduces hesitation and encourages confident decisions.

MARKETING MIX ELEMENT	MARKETING MIX ELEMENT FEATURE	% OF THE MARKETING MIX	
People	▶ Sales Team Enthusiasm	16.54%	93.1% of People
	▶ Tailored Client Consultation	5.67%	
	Sales Team Expertise	5.15%	
	Sales Team Presence	2.94%	
	Other	2.26%	
Product	▶ Fashion Assortment	15.63%	95.0% of Product
	▶ Product Quality	8.02%	
	Exclusive Merchandise	1.62%	
	Steady Stock Availability	1.39%	
	Other	1.40%	
Place	▶ Ambiance	10.89%	88.8% of Place
	Shop Placement	2.06%	
	Store Configuration	2.04%	
	Maintenance and Tidiness	1.28%	
	Other	2.04%	
Process	Accessible Customer Care	5.05%	91.4% of Process
	Timely Order Execution	1.98%	
	Smooth Checkout Experience	1.13%	
	Omnichannel Experience	0.49%	
	Other	0.81%	
Price	Market-Competitive Prices	2.51%	90.4% of Price
	Return on Investment	2.21%	
	Pricing Structure	0.55%	
	Transparent Pricing	0.53%	
	Other	0.62%	
Promotion	Rewards Scheme	2.09%	88.0% of Promotion
	Digital Engagement	1.10%	
	Special Deals	0.72%	
	Local Involvement	0.65%	
	Other	0.62%	

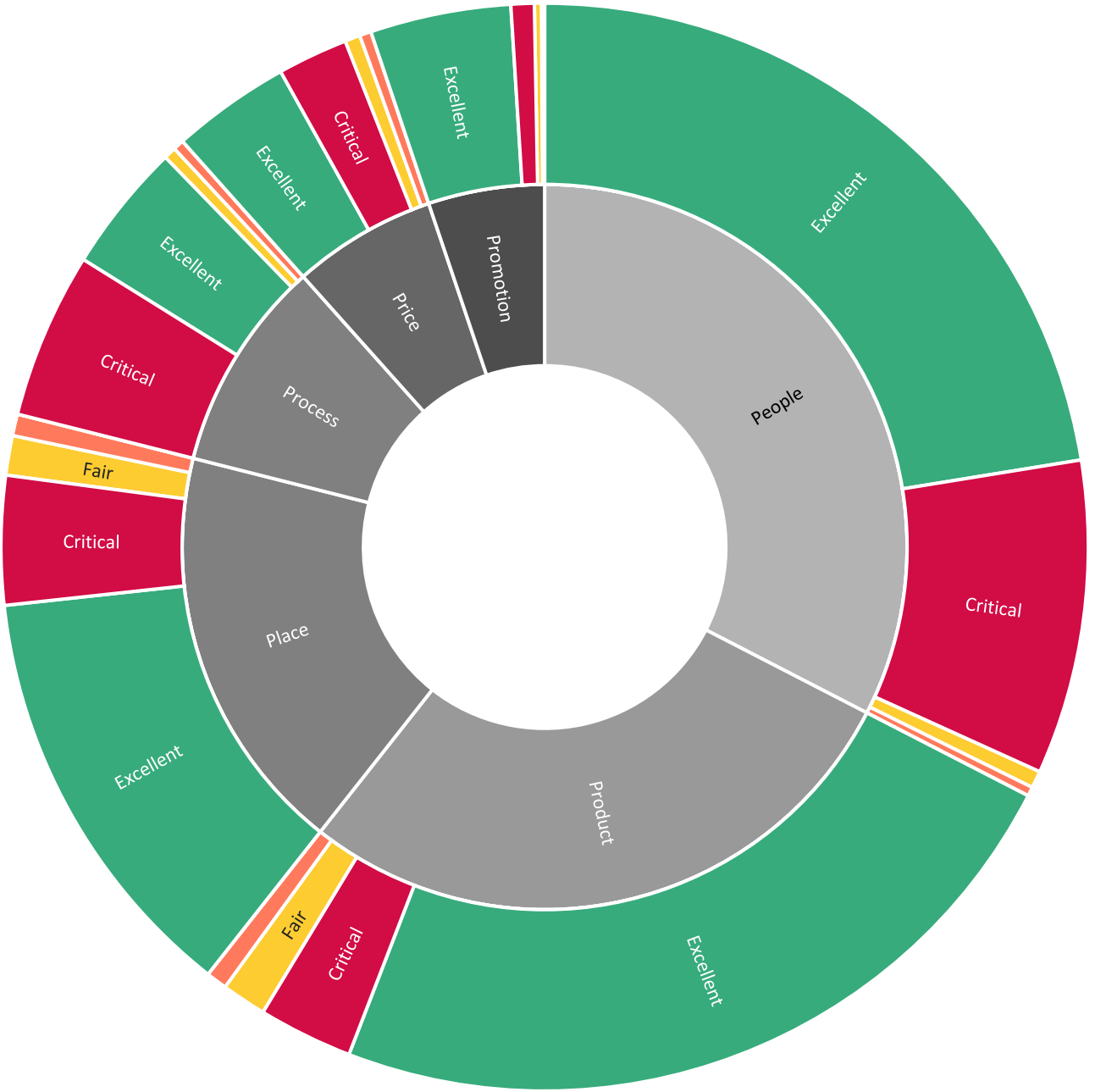
MARKETING MIX EXPERIENCES

Understanding Customer Sentiments, Thoughts, and Feelings

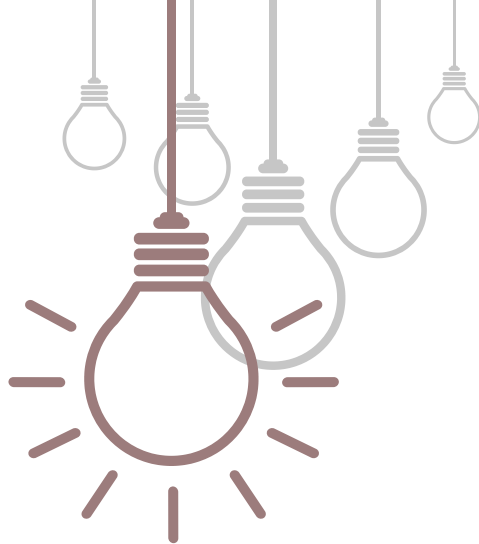
Customer sentiment in fashion retail reveals a clear dual dynamic. The most visible experience drivers – **People, Product, and Place** – not only attract the majority of feedback but also account for **67.5% of all critical comments**. **People** alone represent **39% of all negative experience references**. This indicates that the areas shaping customer perception most strongly are also where breakdowns are most noticeable. At the same time, **Process** emerges as the most vulnerable element, with **over half of its feedback (52.1%) classified as critical**.

Overall sentiment remains largely positive, with critical feedback representing 24% of the total. This shows that most interactions meet or exceed expectations, driven by strong staff engagement, appealing assortments, and a supportive store environment – elements that customers value most.

Within these core pillars, however, negative sentiment highlights where attention is needed. For **People**, it reflects gaps in engagement and expertise; for **Product**, mismatches in assortment, quality, or availability; and for **Place**, issues with layout and comfort. These areas define the key points where improvements can have the greatest impact.



KEY TAKEAWAYS



Fashion retail feedback highlights a strong connection between customer confidence and experience consistency. Staff interaction, product relevance, and operational execution shape how customers perceive the journey, while weak follow-up and process friction quickly reduce trust and purchase comfort.



Rebuild Customer Trust

More than 85% of critical reviews remain unanswered across fashion retail, leaving negative experiences unresolved and weakening trust in the brand's willingness to respond, support customers, and recover dissatisfaction effectively.



Strengthen Customer Interaction

People account for 39% of all critical feedback, showing how inconsistent support, weak communication, lack of attentiveness, or limited product expertise quickly influence customer perception and shopping comfort.



Prioritize People and Product

People (33%) and Product (28%) dominate customer attention, showing that staff interaction and assortment relevance, product quality, and personalized support define the shopping journey and influence purchase confidence.



Reduce Operational Friction

Process records the highest negative sentiment with 52% of all Process-related feedback classified as critical. This is due to payment, order handling, and post-purchase coordination issues that interrupt the continuity of the journey.

By strengthening customer recovery, improving staff consistency, and reducing friction during checkout and post-purchase stages, fashion retailers can create smoother journeys, reinforce confidence, and build stronger long-term customer preference.



Fashion Stores: **Customer Journey**

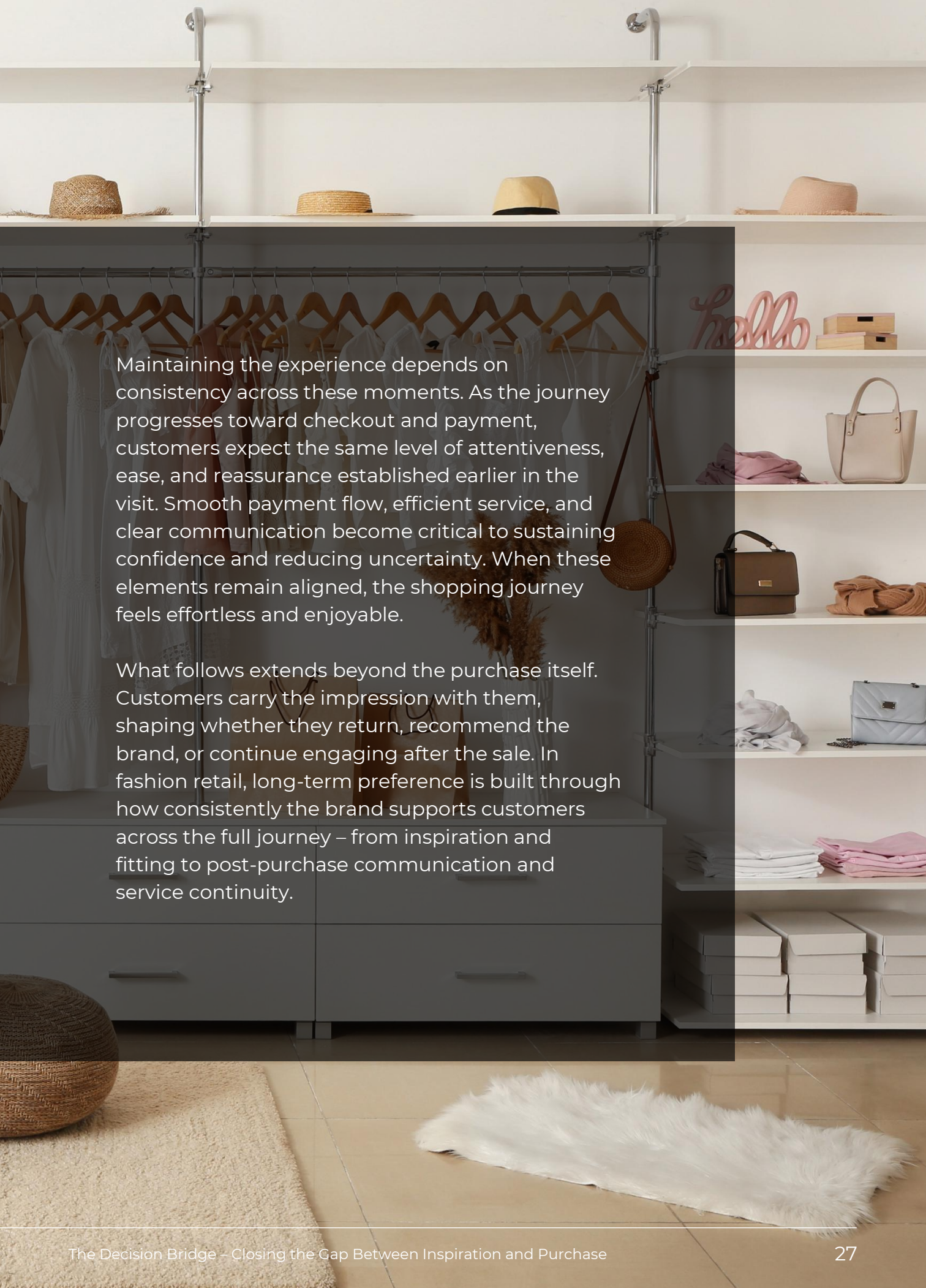
Fashion shopping is rarely a straightforward purchase process – it is shaped by inspiration, personal preferences, confidence, and the search for products that feel right both functionally and emotionally. Customers move through a journey of exploration, comparison, fitting, evaluation, and reassurance, where each interaction influences confidence in the final decision.

This section brings together the key stages of the customer journey – from awareness and product discovery to in-store exploration, fitting, purchase, and post-purchase engagement. Across these moments, customers encounter touchpoints that shape convenience, trust, and emotional connection, giving fashion retailers opportunities to reduce hesitation, strengthen confidence, and build lasting preference beyond the transaction itself.



In fashion retail, the journey is shaped by inspiration, personal identity, and the search for confidence in every choice. It often begins before the store visit itself, influenced by online discovery, social media, brand image, and product presentation. Customers compare styles and evaluate prices while looking for reassurance that products match their expectations. Early impressions are strongly influenced by assortment relevance and brand positioning.

As customers move into store exploration and fitting, the experience becomes more personal and emotionally driven. Store atmosphere, staff interaction, product availability, fitting room experience, and pricing clarity all influence how smoothly the journey unfolds. Small frictions – difficulty finding sizes, limited support, or unclear promotions – can quickly increase hesitation, while attentive guidance strengthens confidence.



Maintaining the experience depends on consistency across these moments. As the journey progresses toward checkout and payment, customers expect the same level of attentiveness, ease, and reassurance established earlier in the visit. Smooth payment flow, efficient service, and clear communication become critical to sustaining confidence and reducing uncertainty. When these elements remain aligned, the shopping journey feels effortless and enjoyable.

What follows extends beyond the purchase itself. Customers carry the impression with them, shaping whether they return, recommend the brand, or continue engaging after the sale. In fashion retail, long-term preference is built through how consistently the brand supports customers across the full journey – from inspiration and fitting to post-purchase communication and service continuity.

CUSTOMER JOURNEY MAP: FASHION STORES

In this analysis, we examine a typical **5-stage** Customer Journey Map that includes **11 distinct steps** reflecting the evolution of the customer experience.

The Customer Journey refers to the various stages a customer goes through while interacting with a company or brand – from the initial contact to the eventual purchase, and beyond.

The Customer Journey Map is a visual diagram that shows the Customer Journey. The Customer Journey Map helps businesses understand and analyze their customers' experiences, identify pain points, uncover opportunities for improvement and ultimately enhance the overall customer experience.

Awareness

Becomes aware of a brand, product, or service

Consideration

Researches and evaluates potential solutions

Conversion

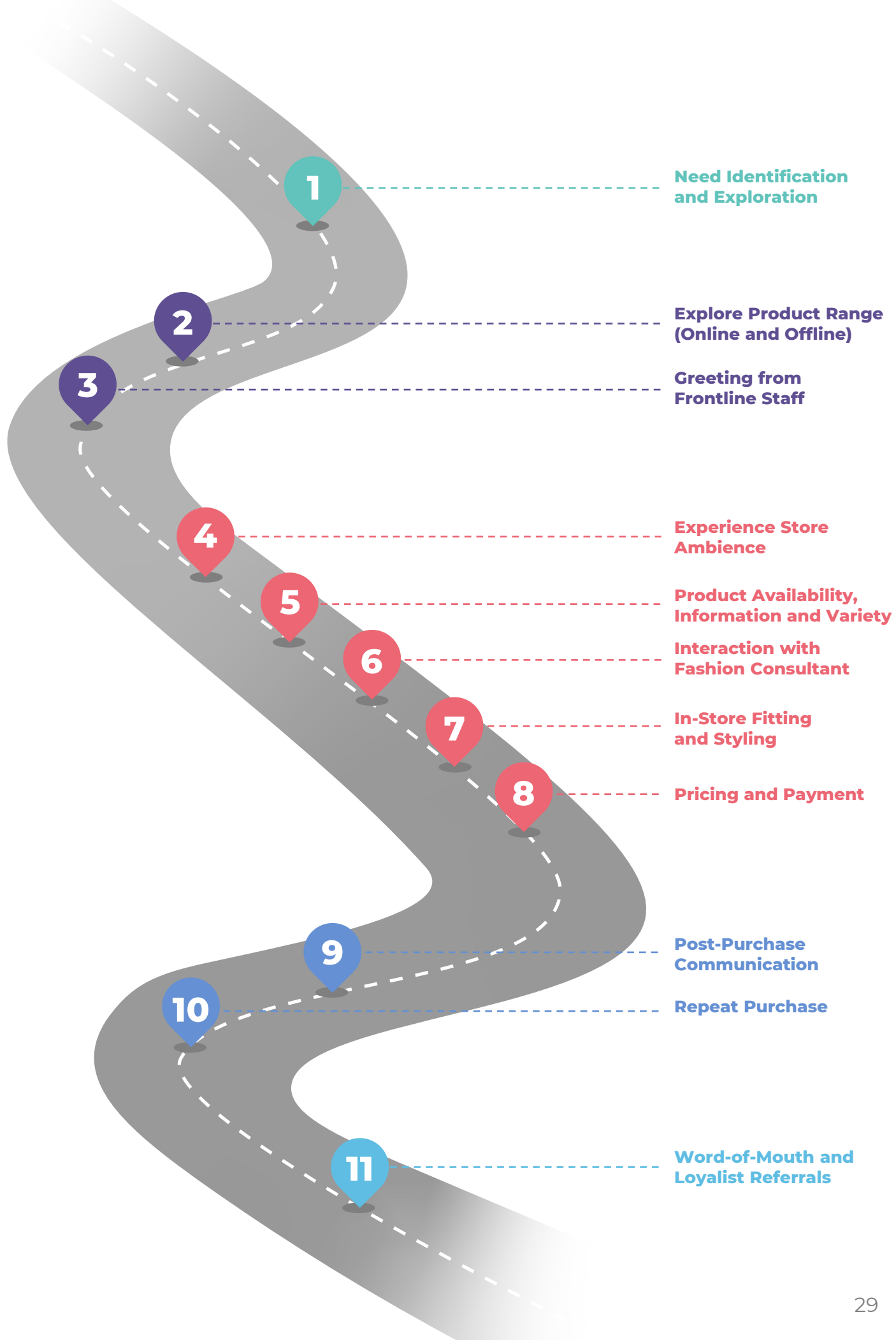
Chooses a product or service and makes a purchase

Retention

Delivery, use, additional purchases of product or service

Advocacy

Advocate, shares the positive experience with others



CUSTOMER JOURNEY MAP: FASHION STORES






































The fashion retail journey develops across five key stages that shape how customers move from initial inspiration to brand preference::

- **Awareness**
- **Consideration**
- **Conversion**
- **Retention**
- **Advocacy**

Each stage reflects a different phase of the shopping journey – beginning with inspiration and product discovery, continuing through exploration, fitting, purchase, and extending into repeat purchases and brand recommendation.

Along the way, customers encounter touchpoints that shape confidence and perception: browsing collections, evaluating products and prices, interacting with staff, trying products, completing payment, and receiving post-purchase support.

These moments give fashion retailers the opportunity to influence perception through relevance, guidance, convenience, and consistency. When each stage feels connected and effortless, the result is a shopping experience customers trust and want to return to.

Awareness	<p>Need Identification and Exploration</p> <p>Realize the need for new fashion items, conduct research on current trends</p>	 Social media	 Fashion blogs	 Online ads	<p>Identify latest fashion trends and where to purchase them</p>	 CSAT
Consideration	<p>Explore Product Range (Online and Offline)</p> <p>Visit the fashion store or browse the online collection, compare styles and pricing</p>	 Physical store	 E-commerce website		<p>Evaluate fashion item selection and affordability</p>	 CES
	<p>Greeting from Frontline Staff</p> <p>Experience initial interaction with store staff upon entry or online inquiry</p>	 Store entrance	 Online chat service		<p>Feel welcomed and valued as a customer</p>	 CES
	<p>Experience Store Ambience</p> <p>Engage with the store's design and atmosphere, including layout, lighting, and music</p>	 Store interior	 Music	 Visual merchandising	<p>Shop in an environment that enhances the fashion experience</p>	 CSAT
Conversion	<p>Product Availability, Information and Variety</p> <p>Browse through various outfits, check for sizes, read information tags</p>	 Clothing racks	 Size charts	 Product tags	<p>Select outfits that fit well and meet fashion needs</p>	 CSAT
	<p>Interaction with Fashion Consultant</p> <p>Seek fashion advice from in-store consultants or customer service online</p>	 Face-to-face consultation	 Online support		<p>Receive tailored recommendations to enhance personal style</p>	 CSAT
	<p>In-store Fitting and Styling</p> <p>Use fitting rooms or virtual fitting tools to try on new outfits</p>	 Fitting rooms	 Augmented reality apps		<p>Receive tailored recommendations to enhance personal style</p>	 CES
	<p>Pricing and Payment</p> <p>Proceed to payment, consider membership or discount offers for savings, provide feedback on the purchase experience</p>	 Checkout counters	 Membership/loyalty program sign-up		<p>Complete the purchase with satisfactory price points and conditions</p>	 CES
	<p>Post-Purchase Communication</p> <p>Receive post-purchase communication, respond to surveys or feedback requests</p>	 Follow-up emails	 Satisfaction surveys		<p>Maintain satisfaction with the purchase, receive help if needed</p>	 CSAT
	<p>Repeat Purchase</p> <p>Take advantage of promotions and return for more purchases</p>	 Email	 In-store promotions	 Loyalty program	<p>Benefit from discounts and discover new products</p>	 CSAT
Advocacy	<p>Word of Mouth and Loyalist Referrals</p> <p>Share positive experiences with the store, write reviews, participate in referral programs</p>	 Social networks	 Referral program		<p>Advocate for their preferred fashion store, help others make informed decisions</p>	 NPS

CUSTOMER JOURNEY STAGES

Awareness

The Awareness stage begins when customers recognize a need for new fashion items, seasonal updates, or style inspiration.

Consideration

In the Consideration stage, customers narrow down options based on their style preferences, budget, and expectations for the shopping experience.

Conversion

The Conversion stage is where interest turns into purchase, as customers move from browsing products to actively engaging in the shopping experience. From store entry to fitting and checkout, this phase confirms whether earlier expectations align with reality. Store atmosphere, product presentation, and first interaction with staff play a critical role in shaping confidence, while smooth service and supportive guidance transform consideration into a satisfying purchase experience.

Retention

The Retention stage captures whether the shopping experience remains positive enough to encourage future visits and continued engagement with the brand.

Advocacy

Advocacy develops when customers leave with a strong enough impression to actively associate themselves with the brand and share the experience with others.

Discovery happens through social media, fashion blogs, and online content, where brand image, trends, and product presentation shape initial interest.

They review collections, pricing, promotions, and customer feedback, comparing product variety, store atmosphere, and service quality before making a choice.

During this stage, customers interact directly with products, staff, and the store environment, making real-time judgments about service quality and value. They evaluate product availability, fitting comfort, staff support, pricing clarity, and checkout efficiency while navigating purchase decisions and payment. Clear communication, attentive service, and consistency across touchpoints reduce hesitation and strengthen shopping confidence. When execution feels seamless, the experience becomes comfortable, personalized, and more likely to encourage repeat purchases.

Customers revisit the experience through product usage, loyalty programs, follow-up communication, and post-purchase support. Positive engagement and consistent support encourage repeat purchases and strengthen long-term customer preference.

Online reviews, social sharing, and personal recommendations help shape how others perceive the retailer, influencing expectations around style, service, product quality, and overall shopping confidence.

SUMMARY

The fashion retail journey develops through a series of emotional and practical decisions that shape how customers connect with a brand. From inspiration and product exploration to fitting, purchase, and post-purchase interaction, each stage influences how confident and supported customers feel. Early perception is shaped by brand image, product relevance, and visual presentation, while later stages determine whether expectations are met.

Throughout the journey, customers evaluate both the products and the experience around them. Staff guidance, fitting comfort, pricing transparency, checkout flow, and post-purchase support all influence how smooth and reassuring the experience feels. Small moments of friction can quickly interrupt confidence, while consistent support strengthens purchase certainty and emotional connection.

Long-term preference depends on maintaining consistency across these touchpoints. Reliable service, seamless execution, and effective follow-up communication encourage repeat purchases, stronger loyalty, and positive recommendations over time.

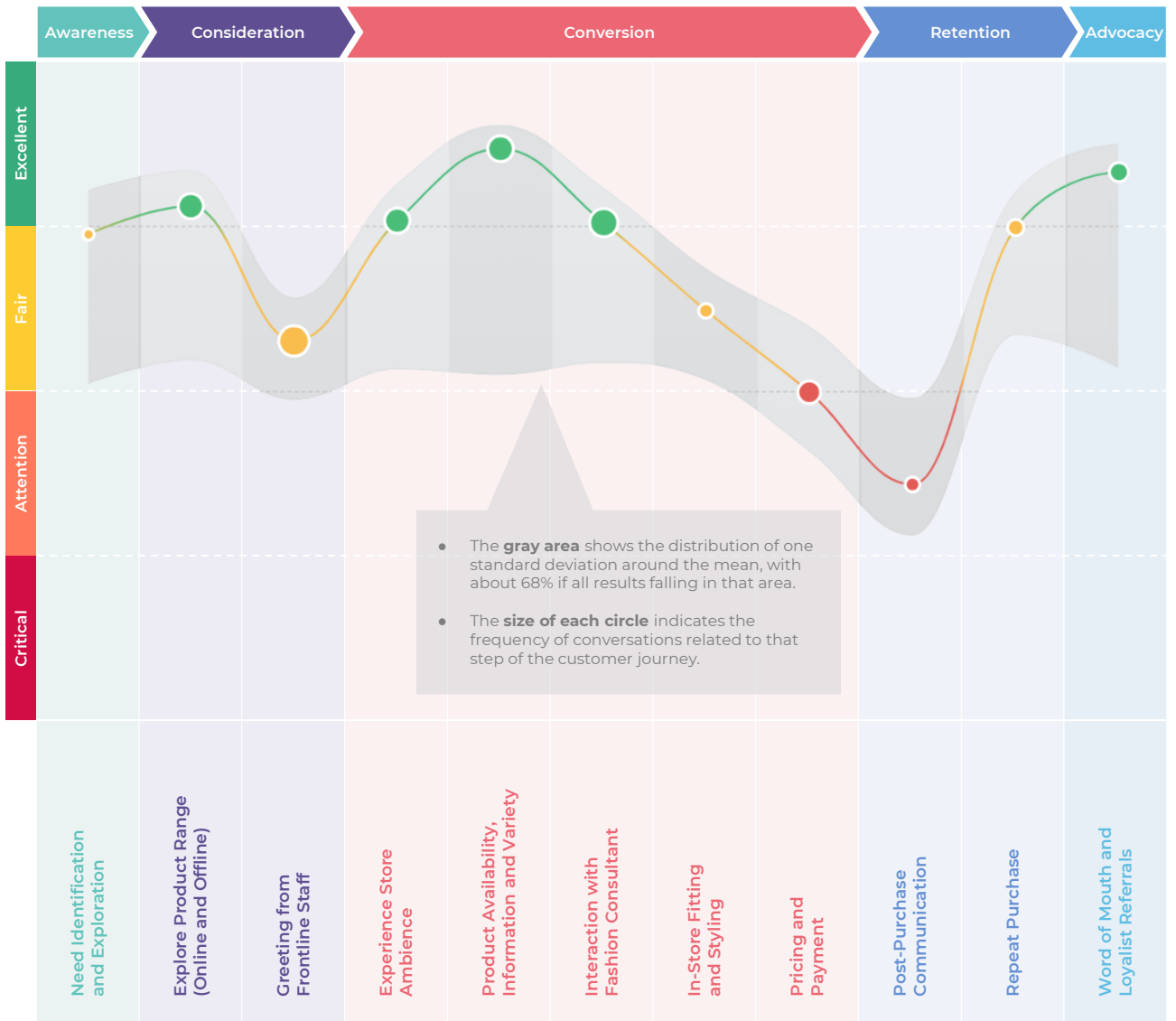
THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

The fashion retail journey shows strong results in the initial and core phases, where **Product Discovery, Store Ambience**, as well as **Product Availability and Variety**, and **Interaction with Fashion Consultants** generate the highest sentiment.

These stages create confidence and engagement through relevant assortment and personalized support. At the same time, noticeable declines emerge around **Fitting, Pricing and Payment**, and especially **Post-Purchase engagement**, where the experience begins to lose continuity and emotional connection.

The chart illustrates customer sentiment during the various phases of the Customer Journey. Areas shaded in the graph denote the standard deviation from the average, highlighting the degree of variability at each step and signifying the need for more precise measurement techniques.

The circles on the graph correspond to the frequency of specific elements noted at each phase, with larger circles indicating steps with more frequently cited attributes. This visualization aids in identifying which areas to prioritize for strategic focus.



SENTIMENT BANDS

Excellent	0.5 to 1.0
Fair	between 0.0 and 0.5
Attention	0.0 to -0.5 (excluded)
Critical	-0.5 to -1.0

CASE IN POINT

Aspect-Based Sentiment Analysis (ABSA) is particularly effective for analyzing online reviews and ratings by providing detailed, aspect-specific insights.

A customer review may read:



I discovered this store online while searching for a new dress. I had a strong first impression. The store itself had a modern layout and pleasant atmosphere. I found several pieces I really liked, while the staff provided helpful styling advice without being pushy. However, finding the right size was frustrating because of missing sizes and limited availability. Checkout was slow, and some items seemed overpriced for the quality. I wish they had gotten back to me because I had a question about one item.

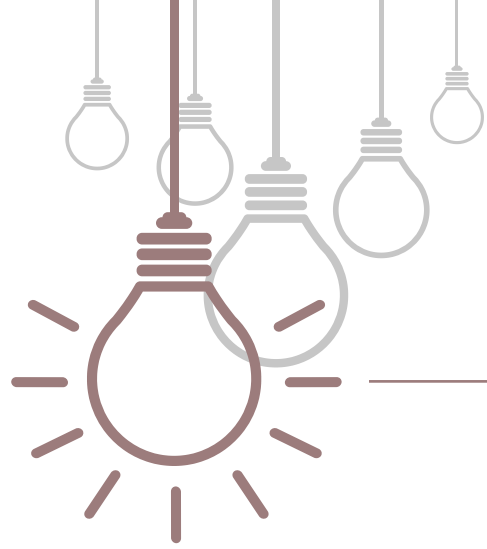
Aspect	Modifier	Sentiment
On-line Discovery	Strong First Impression	Positive
Store Ambiance	Modern Layout, Pleasant Atmosphere	Positive
Fashion Consultant Interaction	Helpful Styling Advice	Positive
Product Availability and Variety	Missing Sizes, Limited Availability	Positive
Pricing and Payment	Slow Checkout, Overpriced Products	Negative
Post-Purchase Communication	Lack of Follow-Up Communication	Negative

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Aspect-Based Sentiment Analysis (ABSA) excels in extracting deeper insights from customer interactions by categorizing aspects of the product, service, or experience being reviewed. It then evaluates the modifying words or phrases in the review, assigning them a sentiment polarity – positive, neutral, or negative – to gauge customer opinions.

ABSA is not, however, without some limitations. Notably, complexity in language and expression: people who frequently employ idioms, sarcasm, or metaphors can pose difficulties for accurate interpretation.

KEY TAKEAWAYS



The fashion retail journey builds customer confidence across connected moments rather than through a single interaction. Strong early engagement and supportive in-store experiences create positive momentum, while operational friction and weak follow-up quickly interrupt the flow.



Carry the Momentum Forward

The journey begins positively as customers explore products and enter the store, making it essential to maintain the same level of confidence, engagement, and ease through fitting, checkout, and post-purchase stages.



Reduce Friction at Checkout

A clear decline emerges around fitting, pricing, and payment, showing the importance of simplifying checkout flow, improving process clarity, and reducing effort during critical purchase moments.



Elevate the Decision Moments

The strongest sentiment appears around store ambiance, product availability, and interaction with fashion consultants, highlighting the need to continuously strengthen guidance, product relevance, and personalize support.



Strengthen the Return Loop

The sharpest drop occurs during post-purchase communication, emphasizing the need for faster follow-up, clearer updates, more consistent customer support, and stronger continuity throughout the post-purchase relationship.

Creating consistency across the full journey requires more than strong products or appealing stores alone. Fashion retailers that successfully connect guidance, operational ease, and post-purchase support are better positioned to strengthen confidence, loyalty, and overall shopping continuity.

MEET THE EXPERT



Meet the experts featured in our podcast series. Discover their backgrounds, unique perspectives, and invaluable contributions to the field of Customer Experience.

ABDEL WAHAB CHAOUI

C&O Marketing

C&O Marketing combines quantitative and qualitative methodologies, such as mystery shopping, price monitoring, store-checks, and field observation. C&O combines field execution and strategic consultancy across the full spectrum of marketing research, transforming rigorous data collection into insightful, actionable intelligence. Operating across retail, fashion, banking, automotive, telecoms, and other sectors, C&O manages both complex research design and on-the-ground operations across the Maghreb, Middle East, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Abdel Wahab Chaoui

Abdel Wahab Chaoui is the co-founder and Associate Director of C&O Marketing, a full-service market research agency established in Casablanca in 1994 alongside his partner Abdallah Omari. Over three decades, the firm has developed into a multi-geography practice covering Morocco, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East - with offices in Casablanca and Dubai, and a pan-African network of quality partners across some forty countries.

Abdel Wahab Chaoui is also a board Member of MSPA Europe/Africa since 2014, and a founding member of AMRA, the African Market Research Association. He also served as ESOMAR's representative in Morocco for many years – commitments that reflect a long-standing belief that good research is built as much within professional communities as within individual firms.

Outside the office, he spent several years as a columnist for a weekly newspaper – a discipline that still shapes the way he frames a question and delivers a finding.





THE EXCELLENCE PERSPECTIVE: TURNING CUSTOMERS INTO FRIENDS

In fashion retail, CX excellence is defined by the ability to guide customers with confidence, trust, and understanding. As Abdel Wahab Chaoui emphasized, long-term loyalty is created when brands stop treating interactions as transactions and focus on helping customers find what truly fits their needs. In an industry driven by emotion, identity, and confidence, the strongest differentiator is the perspective behind the service experience.

“CX excellence is when you stop seeing customers and you start seeing friends.”

– **Abdel Wahab Chaoui**

For Abdel Wahab Chaoui, customer experience excellence begins with a completely different perspective on the role of service in fashion retail. The objective is not simply to complete a transaction, but to create an experience where customers feel supported in their decision-making process. As he explains, *“CX excellence is when you stop seeing customers and you start seeing friends.”* This mindset changes the purpose of the interaction itself. Instead of focusing on the sale alone, the experience becomes centered around trust, understanding, and helping customers feel confident in their choices.

Abdel Wahab extends this philosophy even further when discussing the role of service teams inside the store. *“Because you do not sell your solution to your friends. You find theirs.”* In practice, this means guiding customers toward what truly fits their needs rather than simply pushing products or promotions. The interaction becomes less transactional and more consultative, creating a stronger sense of reassurance, comfort, and long-term connection throughout the customer journey.

This perspective also reshapes how brands think about loyalty itself. As Abdel Wahab explains, *“Brands try to build loyalty with their customers, but a brand is not a person in fact. So, your salesperson must embody the brand and treat your customers, their customers, as friends.”* Trust is built when employees fully embody the company vision and treat the relationship with customers as their own responsibility, not simply as part of the operational process. In practice, this means guiding customers toward what truly fits their needs rather than simply pushing sales.

Ultimately, Abdel Wahab believes that the strongest customer experiences are built on trust rather than persuasion. His suggestion to *“imagine a friendliness manager position to embody this philosophy in the store”* reflects a broader strategic idea – customer experience leadership should not focus only on operational execution, but also on creating environments where customers feel comfortable, understood, and valued. In this perspective, excellence is not measured only by completed targets, but by the quality of the relationship that remains after the purchase is completed.



CONNECTING THE DOTS: BUILDING ACTIONABLE CX INTELLIGENCE

Many organizations already have access to enormous amounts of customer data, operational reports, surveys, and reviews. The real challenge is not collecting more information, but connecting different data sources into actionable intelligence. Abdel Wahab Chaoui explains how meaningful CX decisions emerge when customer perception, mystery shopping, and operational execution are interpreted together.

“The most important thing is to make data talk to other data, and to turn this conversation into a decision.”
– **Abdel Wahab Chaoui**

Most organizations today are not struggling with a lack of information. The challenge is making different insights work together in a way that supports clearer business decisions. As Abdel Wahab explains, *“The most valuable thing a research team can deliver is not data. Data is everywhere today. The most important thing is to make data talk to other data, and to turn this conversation into a decision.”* The real value of CX intelligence emerges not from collecting more information, but from connecting insights into meaningful direction and action.

This creates a major shift in how customer experience research should be approached. Rather than treating methodologies as isolated exercises, Abdel Wahab sees them as complementary parts of the same system. *“Mystery shopping tells you what was not properly executed in the store, and CX research tells you what the customer perceived as poorly executed and how strongly that perception kept them from buying.”* One measures operational execution, while the other reveals emotional and commercial impact. Together, they create a much deeper understanding of why customers hesitate, disengage, or return.



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Many brands still rely too heavily on isolated measurements or standalone reports. Yet operational execution alone rarely explains the full customer reality. As Abdel Wahab explains, *“One alone gives you control, the other alone gives you perception. Together they give you intelligence.”* The combination of methodologies allows organizations to move beyond surface-level reporting and identify which operational gaps truly influence customer trust, purchase confidence, and loyalty.

The same principle applies to the relationship between methodologies themselves. *“CX research and mystery shopping are two pieces of the same puzzle. Only when you put them together do you see the full picture.”* By combining customer perception analysis with operational execution measurement, brands gain a broader understanding of how experience, execution, and customer behavior interact to shape commercial performance and long-term loyalty.

Continuity is another critical element in building meaningful CX intelligence. As Abdel Wahab explains, *“A one-time study gives you a photograph, a continuous program gives you a movie. And only the movie tells you where you're going.”* While one-time measurements may identify specific issues at a given moment, continuous CX programs reveal patterns, behavioral shifts, and the real direction of customer perception, allowing organizations to react more strategically and proactively.

Even the most sophisticated research loses value if it remains disconnected from operational action. Too often, organizations focus heavily on collecting feedback without clearly defining how the information will influence decisions or business priorities. Abdel Wahab addresses this directly: *“The CX program is not a measurement exercise, it's a decision-making system.”* In this perspective, actionable CX intelligence is not created through individual reports alone, but through connected insights that continuously guide operational improvement and strategic decision-making.



THE SHARED EXPERIENCE: FASHION BRANDS INSIDE RETAIL ECOSYSTEMS

Customer perception in fashion retail is shaped not only by the store itself, but also by the wider retail ecosystem surrounding it – from mall positioning and neighboring brands to visitor flow and atmosphere. Through C&O Marketing’s Fashion Mall Interaction Model, Abdel Wahab Chaoui explains how environment and perception directly influence commercial performance.

“A fashion brand, however strong, is never perceived in isolation.”

– **Abdel Wahab Chaoui**



Traditional retail analysis often focuses only on what happens inside the store – product assortment, service execution, or operational standards. Yet customer perception begins forming much earlier, long before direct interaction with the brand itself. As Abdel Wahab explains, *“A fashion brand, however strong, is never perceived in isolation.”* The atmosphere of the mall, surrounding brands, visitor flow, positioning, and overall emotional environment already shape customer expectations before they even cross the entrance of the store. In this context, the shopping environment becomes an active part of the purchase journey rather than simply a physical location.

The realization behind the Fashion Mall Interaction Model came directly from inconsistencies observed in the field. “A brand could score well in mystery shopping and still be poorly perceived by the mall visitor study – or the opposite.” This revealed a critical gap between operational measurements and actual customer perception. Traditional KPIs could explain what was happening inside the store, but not the broader environmental factors influencing confidence, attraction, purchase behavior, and overall performance.

Shopping malls also actively influence brand identity and emotional perception. Abdel Wahab explains that *“a mall is not a neutral host, it’s a living entity with its own visitor base, its own tenant mix, its own positioning.”* Fashion brands therefore inherit part of the ecosystem surrounding them. Neighboring stores, mall positioning, traffic quality, and even circulation patterns become part of the customer experience, shaping how brands are perceived commercially and emotionally.

What makes this relationship even more complex is that both sides continuously evolve. *“Inside every mall we have two living entities in permanent interaction”*, Abdel Wahab explains. Shopping malls change through new tenants, repositioning, and visitor behavior shifts,

while brands evolve through collections, strategies, and customer expectations. Understanding this interaction over time becomes essential for identifying why some brands attract stronger engagement and commercial performance than others.

This interaction also changes the relationship between shopping malls and fashion brands themselves. Both sides contribute to the same customer perception and commercial outcome. As Abdel Wahab explains, *“We move from co-existing under the same roof to winning together under the same roof.”* Customer experience therefore becomes a shared ecosystem responsibility, where brand performance, visitor behavior, and positioning continuously influence one another.



FASHION BRAND



FASHION BRANDS AND MALLS: A SHARED DESTINY

*Combining CX Research
and Mystery Shopping
to Understand the Interdependence
Between Fashion Brands
and the Mall That Houses Them*

01 INTRODUCTION

Understanding the contrasting performance of fashion brands within mall environments

In the world of fashion retail, a recurring question arises both among fashion brands and among the managers of the shopping centers that house them: why do two brands with comparable positioning generate such different levels of traffic, revenue and brand image within the same mall? And from one mall to another?

The instinctive answer points to internal variables: brand awareness and image – because shoppers go to Zara because it is Zara, above all else –, product range quality, merchandising, team competence. These factors matter, but they do not alone explain the scale of the gaps observed in the field, between fashion brands within the same mall or between different locations of the same brand.

What our 30 years of accumulated experience in retail research have led us to observe is that a fashion brand, however strong,

is never perceived in isolation once implanted in a shopping mall.

It must navigate an ecosystem that pre-exists it: a visitor base with its own habits and expectations, circulation flows that may or may not be favorable, neighboring brands that color its perceived positioning, and an overall configuration that sometimes strongly influences how each brand is experienced before the customer even steps through the door.

It is from this observation that the approach combining CX Research and Mystery Shopping presented here was born: a study co-commissioned by a fashion brand – seeking to understand its contrasting results from one mall to another – and by the mall operator, interested in the findings for its own fashion mix. This dual perspective structured the approach and strengthened its analytical value.



“When entering a shopping mall, a fashion brand will de facto wear the identity of the mall that houses it.

We therefore need the right tools to study the brand × mall interaction in order to optimize this coexistence.”

Abdel Wahab Chaoui,
Associate Director, C&O Marketing

02 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The mall as a hidden variable of fashion performance

Fashion brand performance in a shopping mall is generally analyzed through its own indicators: conversion rate, average basket, customer satisfaction. These metrics tell us what is happening inside the store. But they remain silent on what is happening before – and around it.

Yet a shopping mall is not a neutral host for brands. It is a structured environment with its own identity, a specific visitor base, and a circulation logic that largely determines who passes in front of which brand, when, and in what state of mind. In this sense, the mall is itself an actor in the performance of every brand it houses.

The fashion brand and the mall are two living entities: an evolution within interdependence

MALL VISITOR BASE. Each mall attracts its own customer profile. A fashion brand implanted in a shopping center whose visitor base is outside its target will be structurally disadvantaged, regardless of the quality of its products and services.

LOCATION WITHIN THE MALL. Absolute position in circulation flows and relative positioning vis-à-vis neighboring brands (fashion or otherwise) directly influence traffic levels and perceived image.

BRAND VISIBILITY. Signage, window display readability, ease of access: these factors condition the capture rate – the proportion of visitors who actually cross the threshold of the store.

IN-STORE EXECUTION. Welcome, advice, merchandising, atmosphere, product range: once inside, execution quality determines conversion. But this reading is only illuminating when set against the upstream factors.

THE INTERACTION OVER TIME. The mall and the brand are two living entities that evolve permanently – their mix, their image, their visitor base. What was a coherent implantation can become a less obvious coexistence. Brand performance in a mall is part of a continuous interaction that must be measured over time.



FASHION x MALL INTERACTION MODEL



Execution in store

Welcome & Service Quality
Merchandising & Customer Journey
Rush / Normal Performance



Mall Visitors

Profile, Habits, Motivation
Alignment with the Fashion brand's target



Mall Identity

Image & Positioning
Communication & Commercial mix



Location

Absolute & Relative Positioning
Fashion neighbours
Anchors & traffic generators



Visibility

Signage & window display
Legibility within circulation flows
Capture rate



Evolution over time

Two living entities
BRAND X MALL
Evolving commercial mix

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The articulation of these dimensions justifies a combined methodological approach, capable of measuring them simultaneously and cross-referencing them. This is what we have formalized in the Fashion-Mall Interaction Model by C&O.

03 METHODOLOGY

A three-pillar approach: measuring what the customer lives, understands and feels

The methodology rests on a founding principle: neither approach – CX research or mystery shopping – is sufficient on its own to capture the complexity of the relationship between a customer, a brand and its mall environment. It is their combination that produces a truly actionable reading – for the brand as much as for the mall operator.

01 MALL EXIT SURVEY	02 FASHION VISITOR BOOSTER	03 BENCHMARK MYSTERY SHOPPING
<p>Profile & Intent Visit motivations Frequency habits Planned brands at entry</p> <p>Actual journey Zones & brands visited Purchases made or abandoned</p> <p>Perceptions Overall mall image Fashion brands perceived</p> <p>How ? N = 600 visitors @ mall exit Weekdays & weekends hourly quotas LOI : 20-25 min</p>	<p>Full fashion journey All fashion brands visited Purchases made or not</p> <p>In-store experience Welcome, advice, offer Fitting room, upselling Positioning vs competitors Subjective rating by dimension</p> <p>Intent vs actual behaviour Gap between intent & purchase</p> <p>How ? Visitors who visited the target brand or a comparable one LOI : 10 min integrated into Exit Survey</p>	<p>5 dimensions assessed:</p> <p>Storefront attractiveness Welcome & greeting Quality of advice In-store journey comfort End-of-visit management</p> <p>Objective rating Global fashion retail standards</p> <p>Rush hours vs normal hours Operational maturity</p> <p>How ? 3 visits / brand > Competitive set Same shopper weekdays & weekends Rush hours & normal trading</p>

CX × Mystery Shopping Crossover

Subjective rating × Objective rating → Driver weighting · Grid re-weighting · Actionable diagnosis

**CX as the fuel for the mystery shopping program.
When subjective data helps refine the standards**



THE CX / MYSTERY SHOPPING CROSSOVER

Mystery shopping produces an objective measure of operational execution, assessed against global fashion retail standards. The Fashion Booster documents real customer perception. Their crossover reveals situations no single tool could identify: a brand with strong execution but weak perception points to a visibility issue or a visitor-base mismatch. A well-perceived brand with operational gaps signals a latent risk zone. This crossed diagnosis enables truly targeted recommendations.

SPECIFIC VALUE FOR THE MALL OPERATOR

The mall operator is a full beneficiary of the approach. The exit survey reveals how the visitor base perceives the mall's fashion offer. The booster documents dynamics between brands. The mystery shopping gives an objective reading of overall execution quality, enabling fact-based dialogue with tenant brands. The key deliverable for the operator is a Fashion Shopping Road Map: which brands contribute to the mall's fashion attractiveness, which penalize it, and what adjustments would optimize the offer.

AN ETHICAL APPROACH

Each party receives the data useful for their decisions without the sensitive information of one being exposed to the other. Mystery shopping scores are communicated to the mall operator in aggregated and anonymized form. This restitution architecture ensures the trust of each party is preserved.

04 KEY INSIGHTS

What the field reveals when you know where to look

The value of a combined methodology is measured not by its sophistication, but by the quality of the insights it produces. Here are the most significant findings:

INSIGHT 1 – FASHION VISIT INTENT IS MORE FRAGILE THAN WE THINK

The exit survey measures the gap between declared intent at entry and actual behavior at exit. A significant proportion of visitors who declared an intention to visit a specific fashion brand did not ultimately do so. Reasons combine internal factors – offer, price, service – and environmental factors: difficulty locating the brand, journey diversion, end-of-visit fatigue. Even strong intent is never guaranteed.

2 to 3 in 10

visitors who declared a fashion purchase intent at mall entry actually complete that purchase

The Mall Factor

has a significant impact on fashion brand success – variable depending on brand awareness and the mall's own identity

INSIGHT 2 – THE COMMERCIAL NEIGHBORHOOD SPEAKS BEFORE THE BRAND DOES

Shoppers spontaneously position a fashion brand not only based on their in-store experience but also based on what surrounds it in the mall. The direct fashion neighborhood plays a role, but commercial locomotives – large food retailers, sports brands, high-traffic fast food – are equally decisive in generating footfall.

A brand in the wake of a powerful traffic generator benefits from natural exposure. Conversely, an aisle dominated by unattractive brands condemns the fashion brand to commercial invisibility.

±15%

the average impact of the commercial neighbourhood on a brand's effectiveness within a mall – positive or negative

INSIGHT 3 – OPERATIONAL PRESSURE REVEALS BRAND MATURITY

During normal trading hours, performance gaps between brands in the competitive set are often limited. It is under rush-hour pressure that real differences emerge. Some brands maintain remarkable consistency; others see their scores degrade significantly. Yet rush hours are precisely the moments when the mall is most visited. A degradation during peak traffic is not an isolated incident – it is a signal of organizational weakness.

6 times in 10

operational quality and store standards directly condition customer satisfaction and loyalty

INSIGHT 4 – THE CUSTOMER’S DESIRE IS THERE. IT IS THE EXECUTION THAT FALLS SHORT.

This is the most powerful insight our approach produces. The scenario: at the mall entrance, a visitor declares a clear intention to visit a fashion brand with a strong purchase motivation. At exit, the fashion booster reveals they did visit the brand – but did not buy. The mystery shopping confirms and objectifies the same gaps across the same dimensions.

In the Fashion Booster, the real customer rates each key dimension subjectively: merchandising, welcome, service, offer clarity, fitting rooms, product availability, upselling. The mystery shopper evaluates these same dimensions objectively. The crossover, dimension by dimension, produces the ability to weight each operational gap’s contribution to the failure of the transaction.

More structurally: it enables the re-weighting of mystery shopping grid items based on their actual impact on the purchase decision.

The grid ceases to be a fixed tool – it becomes a living instrument, calibrated on the actual behavioral reality of the customers of this brand, in this mall, facing this competitive set.

“It’s good to know what matters. But it’s better to know to what extent.”

Abdel Wahab Chaoui,
Associate Director, C&O Marketing

This is exactly what the theme of this issue summarizes: From Insight to Action. Not the insight alone. Not the action alone. But the precise, documented path that connects one to the other.

INSIGHT 5 – THE DUAL ATTRACTIVENESS: MALL × BRAND

The success of a fashion brand in a mall results from the effect of a dual attractiveness – Mall × Brand: an interdependence that evolves over time. Performance is never judged in absolute terms but always in comparison – between the evolution of the mall’s attractiveness and the brand’s commercial performance within that center on one hand, and between the perceived customer experience and the actual execution quality compared to competing fashion brands in the same center on the other.

The precise and regular monitoring of the brand – mall ecosystem relationship conditions the resilience and performance of the fashion brand.

“The mall is a complex ecosystem in continuous evolution – with its anchors, its visitors and its own fashion micro-market. The fashion brand must learn to optimize its coexistence with it.”

Abdel Wahab Chaoui,
Associate Director, C&O Marketing



05 FROM INSIGHT TO ACTION

What well-constructed data makes possible

A diagnosis is only as valuable as the decisions it enables. The Fashion-Mall Interaction Model by C&O was designed from the outset as a decision-support tool – for the brand as much as for the mall operator.

FOR THE BRAND

The CX / mystery shopping crossover produces a clear operational roadmap: what to correct, in what order, with what level of priority. The prioritization of actions is no longer a matter of managerial intuition – it is grounded in the actual weight of each gap in the failure of the transaction. For brands present in multiple malls, the approach also opens a benchmarking perspective: what share of performance gaps is attributable to operational factors, and what share to the mall ecosystem?

FOR THE MALL OPERATOR

The Fashion Shopping Road Map identifies brands that contribute to the mall's fashion attractiveness and those that penalize it, guides lease renewal decisions and enables fact-based dialogue with tenant brands. This posture of an informed partner – rather than a mere lessor – is increasingly expected in a context where mall performance directly conditions that of its tenants.

A METHODOLOGY WITH 5 STRENGTHS

Duplicable
Across malls

Actionable
Operational roadmap

Evolving
Over time

Comparable
Competitive set

Multi-sector
Fashion, Food, Sport...

Applied across different malls, the methodology produces comparable data enabling universal insights on brand × mall interaction mechanisms. Reconducted over time, it transforms a one-time diagnosis into a continuous management program. And what is demonstrated for fashion applies to every retail sector in a mall: food courts, cosmetics, sports, electronics. For MSPA agencies and CX professionals, every mall becomes a potential research site, every tenant brand a potential client.



CONCLUSION

Thirty years of retail field experience have taught us one thing: data is not the problem. What is missing is the ability to make data sources talk to each other. A mystery shopping grid without grounding in real customer perception remains a control tool. A CX study without cross-referencing against operational execution remains a snapshot. It is their combination that produces intelligence – and it is that intelligence that makes action possible.

What the Fashion-Mall Interaction Model by C&O demonstrates is that a fashion brand can no longer be evaluated independently of the ecosystem that carries it. The mall is not a backdrop. It is an actor. And like any actor, it influences, constrains, amplifies – or penalizes. Ignoring this dimension means flying blind over half of the performance equation.

The real shift is not methodological. It is managerial. It means moving from periodic, compartmentalized measurement to a continuous management system – where each dimension, visitor base, location, visibility, execution – is tracked in its interaction with the others, and over time. A one-time diagnosis captures a photograph. A reconducted program produces a film – and it is the film that enables anticipation, adjustment and decision.

This model was built for fashion retail. But its logic applies to any environment where multiple actors jointly shape the customer experience: food courts, hospitality, healthcare, banking, airports. Wherever a brand, an environment and a customer coexist, the same question arises – and the same research architecture can answer it. The Ecosystem-Brand-Customer interaction is in constant evolution and constitutes the true lens through which brand performance must be analyzed.



“Beyond Added Data, Added Value – through pertinent combination and benchmarking.”

Abdel Wahab Chaoui,
Associate Director, C&O Marketing



A STUDY PROVIDED BY
C&O MARKETING

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**THE BUSINESS
PERSPECTIVE**



**KEEPING THE CUSTOMER
EXPERIENCE PROMISE,
EVERY DAY**

*THE EXECUTION DISCIPLINE BEHIND
KIABI MOROCCO'S CX STRATEGY*

SAFAE FIKRI

*This interview features **Safae Fikri**, CEO of Modes & Nuances, the exclusive KIABI franchisee in Morocco. The perspective shared in this article refers to KIABI's operations in Morocco under Modes & Nuances, and not to KIABI France as franchisor.*



Mrs. Safae Fikri is the CEO of Modes & Nuances, the exclusive KIABI franchisee in Morocco, and a senior executive with nearly 20 years of experience in retail and distribution. Under her leadership, the KIABI network in Morocco has developed a strong reputation for customer experience excellence, anchored in rigorous operational discipline and a genuine culture of continuous improvement.

A graduate of HEC Paris, Mrs. Safae Fikri began her career in management consulting before joining the public sector as Advisor to the Minister of Tourism, Crafts and Social Economy. She subsequently built her expertise in retail distribution, leading the development of one of Morocco's most recognized fashion networks.

She is also an independent board member of a listed consumer credit company, Secretary General of the FMCR, the federation representing networked commerce within the CGEM, Morocco's main employers' federation, and a member of the Club des Femmes Administrateurs. Her commitment to governance, ethics and business performance makes her one of the respected voices in Moroccan retail leadership.

Modes & Nuances
Exclusive KIABI franchisee in Morocco

kiabi.ma



At KIABI Morocco, customer experience is not treated as a campaign, a slogan, or a layer added to the business. It is managed as an operational and commercial discipline, one that depends on clarity, measurement, consistency, and daily execution.

When asked how she defines customer experience excellence, Mrs. Safae Fikri keeps the answer grounded in the daily reality of families.

“At KIABI, excellence rests on a simple but structuring idea: being genuinely useful in the daily lives of families, in a fluid and consistent way. Our brand offers accessible fashion, style, quality and low prices, designed to meet the needs of families.”

This definition connects the emotional and the operational. The experience must feel simple and reassuring, but that ease depends on very concrete conditions.

“In our context, doing things right from the customer’s perspective means delivering a fluid, simple, warm and reliable experience: a welcoming store, well-presented products, clearly organized departments, available teams, well-maintained fitting rooms and

checkout areas, and above all, the feeling that the entire family can be dressed without complication or unpleasant surprises.”

From a business perspective, this is not secondary. For Mrs. Safae Fikri, customer experience is directly linked to performance.

If she were to write an online review as a customer herself, Mrs. Safae Fikri’s answer would be simple: *“A practical and accessible brand, where everything is designed to make my life easier, whether in-store or online.”*

That description does not overcomplicate the value proposition. In family fashion, customers are often managing budget, time, children, needs, preferences, sizes, and convenience. The experience must reduce friction, not add to it.

As Mrs. Fikri explains, *“A good KIABI experience is a seamless, inclusive and reassuring one, an experience you want to repeat.”*

That idea of repeatability is important. In retail, loyalty is not built only through campaigns or promotions. It is built when customers trust that the next visit will be as simple and reliable as the last one.

“

“Excellence is not about doing something exceptional occasionally. It is about being reliable over time and turning that reliability into business performance.”

DESIGNED EXPERIENCE VS. LIVED EXPERIENCE

Many organizations design customer journeys that look strong on paper but become fragile in practice. In fashion retail, this gap is rarely caused by a lack of intention. It is usually caused by the difficulty of translating intention into consistent execution.

When speaking about how this gap appears most often in the sector, Mrs. Safae Fikri is direct: *“In our sector, the gap appears most often not in the intention, but in the execution. Every brand wants to deliver a smooth, inspiring and service-oriented experience. In reality, it is very concrete details that make the difference: store presentation, staff availability, clarity of the customer journey,*

quality of stock replenishment, price legibility, the fitting room experience, checkout waiting time, and the ability to maintain the right level of service during peak traffic periods.”

This is where the designed experience meets the lived experience. A customer does not experience the strategy documented. The customer experiences the store, the team, the fitting room, the stock, the waiting time, and the ease of completing the purchase.

“You can design very comprehensive customer journeys, but if in-store execution is not up to standard, the experience deteriorates immediately.”



MEASUREMENT AS AN OPERATING SYSTEM

At KIABI Morocco, the gap between intended and lived experience is managed through a set of routines and tools designed to keep the organization close to operational reality.

Mrs. Safae Fikri describes this as a deliberate choice made from the beginning: *“At KIABI in Morocco, we made a structuring choice from the outset: anchoring operational reality at the heart of our management system, through a set of complementary tools: mystery shopping deployed since our launch in Morocco in 2012; very regular audit visits by the franchisor; the Gooddays platform, which enables us to collect, analyze and respond to customer feedback directly from our stores; annual customer surveys and focus groups. We have also set up a WhatsApp group in each store for feedback, as teams are often the first to detect weak signals.”*

The strength of this approach is not only the number of tools used, but the way they are combined. Mystery shopping provides a structured view of execution. Audits reinforce standards. Customer feedback captures perception. Online reviews reveal spontaneous reactions and recurring friction points. Store teams detect weak signals in real time. Annual surveys and focus groups add a broader understanding of how customers perceive the brand and how expectations are evolving.

That reference to store teams is particularly interesting. In customer-facing environments, frontline employees often see changes before they appear in formal reports. They notice hesitation, repeated questions, confusion, frustration, and emerging expectations.

“Annual listening programs, annual barometer, focus groups, also provide valuable insight into how our customers perceive us.” In fashion retail, this broader listening system also helps the organization understand the market context.





Together, these sources create a more complete view of what customers actually experience.

“These tools allow us to step outside internal perception and confront the reality as lived by our customers. They force us to implement concrete corrective actions. The Gooddays tool in particular enables us to measure customer satisfaction and NPS, and to respond directly to customers.”

That ability to step outside internal perception is central. Many customer experience gaps remain invisible because organizations evaluate the experience from the inside out. KIABI Morocco’s approach points in the opposite direction: the operating model must be confronted with external evidence.

This is especially relevant in fashion retail, where customer expectations evolve quickly and are shaped by price, practicality, value for money, purchasing journeys, budget decisions, and digital comparison. In this context, customer experience cannot be interpreted in isolation from the market.

Consistency, therefore, is not left to interpretation: *“Consistency between the intended and the actual experience rests on three levers: measure, manage, and hold accountable. We measure with the right tools, we manage with concrete action plans, and we hold teams accountable through a direct link with quarterly bonuses.”*

This is where customer experience becomes part of management discipline. It is not only measured. It is connected to accountability, action, and performance.

As Mrs. Safae Fikri reinforces it, *“the key remains execution discipline, every single day.”*



MYSTERY SHOPPING AS A CORE LENS

KIABI Morocco has worked with mystery shopping for 14 years. Mrs. Safae Fikri is convinced about the value of the methodology:

“We integrated mystery shopping very early, from our launch in 2012. In our case, there is a clear framework: mystery shopping is part of the franchise contract requirements and is mandated by the franchisor. But beyond this obligation, we quickly saw it as an extremely useful management and improvement tool.”

Mystery shopping is sometimes reduced to compliance checking. In Safae’s explanation, it becomes a way to make the experience visible, structured, and actionable.

“Mystery shopping provides an external, structured and regular view of actual in-store execution. It helps transform topics that might otherwise be perceived as qualitative or subjective into measurable, manageable and actionable subjects. It allows us to concretely assess whether the promise is being kept.”

This is one of the strongest links between research and execution in the interview. The role of research is not simply to report what happened. It is to make the invisible visible, and to turn perceptions into management conversations.



“The key remains execution discipline, every single day.”

FROM INSIGHT TO ACCOUNTABILITY

Measurement only creates value when it changes what happens next: *“Our principle is simple: every insight must produce a visible action. The transition from measurement to action is, for us, the essential part.”*

This is where many organizations struggle. They collect data, generate dashboards, and discuss trends, but the insight does not always reach the store, the team, the routine, or the standard. At KIABI Morocco, the process is designed to move from diagnosis to correction.

“In practice, results are not read as an end in themselves or as a simple dashboard. They serve to identify priority gaps, store by store, and then to implement targeted corrective actions, whether relating to the quality of welcome, commercial availability, respect for the customer journey, fitting room presentation, checkout fluidity, signage, or the relational posture of teams.”

The specificity of these examples is important. Customer experience is translated into concrete operational dimensions: welcome, availability, journey compliance, fitting rooms, checkout, signage, and team behavior.

“We then carry out managerial follow-up: sharing results, assigning accountability, supporting teams, and verifying over time that the correction has taken place. These results influence quarterly bonuses, which naturally strengthens ownership on the ground.”

The connection between insight, action, accountability, and incentives gives the system credibility. It signals that customer experience is not a side topic. It is part of performance.

Mrs. Safae Fikri also stresses that data cannot be separated from responsibility: *“The essential condition is never to dissociate data from operational accountability. An insight is only valuable if it is linked to an owner, an action, a deadline and a follow-up. Otherwise, it remains an interesting comment with no impact.”*

This captures a frequent weakness in organizations: the belief that knowing is the same as improving. It is not. Insight needs ownership.

“The insights from mystery shopping, customer feedback and online reviews must lead to concrete decisions: recalibration of a standard, reinforcement of a vigilance point, managerial coaching, targeted training, or immediate operational correction in-store.”

This is how research becomes operational. It informs standards, coaching, training, and immediate correction: *“What guarantees the transition to action is also the fact that customer experience is not treated as a peripheral topic. It is integrated into network management. Since results partly influence the bonuses of in-store teams, our teams understand that this is not reporting: it is a performance issue.”*

When customer experience is linked to management routines and performance mechanisms, it stops being a communication theme and becomes part of how the business is run.

READING ONLINE REVIEWS BEYOND THE AVERAGE RATING

Online reviews play a specific role in KIABI Morocco's customer experience system. They are not treated only as reputation indicators. They are read as spontaneous evidence of the lived experience: *"They play a key role, as they are the real and spontaneous expression of what customers experience. We do not read them solely in terms of average rating."*

Average ratings can be useful, but they often hide the patterns that require action. Safae's focus is on recurrence, location, topic, and frequency: *"What interests us most are the recurrences: what comes up most often? On which topics? In which stores? With what frequency? Is it about welcome, waiting times, product availability, organization, cleanliness, checkout, or the relationship with sales staff?"*

This approach turns reviews into a diagnostic tool. The value is not only in knowing whether the customer was satisfied. The value is in identifying where the experience repeatedly succeeds or breaks.

"Online reviews have a particular value because they often reveal the gap between the perceived promise and the experience actually lived. They complement mystery shopping perfectly. When multiple signals converge, mystery shopping results, field feedback and online reviews, it becomes a very strong indicator that action is required."





THE INDICATORS THAT MATTER

KIABI Morocco monitors several KPIs directly linked to customer experience, including mystery shopping results, complaints, customer reviews and satisfaction, recommendation and loyalty indicators such as NPS, and the results of franchisor audit visits.

“At KIABI worldwide, the NPS reaches 70, reflecting a strong recommendation capacity. In Morocco, we achieve excellent mystery shopping scores, averaging above 90% across the network, and we work to maintain an NPS in line with the brand’s global standards.”

The figures are strong, but Mrs. Safae Fikri’s interpretation is even more relevant. She does not present customer experience performance as a static score. She frames it as sustained improvement.



“Beyond the figures, the most important indicator remains continuous improvement in execution quality. A strong score at a single point in time is positive; a solid improvement sustained over time is, in my view, far more revealing of a genuine customer culture.”

A strong result can reflect performance at a given moment. Sustained improvement reflects culture, discipline, and management continuity.

THE LEADERSHIP LESSON: USEFUL, EXECUTABLE, MEASURABLE

When asked what advice she would give to leaders who want to move from intention to execution in customer experience, Mrs. Safae Fikri points to a risk that many organizations face: **overcomplication**.

“In an environment where customers can interact with a brand across multiple channels, locations and moments, the customer experience is becoming increasingly rich: omnichannel, service-oriented, community-driven. In this sense, the risk is to over-complicate this brand-customer interaction.”

Her advice is simple and yet powerful:
“Build experiences that are useful, but above all executable and measurable.”

This is a fundamental principle for customer experience leaders: The quality of a designed experience depends not only on how attractive it looks, but on whether the organization can consistently deliver it.

“Customer experience does not play out in the promise, but in its ability to be kept at every interaction. This rests on a simple balance: an ambitious experience, rigorous execution, and a permanent capacity to question oneself.”

That balance between ambition, execution, and humility is at the center of Mrs. Safae Fikri’s leadership perspective. If she had to summarize the secret to sustaining customer experience excellence over time, she would choose one idea: **consistency**.

“If I had to summarize it in one idea, I would say the secret is consistency. Customer experience excellence is not a moment, a campaign, or a slogan. It is a long-term discipline. It is built through repetition, vigilance, and humility too,

because you must be willing to look honestly at the gap between what you want to offer and what the customer actually experiences.”

This willingness to look honestly at the gap is what separates intention from management. It requires the organization to accept that the customer’s reality may not always match the internal view.

“One of the strongest lessons I have learned over the years is that operational details are never small from the customer’s perspective. What the company considers a detail is often, for the customer, the very reality of the brand.”

This is especially true in retail. A sign, a queue, a missing size, a poorly maintained fitting room, or an unavailable team member may look small internally. For the customer, it may define the entire visit.



“Sustaining lasting excellence means successfully holding three requirements together: a clear promise, honest measurement, and a genuine capacity to correct quickly. It is this combination that transforms the ambition of customer experience into a competitive advantage.”



A REFLECTION FROM THE CX CHANNEL TEAM

KIABI Morocco illustrates a disciplined approach to moving from customer experience **intention** to operational **reality**. The promise is accessible fashion for families, but the strength is in how that promise is managed: through measurement, store-level accountability, customer feedback, online reviews, audits, team listening, and continuous correction.

In an industry where the experience is shaped by both emotional and practical factors, brands need to balance personalization with speed and scale. Customers are looking for style, but also clarity, affordability, convenience, availability, and confidence. The experience must feel simple, but the system behind that simplicity cannot be casual.

What stands out in Mrs. Safae Fikri's perspective is the refusal to separate customer experience from business performance. Conversion, basket size, loyalty, advocacy, NPS, mystery shopping results, audits, and team bonuses are all part of the same management conversation.

This matters because customer experience becomes sustainable only when it is embedded into the operating model.

The role of research is also central. Mystery shopping, customer feedback, online reviews, surveys, focus groups, and frontline input each provide a different lens on reality. Together, they help the organization move beyond assumptions and understand where the promise is being kept, where it is weakening, and where action is required.

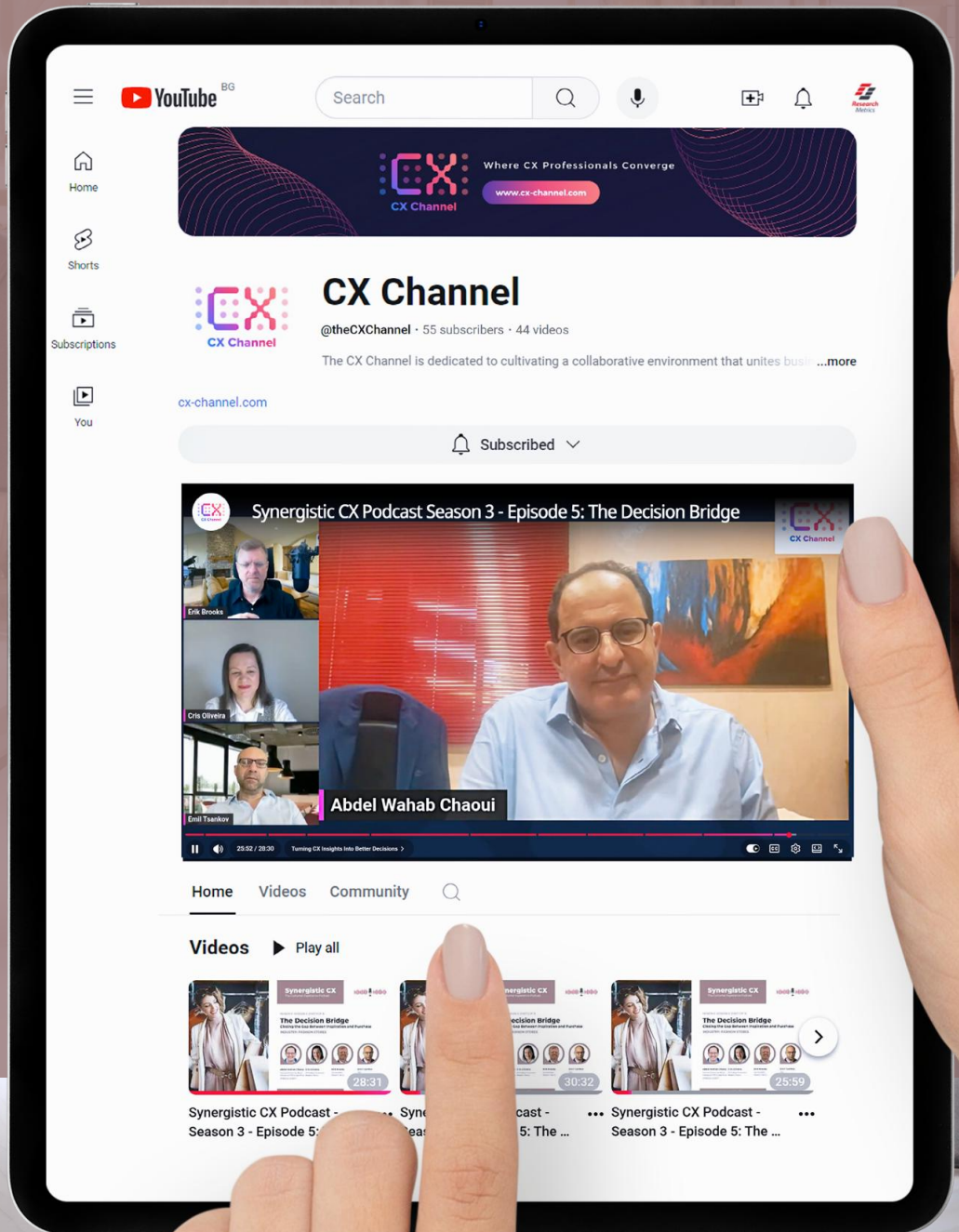
In retail, the details are never small. They are where the brand becomes real. KIABI Morocco's approach shows that lasting customer experience excellence depends on a clear promise, honest measurement, disciplined execution, and the capacity to correct quickly when reality does not match intention.

KIABI Morocco stands out as an example of Customer Experience Excellence.



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With a special appreciation to **Abdallah Omari, Associate Director at C&O Marketing,** for facilitating this interview with Safae Fikri and KIABI Morocco.

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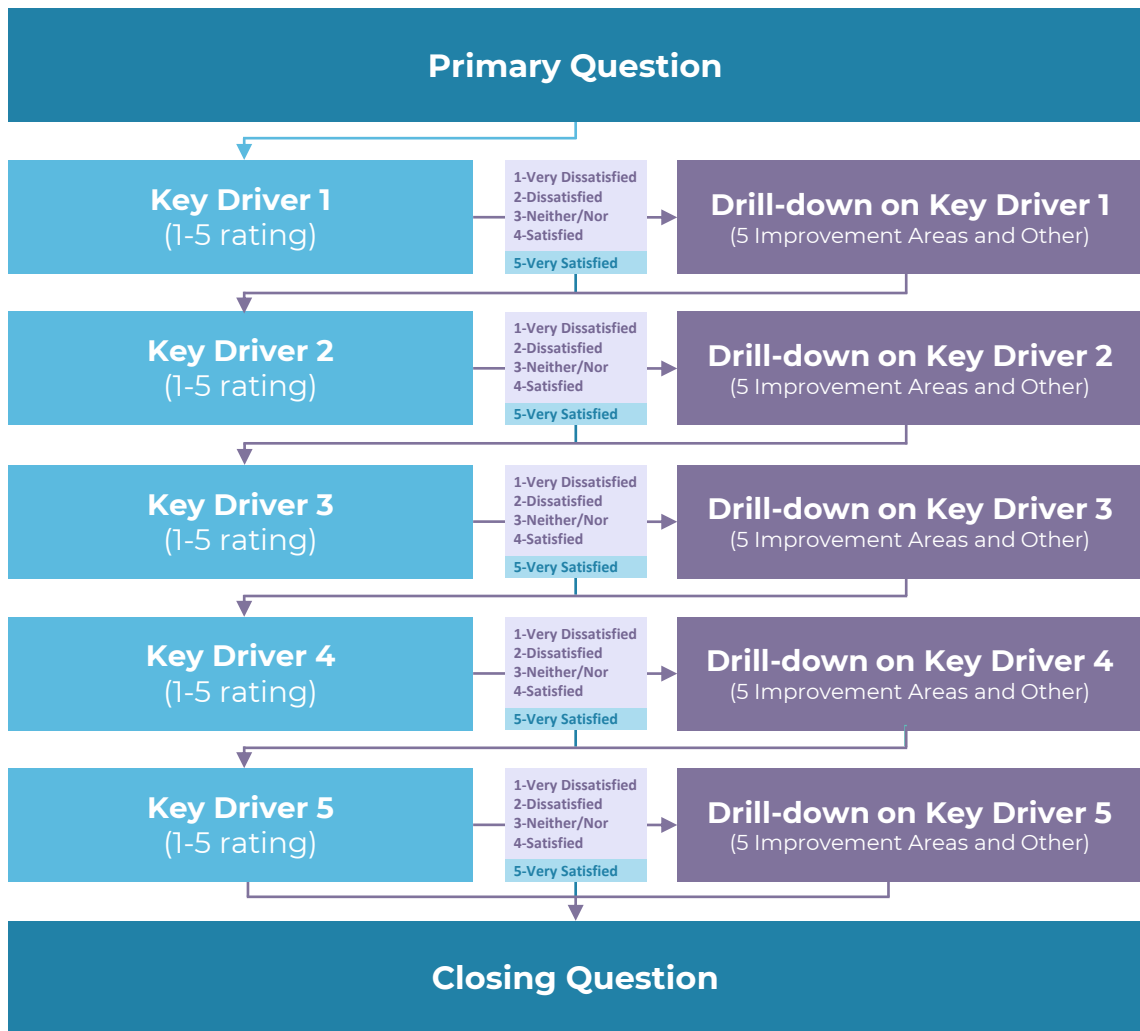
Creating a Starter VoC Survey

Understanding customer feedback in fashion retail means examining the moments that shape confidence throughout the shopping journey. A well-designed VoC survey helps identify where customer expectations are not fully met, which parts of the experience create friction, and the underlying reasons behind dissatisfaction. By capturing feedback across key touchpoints, retailers can better understand where frustration, or disengagement begins to appear.

This section introduces how to create a practical starter VoC survey for fashion stores by building concise questions around the areas that matter most to customers and generate the strongest negative sentiment. Combined with a simple satisfaction scale, these insights help retailers identify friction points and improve the moments that most strongly influence purchase confidence.

CREATING A STARTER VOC SURVEY

A starter VoC survey can be created by harnessing insights from customer sentiments, thoughts, and feelings expressed in their online reviews and **focusing on the topics customers discuss most frequently.**



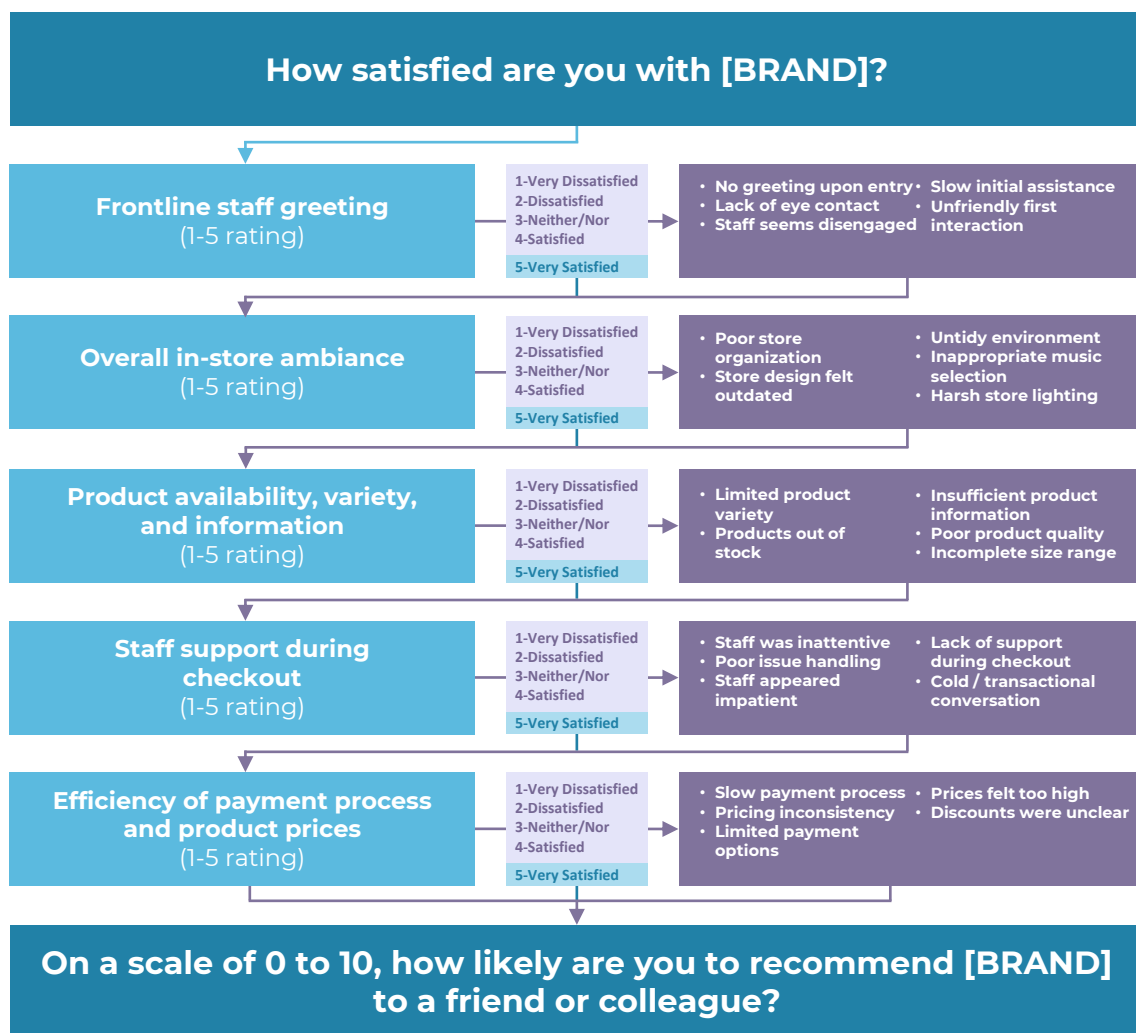
Primary Question: The starting point of the survey, setting the general direction and context. It gathers a quick overall snapshot on the customer's opinion of the brand, company, or product.

Closing Question: The final question posed to the respondent. This can capture valuable insights that might not otherwise fit the general format/structure of the survey.

KEY DRIVER AND DRILL-DOWN QUESTIONS

Primary Question: Rate “How satisfied are you with [BRAND]” on a scale from 1 ('Very Dissatisfied') to 5 ('Very Satisfied')

Closing Question: Evaluate customer retention and advocacy potential, gaining insights into the customer experience.

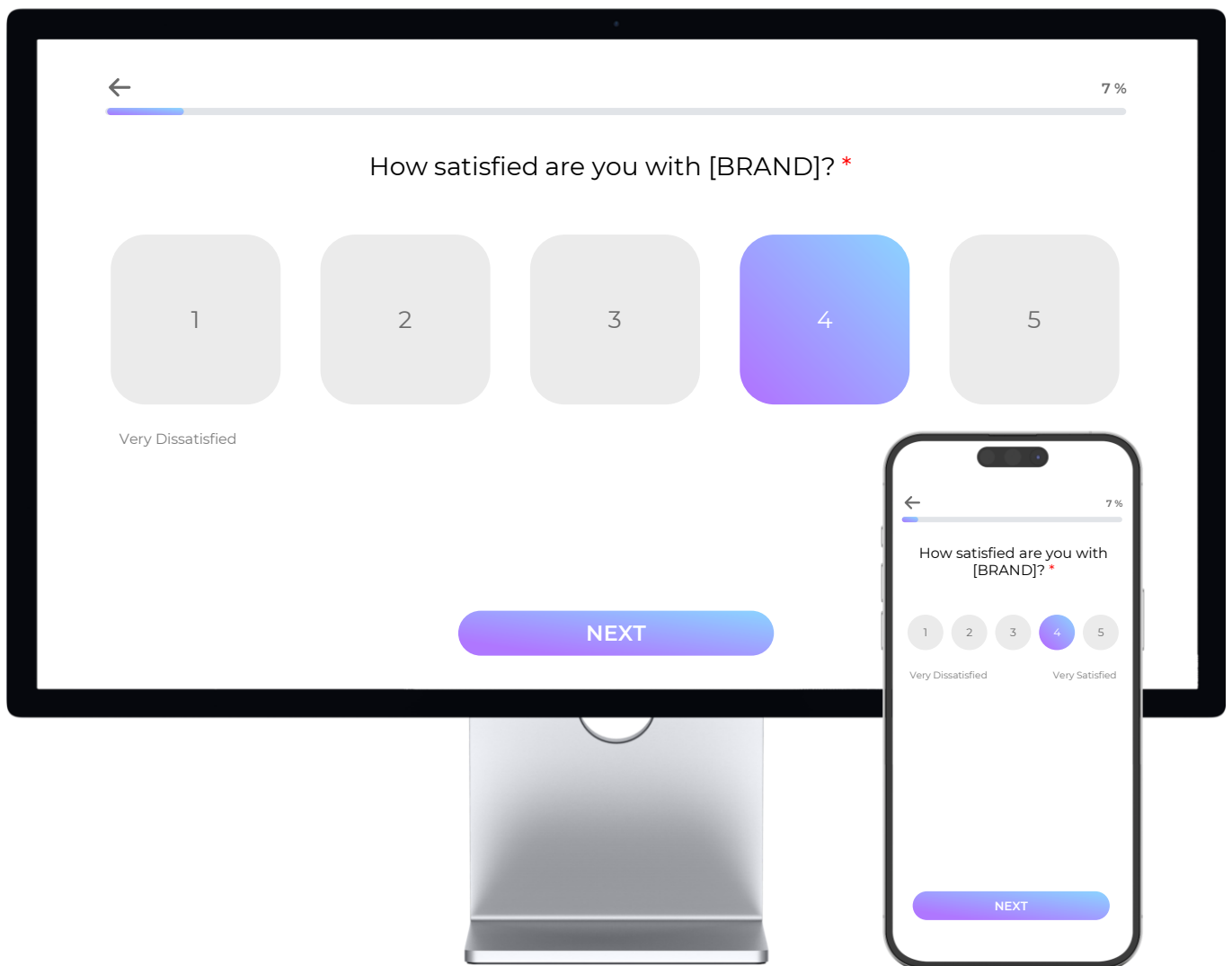


Key Driver Question: Used to assess user satisfaction on the top 5 critical industry topics using a 1-5 scale.

Drill-Down Questions: Respondents not fully satisfied identify their top dissatisfaction factors.

A STARTER VOC SURVEY FOR FASHION STORES

Creating a starter Voice of the Customer (VoC) survey based on insights from online customer reviews ensures that the survey is relevant and focused on actual customer experiences. This approach leads to higher engagement and response rates, as it addresses the issues and trends that matter most to customers. Such a survey provides valuable data for prioritizing business strategies and improving customer satisfaction.



← 15 %

How satisfied were you with the FRONTLINE STAFF GREETING?*

1 2 3 4 5

Very Dissatisfied Very Satisfied

NEXT

← 23 %

What part of the "FRONTLINE STAFF GREETING" fell short?*

No greeting upon entry

Lack of eye contact

Staff seems disengaged

Slow initial assistance

Unfriendly first interaction

Other

NEXT

← 30 %

How satisfied were you with the OVERALL IN-STORE AMBIANCE?*

1 2 3 4 5

Very Dissatisfied Very Satisfied

NEXT

← 38 %

What part of "OVERALL IN-STORE AMBIANCE" fell short?*

Poor store organization

Store design felt outdated

Untidy environment

Inappropriate music selection

Harsh store lighting

Other

NEXT

← 46 %

How satisfied were you with the PRODUCT AVAILABILITY, VARIETY, AND INFORMATION?*

1 2 3 4 5

Very Dissatisfied Very Satisfied

NEXT

← 53 %

What part of "PRODUCT AVAILABILITY, VARIETY, AND INFORMATION" fell short?*

Limited product variety

Products out of stock

Insufficient product information

Poor product quality

Incomplete size range

Other

NEXT

← 61 %

How satisfied were you with the STAFF SUPPORT DURING CHECKOUT AND PAYMENT?*

1 2 3 4 5

Very Dissatisfied Very Satisfied

NEXT

← 69 %

What part of the "STAFF SUPPORT DURING CHECKOUT" fell short?*

Staff was inattentive

Poor issue handling

Staff appeared impatient

Lack of support during checkout

Cold / transactional conversation

Other

NEXT

← 76 %

How satisfied were you with the EFFICIENCY OF PAYMENT PROCESS AND PRODUCT PRICES?*

1 2 3 4 5

Very Dissatisfied Very Satisfied

NEXT

← 84 %

What part of the "EFFICIENCY OF PAYMENT PROCESS AND PRODUCT PRICES" fell short?*

Slow payment process

Pricing inconsistency

Limited payment options

Prices felt too high

Discounts were unclear

Other

NEXT

← 92 %

On a scale of 0 to 10, how likely are you to recommend [BRAND] to a friend or colleague?*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not likely at all Extremely likely

NEXT

VoC SURVEY NEXT STEPS

In this 'starter' VoC survey, we selected the top five key driver questions based on what customers talk about and frequently mention in negative aspects in their online reviews. The drill-down questions were chosen following the same principle.

The VoC Survey Process

	Awareness	Consideration	Conversion	Retention	Advocacy
People	0.03%	25.07%	11.24%	2.15%	0.93%
Product	0.21%	1.08%	8.66%	1.68%	0.23%
Place	0.11%	4.82%	10.57%	0.40%	0.26%
Process	0.07%	3.86%	8.76%	7.56%	0.60%
Price	0.04%	0.42%	7.25%	0.76%	0.33%
Promotion	0.45%	0.17%	0.74%	1.18%	0.38%
Physical Evidence	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

Step 1: Data Analysis

We begin by analyzing online reviews and ratings to create a customer response score matrix. The Marketing Mix-Funnel matrix highlights how different Marketing Mix Elements perform across various Customer Journey Stages.

Step 2: Identify Critical Areas

From the Marketing-Mix Funnel, we identify the top five areas showing the most critical feedback, based on their online reviews and ratings scores.

Step 3: Key Drivers

These areas are selected for deeper examination in the VoC survey. They are converted to questions, following the pattern "How satisfied were you with...", used to assess user satisfaction using a 1-5 scale.

Step 4: Key Driver Details

For each key driver, additional questions are designed and visualized if the driver is scored with a 4 or lower. This direct questioning helps to drill down into the exact reasons behind the customer negative experiences.

Step 5: Data Collection

The VoC survey is distributed and data is collected.

Step 6: Actionable Insights

The collected data reveals specific aspects that negatively affect the overall customer perception of the brand. With this detailed insight, the company can directly target improvements in the critical areas to enhance the customer experience and improve brand reputation.

NOTE: It is up to the CX professional to selectively fine-tune and adjust the key drivers and appropriate drill-down questions, considering the specific needs and objectives of the business.

FRONTLINE STAFF GREETING

Frontline interaction shapes how welcomed and supported customers feel from the moment they enter the store. Staff attitude, attentiveness, product knowledge, and confident guidance all influence shopping comfort, trust, and purchase confidence. Positive interaction also helps reduce hesitation and strengthen emotional connection with the brand.

The top 5 key driver details, followed by an additional 10, offer detailed insight into areas where the **FRONTLINE STAFF GREETING** key driver may fall short.



Top 5 Key Driver Details

- No greeting upon entry
- Lack of eye contact
- Staff seems disengaged
- Slow initial assistance
- Unfriendly first interaction

Additional Key Driver Details

- Staff did not approach proactively
- No assistance offered
- Interaction felt scripted
- Staff lacked product knowledge
- Staff was distracted
- Felt ignored while browsing
- Inconsistent staff attitude
- Staff unavailable on the floor
- Overly pushy assistance
- Lack of personalized attention

OVERALL IN-STORE AMBIANCE

The in-store environment plays an important role in shaping emotional connection and overall perception of the brand. Store atmosphere, layout, lighting, music, and visual presentation influence how enjoyable and inspiring the shopping experience feels. A well-designed environment encourages customers to browse naturally and engage more deeply with products.

The top 5 key driver details, followed by an additional 10, offer detailed insight into areas where the **OVERALL IN-STORE AMBIANCE** key driver may fall short.

Top 5 Key Driver Details

- Poor store organization
- Store design felt outdated
- Untidy environment
- Inappropriate music selection
- Harsh store lighting

Additional Key Driver Details

- Displays looked disorganized
- Poor fitting room cleanliness
- Uncomfortable store temperature
- Weak product presentation
- Lack of atmosphere consistency
- Poor store navigation
- Cluttered aisles
- Unpleasant/strong store scent
- Limited seating or comfort areas
- Weak visual merchandising



PRODUCT AVAILABILITY, VARIETY, AND INFORMATION

Product availability and assortment strongly influence whether customers feel confident in finding suitable options. Variety, size availability, clear product information, and ease of comparison help customers evaluate products more efficiently and reduce uncertainty. Difficulties finding relevant products or accessing clear information can quickly weaken confidence and satisfaction.

The top 5 key driver details, followed by an additional 10, offer detailed insight into areas where the **PRODUCT AVAILABILITY, VARIETY, AND INFORMATION** key driver may fall short.



Top 5 Key Driver Details

- Limited product variety
- Products out of stock
- Insufficient product information
- Poor product quality
- Incomplete size range

Additional Key Driver Details

- Missing popular sizes
- Limited color options
- Inconsistent product availability
- Lack of fabric information
- Difficult product comparison
- Limited new collection options
- Products difficult to locate
- Unclear pricing labels
- Lack of style recommendations
- Outdated collection selection

STAFF SUPPORT DURING CHECKOUT

Checkout interaction represents the final human touchpoint before the purchase is completed. Staff responsiveness, professionalism, and support during payment influence how smooth and reassuring the end of the shopping journey feels. Efficient interaction at this stage helps maintain positive momentum and leaves customers with a stronger final impression.

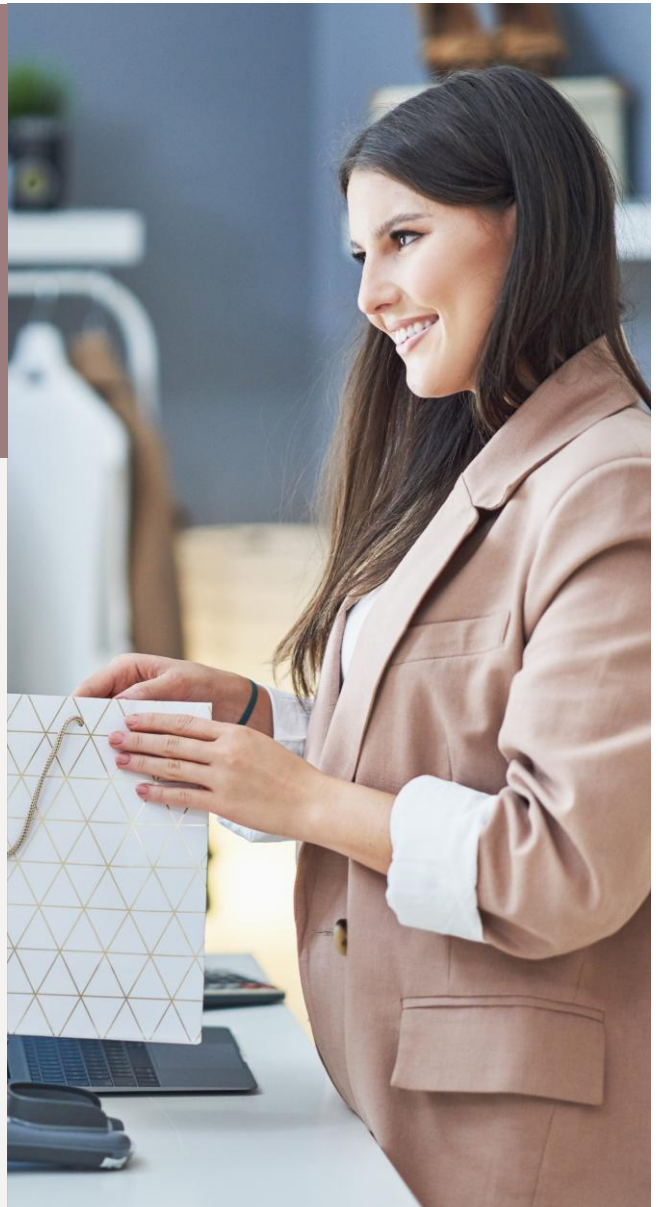
The top 5 key driver details, followed by an additional 10, offer detailed insight into areas where the **STAFF SUPPORT DURING CHECKOUT AND PAYMENT** key driver may fall short.

Top 5 Key Driver Details

- Staff was inattentive
- Poor issue handling
- Staff appeared impatient
- Lack of support during checkout
- Cold / transactional conversation

Additional Key Driver Details

- The staff seems distracted
- Limited problem-solving support
- Weak coordination at checkout
- Checkout interaction felt rushed
- Poor handling of customer questions
- No bag offered at checkout
- Packaging felt careless
- Poor product handling
- No additional item suggestions
- No loyalty program mention



EFFICIENCY OF PAYMENT PROCESS AND PRODUCT PRICES

Payment efficiency and pricing perception strongly affect the final impression customers leave with. Transparent pricing, convenient payment flow, and a clear sense of value help reduce friction and reinforce satisfaction during the final stage of the experience. When pricing feels unclear or payment becomes inconvenient, customer trust can quickly decline.

The top 5 key driver details, followed by an additional 10, offer detailed insight into areas where the **EFFICIENCY OF PAYMENT PROCESS AND PRODUCT PRICES** key driver may fall short.



Top 5 Key Driver Details

- Slow payment process
- Pricing inconsistency
- Limited payment options
- Prices felt too high
- Discounts were unclear

Additional Key Driver Details

- Poor value for money
- Price labels missing
- Long waiting time/queues
- Hidden additional costs
- Promotions not applied correctly
- Complicated discount conditions
- Delayed transaction processing
- Inconvenient refund process
- Payment terminal issues
- Payment confirmation delays

BEYOND THE STARTER TWO MORE KEY DRIVERS

Fashion retail experiences are influenced long before customers enter the store and continue evolving after the purchase is completed. To better capture these moments, the Starter Voice of the Customer (VoC) survey is extended with two additional drivers – **Product Exploration Before the Visit** and **Post-Purchase Communication**.

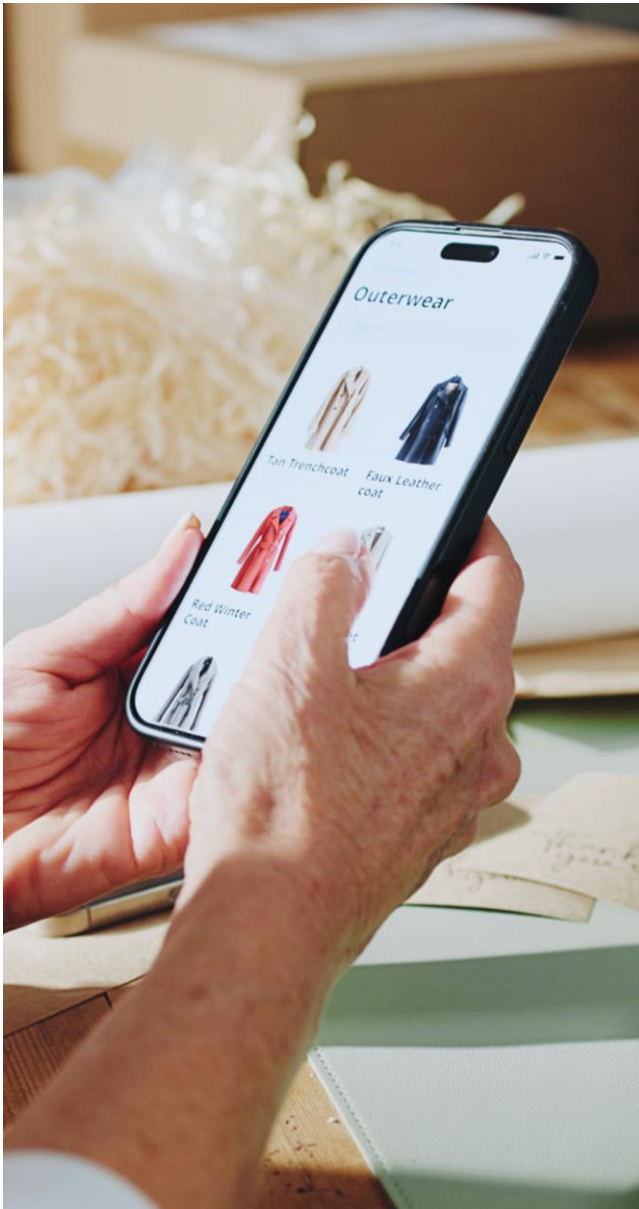
Browsing collections online often influences the decision to visit the store. When navigation feels confusing, information is limited, or products appear inconsistent across channels, customer confidence can quickly decline. Weak follow-up communication after the purchase can also make the relationship feel purely transactional.

When fashion retailers simplify product discovery and maintain relevant communication after the sale, the experience feels more connected and customer-focused. Clear presentation, ongoing engagement, and helpful updates help strengthen trust and encourage repeat visits.

EXPLORING PRODUCTS (ONLINE AND IN-STORE)

The product exploration stage strongly influences whether customers feel motivated to visit the store. Website usability, collection presentation, product visibility, and navigation clarity shape how easily customers can browse styles, compare options, and evaluate whether the brand matches their preferences before making the decision to visit.

The top 5 key driver details, followed by an additional 10, offer insight into areas where the **EXPLORING PRODUCTS (ONLINE AND IN-STORE)** key driver may fall short.



Top 5 Key Driver Details

- Poor website usability
- Difficult product navigation
- Incomplete online assortment
- Confusing product categories
- Limited product visibility

Additional Key Driver Details

- Weak search functionality
- Slow website performance
- Limited filtering options
- Missing product images
- Inaccurate stock visibility
- Difficult size comparison
- Unclear product descriptions
- Outdated collections
- Hard-to-find promotions
- Complicated website navigation

FOLLOW-UP COMMUNICATION AND SUPPORT

Post-purchase communication shapes whether customers feel valued after the transaction is completed. Follow-up messages, support availability, updates, and ongoing engagement influence how connected customers remain to the brand and whether the relationship continues beyond the initial purchase.

The top 5 key driver details, followed by an additional 10, offer a detailed insight into areas where the **FOLLOW-UP COMMUNICATION AND SUPPORT** key driver may fall short.

Top 5 Key Driver Details

- No follow-up communication
- Delayed support response
- No updates on new collections
- Generic promotional messages
- Poor issue resolution

Additional Key Driver Details

- Irrelevant follow-up offers
- Difficult support contact process
- No order status updates
- Lack of personalized communication
- Unclear return communication
- No feedback request after purchase
- Inconsistent post-purchase support
- Slow response to inquiries
- No engagement after purchase
- Support felt automated





PRINCIPLES OF CX: RELEVANCE

HOW RESEARCH HELPS ORGANIZATIONS DETECT THE RELEVANCE DRIFT BEFORE CUSTOMERS MOVE ON

Relevance expires quietly. Customers do not announce the exact moment when a brand begins to lose meaning in their lives. They may still buy. They may still visit. They may still express reasonable satisfaction. Yet the relationship can weaken before the business sees the full consequence.

The first signs are subtle. Customers hesitate longer. They compare more actively. They recommend with less conviction. They become more sensitive to price, effort, clarity, speed, trust, or control. They do not necessarily leave because of one dramatic failure. They begin to move because another option feels closer to what they now value.

This is the relevance drift. **It happens when customer expectations evolve faster than the organization's understanding of value.** The brand may continue to improve, invest, and execute with discipline, but its decisions are guided by assumptions that are starting to age. What once created preference becomes expected. What once felt convenient becomes ordinary. What once seemed acceptable becomes friction.

The danger is not always poor execution. Often, it is good execution against an outdated definition of value.

In customer experience, relevance is the discipline of staying aligned with what customers value as their expectations, behaviors, and priorities evolve. Strong brand recognition, years of market knowledge, and a well-designed journey may create advantage, but they do not protect relevance indefinitely. Relevance is sustained through the ability to keep learning while the customer is changing.

This gives research a more strategic role than many organizations assign to it.

Customer research is often used to evaluate performance: satisfaction, service quality, pain points, journey execution, operational gaps, and customer perception. These responsibilities remain essential. They help organizations understand how the experience is working today and how well the brand promise is being delivered to customers.

“I skate to where the puck is going to be, not where it has been.”

- Wayne Gretzky -



Relevance requires another layer of intelligence. Research must also help leaders detect movement. What is beginning to change? Which expectations are gaining weight? Which frustrations are becoming more frequent? Which benefits are losing value? Which customer groups are recalibrating faster? Where is the company still performing well, but becoming less meaningful? **These questions move research from measurement to foresight.**

Foresight does not mean predicting the future with false certainty. It means reading the present with enough discipline to identify direction. Customer expectations usually shift before satisfaction collapses, complaints escalate, or loyalty weakens. The evidence is often available before the business feels the pressure.

Customer service questions may reveal confusion before frustration becomes visible.

Online reviews may show new language around value, convenience, trust, or effort.. Behavior may change before customers explain why. Frontline teams may notice hesitation before dashboards confirm a trend.

Complaints may expose friction that still appears acceptable in operational reporting. **The value of research lies in connecting these fragments into a coherent reading of customer movement.**

This is where many organizations struggle. They are rich in customer data and poor in customer foresight. They have dashboards, surveys, reviews, complaints, operational metrics, transactional feedback, social listening, and employee observations. Yet these inputs often remain fragmented across functions, each one explaining only part of the customer reality. Relevance requires the organization to see the pattern across them.

Organizations lose relevance when they keep improving what customers are starting to outgrow.

Research protects against this risk by making the drift visible earlier. It helps leaders separate temporary irritation from meaningful change. Some issues reflect isolated dissatisfaction. Others reveal a structural shift in what customers expect from the brand. The discipline lies in knowing the difference. That distinction is essential for decision making.

Organizations should not chase every trend, complaint, or emerging preference with the same urgency. Relevance requires judgment. Research brings structure to that judgment by showing what is recurring, who is affected, where the impact appears, and what business consequence may follow.

The goal is not to follow every movement in the market. The goal is to recognize the changes that may redefine value for the customer. This changes the leadership question. The question is no longer only, "Are customers satisfied today?" A stronger question is: Are we learning fast enough to remain relevant tomorrow?

This is the link between insight and impact. Insight creates impact when it helps the organization act earlier, choose better, and stay aligned with what customers value. It turns research from a retrospective exercise into a source of strategic direction. It gives leaders a way to protect relevance before the market forces the issue.





Relevance belongs among the core principles of customer experience because it connects the present and the future. It asks organizations to understand the customer they serve today while paying attention to the customer who is emerging.

The Core Principle

“Relevance is the discipline of staying aligned with what customers value as their expectations, behaviors, and priorities evolve.”

The Role of Research

“Research must help leaders detect movement, not only measure performance.”

The Strategic Risk

“Organizations lose relevance when they keep improving what customers are starting to outgrow.”

The Leadership Question

“Are we learning fast enough to remain relevant tomorrow?”

The Link to Impact

“Insight creates impact when it helps the organization act earlier, choose better, and stay aligned with what customers value.”

EXCELLENCE IN PRACTICE

EMIRATES SKYWARDS:

LOYALTY AS A JOURNEY, NOT A REWARD



Loyalty is one of the strongest indicators of whether the journey has created lasting value. At its simplest, loyalty can be observed through two critical behaviors: the customer's intention to buy again and the willingness to recommend the product, service, or brand to others. But in business terms, loyalty goes deeper. It is directly connected to brand sustainability.

In highly competitive markets, this matters even more. Brands are no longer competing only on product, price, or availability. They are competing for customers' attention span, trust, time, and share of wallet. In this context, loyalty cannot depend only on the experience during the purchase or use of a product or service. It must be continuously reinforced.

This is where loyalty programs become strategically important. **Loyalty programs are one of the clearest examples of customer insight translated into action.** They are built on a simple but powerful understanding: customers do not remain loyal only because they were satisfied once.

They remain loyal when the brand continues to recognize them, reward them, simplify their choices, and make the relationship feel valuable over time.

A strong loyalty program does not replace customer experience. It extends it. It creates reasons for customers to remain connected to the brand before, during, and after each transaction. It transforms isolated purchases into an ongoing relationship.

The airline **Emirates** is often recognized as an example of customer experience excellence across multiple dimensions: service consistency, premium positioning, global connectivity, and attention to detail. But one of the clearest examples of excellence in practice is its loyalty program, **Emirates Skywards**.

Emirates Skywards is the loyalty program of both Emirates and flydubai, allowing members to earn and spend Skywards Miles across both airlines. This creates a wider travel ecosystem, connecting Emirates' global long-haul network with flydubai's regional and short-haul reach.



The program is structured around four membership tiers: **Blue**, **Silver**, **Gold**, and **Platinum**. Its benefits increase as members progress, including rewards, upgrades, lounge access, and other travel privileges. This tiered structure is important from a CX perspective because it gives customers a visible path of progression. Loyalty is not treated as a static benefit, but as a relationship that can grow.

What makes Emirates Skywards particularly strong is that it is not limited to flights. Members can earn Skywards Miles through travel, hotel stays, car rental, retail, lifestyle partners, and banking partners. They can also use Miles for flights, upgrades, hotel stays, partner rewards, and even donations through the Emirates Airline Foundation.

Many loyalty programs reward transactions.

Emirates Skywards builds an ecosystem.

It gives members more ways to earn, more ways to redeem, and more opportunities to feel that the relationship with the brand has practical value.

The program also includes flexible redemption mechanisms, such as **Cash+Miles**, which allows members to reduce the cash cost of flights, seat selection, excess baggage, and lounge access. This flexibility matters because loyalty programs often fail when rewards feel distant, complex, or inaccessible. By allowing members to use Miles in more practical ways, Emirates lowers the psychological distance between participation and benefit.

Another important element is family relevance. Through **My Family**, Emirates Skywards allows members to pool Miles into a family account, helping households accumulate rewards together. This is especially powerful in travel, where purchase decisions are often collective. Loyalty is not only individual; it can be shared across families, routines, and life moments..



The experiential dimension is also significant. Through **Skywards Exclusives**, members can spend Miles or participate in auctions for special event tickets, invitations, sports, concerts, and lifestyle experiences. This moves loyalty beyond functional rewards. It connects the program to aspiration, access, and memory, three elements that are deeply relevant in premium customer experience.

The scale of the program reinforces its strategic importance. In 2025, Emirates Skywards marked its 25th anniversary and reported 37 million members across 190 countries. Emirates also stated that, over the previous 20 years, the program had distributed nearly 400 billion Miles through more than 100 partners, covering 1,400 flight destinations and 30,000 hotels.

From a customer experience perspective, the lesson is clear: Emirates Skywards is not only a rewards mechanism. It is a relationship architecture.

It supports repeat purchase intention by giving customers reasons to choose Emirates or flydubai again. It supports recommendation by creating benefits and experiences that customers can talk about. It supports brand sustainability by keeping customers connected to the brand across journeys, destinations, families, and lifestyle moments.

The excellence of Emirates Skywards lies in how it translates loyalty into a managed experience. It is not only about earning points. It is about creating continuity. It helps the customer feel recognized, rewarded, and invited to stay within the brand ecosystem.

For CX leaders, this is the real benchmark. A loyalty program should not be evaluated only by enrollment numbers or redemption rates. It should be evaluated by the quality of the relationship it helps build.

A strong loyalty program should not be designed based on assumptions about what customers value. It should be built from multiple streams of evidence: purchase patterns, travel frequency, customer profiles, segmentation, redemption behavior, stated preferences, feedback, and ongoing research into what customers expect from the relationship.

When this evidence is translated into action, loyalty becomes more than a rewards structure. It becomes a managed CX mechanism that recognizes different customer needs, creates relevant benefits, supports retention, and strengthens advocacy.



FROM INSIGHT TO ACTION: 5 LESSONS FROM EMIRATES SKYWARDS

1. **Loyalty must be designed as part of the journey**

Loyalty is not simply what happens after a satisfied customer returns. It is a stage that can be intentionally shaped through recognition, continuity, and meaningful benefits.

2. **Status is a powerful CX mechanism**

Tiered programs work because they give customers a sense of progression. The customer is not only earning Miles; they are moving through a relationship with the brand.

3. **Rewards must feel usable, not distant**

A loyalty program loses strength when value feels difficult to access. Flexible redemption options make the benefit more immediate, practical, and emotionally rewarding.

4. **Loyalty becomes stronger when it reflects real life**

Family pooling recognizes that travel is often planned, paid for, and experienced collectively. This makes the program more relevant to how customers actually live.

5. **Advocacy grows when loyalty creates stories**

Exclusive experiences, upgrades, and special access give customers something to remember and talk about. This is where loyalty moves from retention to recommendation.



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THE CUSTOMER SUMMIT

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IS CONVENIENCE BECOMING CUSTOMER WORK?

This month, The CX Channel team attended an event at Microsoft headquarters in Lisbon, an important moment for the customer experience community, considering how technology was addressed inside of one of the tech giants.

The **Customer Summit | International**, organized by **Conquist**, brought together leaders from Portugal, Brazil, Cape Verde and Angola to discuss customer experience, customer success, employee experience, artificial intelligence, corporate culture and the future of customer relationships.

At a time when customer experience is often dominated by technology, automation, platforms, and AI, the summit offered a different perspective: CX is not becoming less human. If anything, it needs to become more human, more inclusive, and more conscious of what customers actually live. Customers are thirsty for humanity. And that is also felt across the workplace.

Customer experience is lived across the organization. It is shaped by executives, frontline teams, support teams, technology, operations, sales, marketing, and every function that influences what the customer ultimately receives.

One of the strongest messages came from **Manuela Doutel Haghighi, Global Customer Experience & Success Director at Microsoft**, co-organizer of the summit and keynote speaker.

“Without internal culture, there is no external experience. Tools help. Frameworks guide. But culture decides whether the experience actually happens. AI has evolved, data has multiplied, and automation has scaled. But the true differentiator remains empathy, context, and culture, because AI with humanity is what truly builds trust.”

Manuela Doutel Haghighi



Another powerful reflection came from Marta Gonzaga, of Global Watch, who addressed the degradation of customer experience in everyday life. Her point challenged one of the most repeated assumptions in modern service design: that self-service is always about convenience and speed.

Good self-service gives customers control. Poor self-service simply transfers work to them. Today, many customers are not only being asked to choose, buy, and pay. They are also expected to scan, weigh, pack, search, download, register, authenticate, troubleshoot, and learn new systems across every sector.

At the supermarket, customers select products, weigh vegetables, scan items, pack bags, and complete payment. In retail stores, they search for sizes, navigate stock availability, and check themselves out. In restaurants, QR codes replace menus, ordering, and sometimes human interaction. Across sectors, apps multiply, passwords accumulate, and processes become fragmented.

What is presented as convenience can easily become cognitive burden. This is an important warning for customer experience leaders. Not every digital solution improves the experience. Not every automation removes friction. Not every self-service journey creates autonomy. Sometimes, it simply shifts operational effort from the company to the customer.



This is especially relevant as organizations accelerate their use of artificial intelligence. Chatbots, intelligent agents, and automated service models can create efficiency and scale. But they only create value when they respect human context: age, literacy, urgency, emotion, vulnerability, and the customer's actual ability to navigate the process.

Automation without explanation can become exclusion. That is why Customer Experience, Customer Success, and Employee Experience cannot be treated as separate buzzwords. There is no sustainable customer experience when teams are exhausted. There is no customer success when customers cannot use, understand, or benefit from what they have bought. And there is no real AI transformation when organizations have the tools but not the maturity to use them well.

Manuela Doutel Haghighi also highlighted the importance of listening to the voice of customers.

"Too often, customer feedback is treated as something to collect, classify, report, and store. But the voice of the customer is not passive commentary. It is a management input. It shows where expectations are rising, where friction is accumulating, where trust is weakening, and where organizations need to change. In many cases, the most meaningful improvements begin with complaints that were properly heard."

Manuela Doutel Haghighi

As we close this edition of Synergistic CX, with a theme of "From Insight to Action", the Customer Summit reinforced a central message: listening is not enough. Insight only creates value when it changes decisions, behaviors, and experiences.



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