

Pop-ups, Ephemerality, and Consumer Experience: The Centrality of Buzz

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ABSTRACT Pop-up stores are retail solutions that suddenly appear and then disappear—whether days, weeks, or months later. Multiple brands have created pop-ups across a range of product categories in major international markets. They are characterized by their *ephemerality* but also by the *experience* realized during the consumer's visit to the store. Our thesis is that positive response to pop-ups depends on two major factors: (1) the benefits received by consumers who visit pop-ups and (2) the buzz that is generated, especially through social media, where consumers share their pop-up visit experiences. Although little research has investigated pop-ups, we build on the literature from different fields, especially consumer behavior, sociology, marketing, psychology, modeling of social media, and economics to develop theoretical propositions. The ephemerality of pop-ups and the emotional responses they provoke are critical explanations in our conceptualization of consumers' response.

Much has been discussed about the ephemeral behavior of today's consumer (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017). It is suggested that less value is placed on permanence and ownership. This is manifested in the shared economy (Zervas, Proerpio, and Byers 2014) across product categories such as transportation (e.g., Uber), hospitality (e.g., Airbnb), and fashion (e.g., Rent the Runway).

Consumers also allegedly are more interested in experiences than previous generations (Carter and Gilovich 2012; Bhattacharjee and Mogilner 2013). Schmitt (1999) contrasts traditional marketing with practices that intend to create holistic experiences for consumers. Thus, we see mall owners scrambling to make malls more active experiences by adding not only restaurants and movie theaters but also sports options, such as gyms and ice skating rinks, and entertainment for children.

Our focus in this article is on a concept that combines ephemerality and experience. Marketers increasingly have been adding *pop-ups* as a vehicle to reach consumers. By this term we mean stores that literally pop up for a limited period of time and then disappear (de Lassus and Freire 2014). As such, the defining characteristic of a pop-up is its ephemerality. This type of store has existed for seasonal goods (such as Halloween), but our interest is in pop-ups that both are

ephemeral and offer a novel experience. We would argue that Halloween stores may be ephemeral but that the in-store experience is predictable and lacking in novelty from year to year. Similarly, some stores offer a novel experience, such as the nautically themed Louis Vuitton store in Singapore's Marina Bay, designed by Moshe Safdie, but it is not temporary or ephemeral. Pop-ups that are both ephemeral and experiential have appeared recently in luxury goods, fashion, automobiles, and even fast-moving consumer goods (Passy 2017).

The ephemerality of pop-ups seems to be compatible with the values of today's consumer. Roberts (2014) provides an alarmist vision of today's society built on instant gratification. Instant social approval is sought on social media sites, such as Instagram and Snapchat. The notions of immediacy and enjoyment contained in Roberts's vision of an instant gratification society are consistent with our focus on ephemerality and novel experiences. Pop-ups can be considered within the set of instruments that marketing managers have at their disposal to reach potential consumers. In the luxury space, for example, the objective has been to complement flagship stores and to create additional *touch points* to encourage consumers to experience the brand in a more accessible and somewhat less daunting environment. In the market

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for fashion, the ephemerality of pop-ups is compatible with the ephemeral nature of fashion brands. They represent a *match*: the brand and the pop-up complement each other (Berthon et al. 2009; de Lassus and Freire 2014).

Our intent is not to focus on why brands utilize pop-ups, but rather why consumers frequent them and how they react after engaging in a pop-up experience. Nevertheless, in interviews with senior executives to gain background understanding of pop-ups, we ascertained that short-run sales generally are not the objective. Rather, the objectives for established brands are related to brand enhancement and to reach customers who might be intimidated by the brand's flagship store (Dion and Arnould 2011). Pop-ups potentially build brand value and may reach a slightly different demographic segment than the brand's mainstream consumers. For newly emerging retail concepts, pop-ups may substitute for a lack of existing store locations and act as a prelude to the selection of site locations: the dominant objective is to build brand awareness. Recently, such startups as Away (suitcases), Allbirds (casual shoes), and Warby Parker (eyeglasses) all have done pop-ups before committing to bricks and mortar. In London, "Boxpark," a pop-up mall, provides space for new brands to gain consumer reaction. It is a low-cost means to test new business concepts. In New York, "Story" is a new retail concept that takes the point of view of a magazine,

changes like a gallery, and sells things like a store, reinventing itself completely every 4–8 weeks.

Our conceptualization of consumer reactions to pop-ups is represented graphically in figure 1. The thesis is that the image of the brand is reinforced by pop-ups because of the buzz that is generated. Although the extent of such buzz and its effectiveness vary depending on a number of moderators, buzz appears as a central mediating factor in our conceptual model. Buzz occurs in large part as a function of the experience generated when consumers visit pop-ups. We consider first what determines the likelihood of a pop-up visit and, second, the consumer experience resulting from such a visit. The determinants are shown on the leftmost side of figure 1; they concern characteristics related to individual consumers, as well as the characteristics of the pop-up itself. Companies, of course, continue using communication media to promote the pop-up using paid (e.g., traditional advertising) and owned media (e.g., brand websites). Given that the literature has been abundant on these topics and does not differ for pop-ups versus brand communication in general, our model omits these factors to concentrate on what is specific to pop-ups.

Consumer responses are shown on the right side of figure 1; we consider the responses in terms of brand awareness, brand image, and brand loyalty, three of the variables

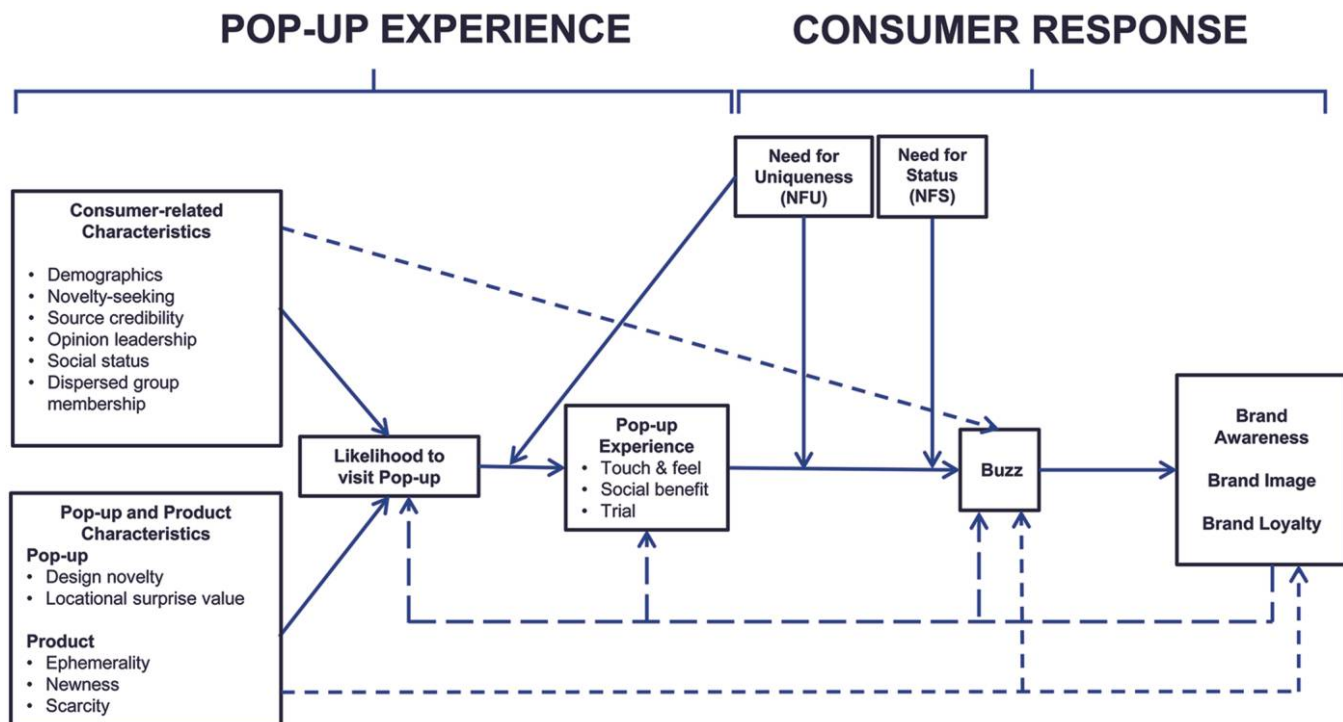


Figure 1. Conceptual model.

on which pop-ups are expected to have the strongest impact. We now justify our thesis and develop our conceptual framework with key research propositions that determine the nomological coherence of our theoretical framework. Before moving to the propositions, however, the concept of buzz needs to be clarified, especially in terms of comparison with the well-researched concept of word of mouth.

THE CONCEPT OF BUZZ

Although *buzz* is a commonly used term, it should be distinguished from the concept of word of mouth (WOM). The notion of buzz is derived from several streams of research, mostly in communication theory and sociology, but has strong roots in the diffusion of innovation literature within marketing and rural sociology where WOM is a central concept (Robertson 1971; Rogers 1995). More recently, with the ability that consumers have to interact electronically through social media, the notions of *marketing buzz*, *buzz marketing*, or *stealth marketing* have received considerable attention from managers (e.g., Edelman and Salsberg 2010), lawyers (e.g., Sprague and Wells 2010), and academics (e.g., Kaikati and Kaikati 2004; Roy and Chattopadhyay 2010; Magnini 2011). However, although *buzz* finds its foundation in the WOM and interpersonal communication literature, it goes beyond WOM.

The origin of buzz is an intense amount of WOM (or, more broadly, communication by consumers among themselves, in person, or electronically). Media coverage can contribute to such buzz, either as an independent source or as a follow-up to the messages generated by consumers. In the latter case, media coverage and the messages generated by consumers are *earned media*, as they are not paid for and “not directly generated by the company or its agents” (Stephen and Galak 2012, 625). In fact, Stephen and Galak (2012) find evidence that social media activity drives earned media activity.

WOM concerns interpersonal social influence as a process—frequently dyadic—whereby innovators or experts convey information to acquaintances searching for credible information in order to reduce purchase uncertainty and risk. The construct of buzz may be initiated by individual consumers but is a social phenomenon that involves multiple members of a social system rather than a dyad of consumers. Such a phenomenon only occurs when a threshold of communication within the social system is reached. Contrarily to a single insect that makes a buzzing, humming sound, a single consumer cannot create buzz, even if a single individual can initiate the process that will lead to buzz.

The extant research stream on WOM, particularly within the area of new product diffusion, focuses on information flows and thus has taken an information/cognitive processing approach. The analysis of social influence through network theories is also grounded in the notion of information flow (Burt 1987), most of the time in a single direction, although recent models of networks allow reciprocity of exchanges, especially in the context of specialized network communities (Schreier, Oberhauser, and Prügl 2007; Moe and Trusov 2011; Lu, Jerath, and Vir Singh 2013).

The internet revolution has changed the consumer information-sharing context to the point that one person potentially can reach thousands of recipients in one click. With buzz, even if a single person initiates the process, a rapid multiplicity of exchanges is required in order to reach the threshold that transforms single messages into buzz. Therefore, the network of communication messages is very complex, implying multiple persons simultaneously in the communication loop with feedback to the senders by anyone in the network. Although buzz is an extension of WOM, which is still at the root of a buzz phenomenon, the multiplicity and the complexity of the communication patterns change its nature with a loss of identification of the real source of information and away from cognitive information processing that is typical of a WOM process.

Cognitive Information Processing versus Emotion Transfer

The information flow process of WOM corresponds to cognitive information processing by the recipient of the information. The information processed is stored in memory, then analyzed relative to the goals of the individual, which results in an evaluation and decision about potential purchase (Bettman 1979). Buzz, in contrast, finds its root in the exchange of emotions born out of the experience of the individual who initiates this exchange to a community of friends or *aficionados*, or even more broadly to the general public in a large social network. Unlike WOM, the receiver of buzz does not necessarily engage in cognitive processing of the information provided but is generally persuaded through an affect transfer process (Wright 1975; Herr et al. 1996).

The intensity of buzz creates a sense of excitement that goes beyond the information usually conveyed in one-on-one interpersonal communications. Pop-ups are instruments of buzz marketing for companies that serve as a means of leveraging interpersonal communication to encourage consumers to continue the brand discussion.

Delayed/Long-Term versus Immediate/Ephemeral

The effects of WOM are delayed because it requires that the receiver processes the information, stores it into memory, and recalls the conclusion of the processing or reprocesses the stored information. The results of this form of processing are typically stable over time (unless goals or context change). On the other hand, buzz has an immediate effect through the transfer of emotions, but by definition, emotions are short-lived (Fisher 2000; Gilbert 2001; Fredrickson and Branigan 2005). However, because they affect the outcome directly in terms of consumer perceptions, brand image, and preferences, these effects can be substantial. Although the impact is likely to dissipate quickly, some residual effect can be expected so that frequent reinforcement of such emotions can create a cycle with a positive trend in the long run on attitudes, brand image, and potentially sales.

Monotonic Function versus Threshold Level

As indicated, buzz involves an intense level of communications within a network. WOM implies a process of influence that requires processing that, at the aggregate level, is reflected by a diffusion pattern represented by the S-shaped curve (Gatignon and Robertson 1985; Rogers 1995). Such a curve, albeit nonlinear, is monotonically increasing over time. The pattern observed for buzz is different in that buzz goes from silence to reaching a peak expeditiously and then tends to disappear very quickly, often in a matter of days. Therefore, buzz is an ephemeral phenomenon, much like a pop-up store.

Thus, the focus of this research is on consumer reactions to pop-up retailing environments that are both experiential in nature and ephemeral. Such pop-ups are designed to surprise consumers and to deliver a particularly enjoyable experience, engaging the consumers in the store in a way that may initiate a process of buzz. Our thesis is that retailing environments that exhibit experiential characteristics and are ephemeral (e.g., luxury pop-ups) present a specific type of retailing environment that functions differently from “permanent” locations because it involves different processes and needs to be managed differently.

To summarize, buzz is an ephemeral phenomenon initiated by a WOM process that only occurs with high levels of communication intensity and when, rather than pure informational content, strong emotions are spread. With this definition of the concept of buzz and knowing how it differs from WOM along several dimensions presented above, we now turn to our conceptualization of how consumers

respond to pop-ups and to the centrality of buzz in our conceptual framework.

DETERMINANTS OF CONSUMER VISITS TO POP-UPS

Given the existence of a pop-up, the initial question is whether consumers are likely to visit. Apart from the usual segmentation criteria, the specific factors that affect the likelihood of a consumer visit fall into two major categories: (1) the design characteristics of the pop-up and (2) the product characteristics.

Design Characteristics of the Pop-up

Novelty is a defining dimension of consumer interest in pop-ups. Online shopping has changed the consumer experience. As a result, it has been suggested that there is a consumer *malaise* when it comes to expending energy on offline shopping. Mall traffic is down, new retail space is down, and consumers are demanding ever faster deliveries (Chen, Kernan, and Blackledge 2017). Novelty is akin to the newness concept in the new products and services literature (e.g., Calantone, Chan, and Cui 2006), which includes the notions of originality and uniqueness (Moldovan, Goldenberg, and Chattopadhyay 2011).

Pop-ups, we would suggest, overcome the sameness/boredom factor. Pop-ups are frequently strong on aesthetics and utilize unique imagery to exude novelty. Kate Spade’s “yurk” pop-up in Bryant Park in New York is distinctive from a design standpoint, as is Prada’s beautiful pop-up at Place Beauvau in Paris, which is reminiscent of the Maribeau Bridge. The explanations for consumer interest that have been provided in the consumer behavior literature rely on consumer cognitions and the notion of optimal stimulation level (Steenkamp and Baumgartner 1992). For example, Meyers-Levy and Tybout (1989) invoke the lack of congruence with existing cognitive schemas to explain such novelty effects. It is the schema discrepancy that determines what is *unexpected* (Derbaix and Vanhamme 2003). This suggests that novelty implies something unexpected or with surprise value. However, even if related to the concept of surprise, it is distinct because surprise is considered by many researchers in psychology as an emotion (Derbaix and Vanhamme 2003) involving a more affective and holistic process (Petty and Cacioppo 1986).

Pop-ups in nontraditional locations and without announcements of when they will appear and disappear create an emotional state of surprise, which generates excitement and which may lead to buzz. As suggested by de Lassus and

Friere (2014, 61), pop-ups can be seen as an “event-centered form of brand communication.” Nevertheless, borrowing on the brand extension literature, the design must fit with the image of the product offerings (Aaker and Keller 1990; Park, Milberg, and Lawson 1991; Bridges, Keller, and Sood 2000). More precisely, from a psychological perspective, what matters is the cognitive consistency between the product offerings and the pop-up design (Osgood and Tannenbaum 1955; Heider 1958; Tauber 1988; Loken and Roedder John 1993).

The concept of optimal stimulation level (OSL) is summarized by Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1992) as a preference for “intermediate levels of stimulation” (434). Such stimulation is obtained by having individuals “engage in exploration of the environment” (Steenkamp and Baumgartner 1992, 434). It is this stimulation that affects the extent to which consumers exhibit variety-seeking, risk-taking, and innovative behavior. Although some level of stimulation is required to fight boredom, which pop-ups do, individuals will reach a level (that differs across individuals) beyond which the effect of the stimulation starts decreasing (leading to an inverted U-shape effect on behavior). Therefore, this theory also appears to explain how critical the surprise value of pop-ups is for stimulating consumers’ interest but also why the pop-up’s ephemerality is fundamental to its effectiveness.

Proposition 1: The more novel the design and the greater the surprise value of a pop-up, the higher the probability of a consumer visit to the pop-up.

Product Characteristics

Ephemerality (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017) is highly consistent with the notion of pop-ups (Janssen et al. 2014). As Coco Chanel famously said, “Fashion is what goes out of fashion.” Consumers who recognize the ephemerality of fashion may also relate to and value the ephemerality of a pop-up. It would seem that the more ephemeral the product offering, the greater the feeling of urgency to realize its benefits and, consequently, the greater the potential consumer interest.

Proposition 2: The more ephemeral the product offering, the higher the probability of a consumer visit to the pop-up.

Similar to the notion of newness of the design of the pop-up discussed in proposition 1, the newness of the product

also comes into focus. Many consumers are particularly oriented toward newness and variety seeking (Sevilla, Zhang, and Kahn 2016) and more attracted to pursuing new alternatives. It would seem more difficult for a well-established brand to engender interest in a pop-up—unless, of course, the brand has been unavailable to most consumers or the brand is able to design a pop-up with a high level of novelty. Well-established brands have developed an image that is often based on dimensions that relate to a constancy of look and feel. Pop-ups are associated with the notion of novelty so that newer brands may be more congruent with the image of pop-ups and are thus more likely to achieve cognitive consistency (Osgood and Tannenbaum 1955; Heider 1958).

Proposition 3: The newer the product concept, the higher the probability of a consumer visit to the pop-up.

This then leads to an additional dimension of the product: its perceived scarcity. Many brands, especially in fashion, walk a fine line between availability and scarcity. Scarcity, as a generalization, is believed to enhance the value proposition for the consumer (Lynn 1991; Jung and Kellaris 2004; Gierl and Huettl 2010), and luxury brands pursue a strategy of limited distribution and communications that suggests exclusivity. Kapferer and Bastien (2012), in their book on luxury strategy, take this to an extreme when they suggest that luxury brands should “not respond to rising demand” and should “make it difficult for clients to buy” (69–71).

Proposition 4: The greater the perceived brand scarcity, the higher the probability of a consumer visit to the pop-up.

POP-UPS AND BUZZ

Social media have become central to the marketing of many brands. Pop-ups, with their unexpected, novel, and ephemeral nature, represent an event worth spreading news about on social media sites. The motivation for posting such messages comes from the utility gained by these consumers who can then signal how *in touch* they are by their ability to identify novel events (Lee et al. 2018). The ephemerality of the store creates a sense of urgency not to miss the opportunity.

Berger (2014), in his treatise on WOM, identifies the reinforcing of shared views as a motivation for WOM. Being among the first to identify a pop-up to friends is a form of

social bonding and creates value for both the communicator and the receiver. Companies can use this mechanism to generate buzz in social media (Briard 2017) and through traditional media reach a population well beyond those that visit the store (Horyn 2004). A logical requirement for an ephemeral marketing action, such as a pop-up, to be effective is that it generates traffic and buzz. Therefore, in this section we are particularly interested in understanding how pop-ups can generate buzz, both indirectly and directly, from the pop-up experience (Jahn et al. 2018). The former refers to individuals who visit the pop-up and who may subsequently engage in social media postings about the pop-up experience; the latter refers to buzz initiated by individuals who do not visit the pop-up but hear about it through earned media. Furthermore, given the high emotional content of both the pop-up and the buzz surrounding it, we are also interested in explaining the nature of these emotional reactions.

Likelihood of Engaging in Buzz Independent of Pop-up Experience

The literature on interpersonal influence suggests that influence does not play the same role in all product categories: this applies particularly to buzz with 10% of consumer-packaged goods accounting for 85% of the buzz (Niederhoffer et al. 2007; Berger and Schwartz 2011). In a field experiment with individuals who agreed to report on their WOM activities (number of reports), Berger and Schwartz (2011) provide evidence that products that are cued more by the environment and that are more publicly visible (or more novel, original, and creating surprise) receive more WOM activity. Fashion brands and luxury brands that tend to be more original and publicly visible can be targets of intense personal communication exchanges, especially through digital social media (de Lassus and Freire 2014; Klein et al. 2016; Taube and Warnaby 2017). The main reason emanates from the importance of the brand experience and consumers' engagement in luxury markets (Taube and Warnaby 2017). Pop-ups offer an access point to luxury brands that become "more approachable and less formal" (Klein et al. 2016, 46). The high symbolism (Hirschman 1981) of luxury brands, but also of hedonic products more generally, makes them capable of generating excitement and (positive) emotions that lead to buzz.

Proposition 5: Buzz from a pop-up is more likely to occur for brands with hedonic benefits, in particular for fashion and luxury brands.

The role of *influentials* can be linked to research on networks. In particular, the critical concept of *centrality* (Iyengar, Van den Bulte, and Lee 2015) is relevant in the context of today's retailing landscape and more particularly of pop-ups. The centrality of a network member has been shown to be strongly related to the time of adoption of certain types of innovations. A central individual reflects the values and norms of the network social system and is likely to engage in earlier adoption of innovations that reflect the values of the system. Consequently, a central individual is likely to influence the diffusion of innovations that tend to be incremental as opposed to more radical.

By contrast, individuals that are *marginals* in the network are those who have key contacts outside the network and have the potential to be a bridging function across groups (Weimann 1982). Such marginals are consequently exposed to more varied groups, using perhaps different products or brands that are not familiar to the member's network. Consequently, marginals may be more likely to initiate buzz and influence their networks with products that break with the values and norms of the social system. This corresponds to Granovetter's (1973) concept of *strength of weak ties*.

Over time, however, these boundary spanners may become recognized as innovators and influentials, and they may take more central positions in their social network (Becker 1970). This issue of network formation and social learning leading to particular structures of networks is an important area of research in economics and social science (Backstrom et al. 2006; Bénabou and Tirole 2006; Acemoglu et al. 2011), with major implications for marketing (Gatignon 2010; Goldenberg, Libai, and Muller 2010), education (Calvo-Armengol, Patacchini, and Zenou 2009), and politics (Theriault 2008). Understanding the impact of a consumer's position in a network and the evolution of a consumer social network structure is especially relevant in today's markets, which are often dominated by social media communications.

Proposition 6: Individuals with marginal positions in their social network are more likely to initiate buzz about pop-ups.

Social media have been powerful means of diffusing information and even sometimes spreading rumors that may lack legitimacy. Research on WOM provides evidence that more positive than negative information tends to be exchanged (Godes and Mayzlin 2004; East, Hammond, and Wright 2007; Berger and Milkman 2012). In fact, such a *positivity bias* is well established (Godes and Mayzlin 2009)

and is typically explained by the fact that more people are likely to participate in positive than negative exchanges (East et al. 2007).

Proposition 7: Buzz is more likely to involve the transfer of positive reactions about pop-ups.

Another factor that explains the extent and valence of WOM is the consumer's loyalty to the brand and knowledge of the product category when generating communication. Loyal and knowledgeable consumers are more likely to share their experience with others (Gatignon and Robertson 1985). However, loyal customers are more likely to generate WOM when they are dissatisfied. While some of the information that loyal customers spread is positive, WOM also includes negative information (Bowman and Narayandas 2001). Similarly, Dubois, Bonezzi and de Angelis (2016) find that interpersonal closeness relates to the level of positivity in social communication. The argument is that consumers "protect" their friends with more balanced information about products, whereas they share more positive information with those who are not close to them.

This highlights the importance of paying attention to loyal customers when opening pop-ups that may be directed at a somewhat different segment of the population whose perceptions and motivations may be different from those of loyal customers (de Lassus and Freire 2014). Buzz may go beyond networks of friends and aficionados and reach individuals who do not share the closeness and similarities of smaller networks. As a consequence, the negative information initially spread by loyal customers to their friends may dominate as it reaches individuals outside their communities. This phenomenon is accentuated by research results by De Angelis et al. (2012): they caution researchers and firms to distinguish between information given by those who have experience with the product and those who share information they hear from others. The contradiction concerns the fact that those with experience with the product tend to provide more positive information. However, secondary WOM is notably different and tends to be more negative (Hornik et al. 2015). This has important implications for the process of diffusion of information, as it would mean that as information spreads, buzz becomes more negative. Given that negative information tends to be more influential than positive information (Arndt 1967; Mizerski 1982; Richins 1983) and that it is more viral (Hornik et al. 2015), these arguments provide another reason for limiting the time that pop-ups are opened. Therefore, although the identification

of the source of information may be lost in the complex communication pattern that characterizes buzz, the information conveyed by buzz will become more negative.

Proposition 8: Buzz becomes more negative as it spreads, especially when emanating from brand-loyal and experienced customers who are more likely to communicate a balanced mix of positive and negative information.

The recent literature analyzing the content of social exchanges tends to show that while the valence of online content explains how viral information spreads, the level of arousal (characterized by an excitatory state) and the emotions evoked by the content are often more critical to outcomes (Berger and Milkman 2012).

The content of WOM can concern factual information about the pop-up, or individuals can share their emotions about the pop-up and about their experience in visiting the store (Cheema and Kaikati 2010). Some of the characteristics that are associated with pop-ups, such as novelty and surprise, can in themselves be strong determinants of buzz. Among the various types of emotions studied in the personality and social psychology literature (e.g., Russell 1980), some emotions appear more relevant as possibly resulting from the experience of visiting a pop-up. The novelty seeker may respond especially with happiness and delight to a well-designed pop-up with strong aesthetics, such as, "beauty or refinement . . . without regard to whatever utilitarian function it might provide" (Burroughs and Mick 2004, 409). This highlights the importance for the pop-up to raise strong positive emotions, since strong negative emotions also generate buzz even if they are less impactful than positive emotions (Berger and Milkman 2012).

A positive emotion that causes particularly strong virality is *awe*, an emotion related to vastness, novelty, and amazement, which is different from the emotion of surprise (Keltner and Haidt 2003). More specifically, "awe is characterized by a feeling of admiration and elevation in the face of something greater than oneself" (Berger and Milkman 2012, 194). The ephemerality of a pop-up, its novelty, and design factors (with distinguishing features from traditional retail stores) all have the potential to contribute to the creation of a sense of awe, favorable to the development of buzz.

Whereas the discussion above applies generally to all individuals exposed either directly or indirectly to pop-ups, the experience of visiting a pop-up is incomparable in magnitude with what individuals who have not been involved

personally can perceive. Therefore, the arousal and emotions to be expected from pop-up visitors have a much greater impact on WOM and potentially buzz compared to what nonvisitors can generate. Expectations are likely to be high when consumers visit the pop-up, and firms must deliver strong positive emotions that will encourage those who visit the store to spread information about their experience.

Proposition 9: The more positive the emotions arising from the pop-up experience, the stronger the buzz generated.

Research by Han, Nunes, and Dreze (2010) finds that luxury goods can signal status to other consumers. Their findings show that those with wealth and a high need for status (NFS) signal with *loud* luxury goods, whereas those with wealth and a low NFS signal with *quiet* luxury goods. Social media can be a very effective way to signal status to varying communities. Individuals low on NFS are less likely to initiate WOM, but those high on NFS are very likely to be active in social media and to take the opportunity to convey their status by widely sharing their knowledge and participation in something as novel and exciting as pop-ups to become the source of buzz.

Proposition 10: Consumers high on need for status are more likely to engage in digital conversations to create buzz for a pop-up that they have visited.

In a series of experiments, Cheema and Kaikati (2010) introduce two factors that moderate the extent and the role of WOM: (1) publicly consumed (e.g., laptop computers) versus privately consumed goods (e.g., mattresses), and (2) the individual personality trait of need for uniqueness (NFU), which means that consumers behave in ways, especially regarding their consumption, that reinforce their differentiation from others. Consumers high on NFU perceive different costs for sharing information that then have a consequence on their likelihood of participating in social media. Consumers high on NFU are less likely to share recommendations for publicly consumed goods that they own (Cheema and Kaikati 2010). By extension to the digital context and pop-ups, consumers high on NFU are less likely to participate in social media communications after having visited a pop-up. However, consumers high on NFU are more likely to visit a pop-up because pop-ups are unique, novel, and ephemeral and therefore can contribute to their sense

of uniqueness. Therefore, while individuals high on NFU are more likely to visit pop-ups, they are less likely to recommend that others visit.

Proposition 11: Conditional on visiting a pop-up, consumers high on need for uniqueness are less likely to be interested in creating buzz and to participate in social media activities to share their pop-up experience.

The Effects of the Pop-up Experience and Buzz on the Brand

The role of brand image (i.e., the combination of cognitive perceptions and affective components consumers have toward a brand) pervades the field of marketing. However, branding and brand image assume a particular importance for luxury goods. This is due to the fact that “consumers express and enhance their identity and ideal personality by purchasing and consuming [luxury brands]” (Sung et al. 2015, 121). Much of what is believed to drive the purchase of luxury goods is the signaling of belonging to an elite group, what Veblen (1899) referred to as *conspicuous consumption*, meaning that social status can be ascribed based on the display of expensive goods. There is some evidence suggesting that online affiliation with certain aspirational brands can be demonstrated by posting on social media. This can boost the consumer’s ideal self, garnering similar status-related benefits as one would be garnered through purchase in the offline world (Grewal et al. 2016).

Furthermore, posting on online social media increases psychological ownership (Pierce, Kostova, and Dirks 2003), as even simple online posting about the brand replaces the individual’s offline need for ownership of the brand, and thus fosters brand loyalty. In addition, the buzz generated—whether through images, video, posts, and so on—typically fosters brand engagement, increasing the number of followers of a brand’s postings and generating commitment on the part of the consumer. This ultimately reinforces brand loyalty, making customers more likely to commit further effort to support the brand in the future, which will ultimately translate into increased sales (Hoffman and Fodor 2010).

Finally, influencers and bloggers play a key role in shaping consumers’ perceptions of a brand’s awareness, image, and loyalty, as they are considered *market mavens* (i.e., individuals who are knowledgeable about products/brands and share their knowledge with other consumers; Feick and Price 1987). There is evidence in the literature suggest-

ing that blog posts of positive valence—even when sponsored by the brand—positively affect the consumer’s attitude toward the sponsored products/brands (Forrest and Cao 2010).

This is even truer when the source of the post is highly credible and transparent about its connection with the sponsored content. The higher the trust in the blog post, the more favorable the attitude and the higher the purchase intention of the sponsored product (Lu, Chang, and Chang 2014). Since these influentials are typically invited to either preview the pop-up or attend its opening celebrations, they will be more likely to promote it via their social networks, generating buzz that will not only be viewed by their followers, but also picked up by traditional media. Social and traditional media will then together influence brand equity (Bruhn et al 2012).

Proposition 12: Positive effect of pop-ups on brand awareness, brand image, and brand loyalty is mediated by the surrounding buzz.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Table 1 provides a summary of the research propositions derived from our conceptual framework. The objective is to encourage new research on this important topic that is part of the changing retailing landscape. Several research methodologies may be appropriate to test the propositions. Here we highlight two different approaches: data analytics and field-based experimental research that provide especially interesting opportunities for new insights because they have recently been able to take advantage of new technologies. Each would seem to have the potential to enrich our understanding of pop-ups specifically, and ephemerality more generally, in the evolving retail environment.

Data Analytics

Pop-ups generate considerable amounts of buzz online, whether through tweets on Twitter or photos and videos shared on Instagram or Facebook that typically encourage consumers creating buzz to use a hashtag (#) that can tie the post back to the brand and the pop-up itself. Using a query with the specific hashtag, researchers can download data from social networks in the form of posts, comments, likes, or shares. Based on such data, researchers have been able to measure “personality” traits that allow marketers to improve their targeting efficiency (Matz et al. 2017).

Such a database would allow researchers to carry out different data analytics and data mining, such as sentiment analyses or text analyses. Sentiment analysis could analyze the emotional content of messages (Ungar 2017), and understanding the emotional tenor of pop-up tweets may be a revealing addition to our knowledge base. Researchers could mine the content of the buzz to see how, for example, visitors versus social media followers of the pop-up respond differently. They could also check whether consumers are fans/followers of the brand online and whether they become fans *after* posting about the pop-up. Finally, they may be able to verify whether buzz increases brand awareness, improves brand image, and fosters long-term brand loyalty with, potentially, an increase in sales.

Recently, firms such as Crimson Hexagon, Digimind, and Brandwatch offer marketers a means to track what is being said by consumers online. At one time firms would track testimonial-to-complaint ratios, but such “inbound” communications to the firm represented a miniscule level of what was actually being said via word of mouth. Many firms today track net promoter scores (Reichheld 2003), which are designed to measure customer loyalty based on asking whether a product or service would be recommended to a friend. This too misses most of what is actually being said about the brand. Social media analytic firms not only track and tabulate consumer mentions but also analyze the content to draw implications for management. The number of conversations analyzed vastly outnumbers most other brand-measuring devices.

There is undoubtedly subtlety to understanding the posting and reposting process, which again (as with WOM) may be related to an individual’s position in the social system. Recent research by Berman et al. (2017) suggests a social diffusion process in multiple cycles moving from different categories of *tweeters*, who fulfill varying roles in the social system. The study of how such processes develop into buzz would be a major step to our understanding of a significant component of the new retailing environment.

Field-Based Experimental Research

A pop-up represents a unique opportunity to run field experiments. Working in collaboration with a brand, researchers can establish experiments with consumers visiting the pop-up to test a variety of retail solutions as well as brand and product options based on consumers’ actual responses. This requires the cooperation of the company owning the brand to obtain professional field experimentation material with measures on actual sales, such as in Matz et al. (2017).

Table 1. Summary of Research Propositions

Category	Proposition	References	
Consumer response to the pop-up: visit and experience	1. The more novel the design and the greater the surprise value of a pop-up, the higher the probability of a consumer visit to the pop-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aaker and Keller (1990) • Bridges, Keller, and Sood (2000) • Chen, Kernan, and Blackledge (2017) • Calantone, Chan, and Cui (2006) • de Lassus and Friere (2014) • Derbaix and Vanhamme (2003) • Heider (1958) • Loken and Roedder John (1993) • Meyers-Levy and Tybout (1989) • Moldovan, Goldenberg, and Chattopadhyay (2011) • Osgood and Tannenbaum (1955) • Park, Milberg, and Lawson (1991) • Tauber (1988) 	
		2. The more ephemeral the product offering, the higher the probability of a consumer visit to the pop-up	• Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017)
			• Janssen et al. (2014)
		3. The newer the product concept, the higher the probability of a consumer visit to the pop-up	• Heider (1958)
			• Osgood and Tannenbaum (1955)
		4. The greater the perceived brand scarcity, the higher the probability of a consumer visit to the pop-up.	• Sevilla, Zhang, and Kahn (2016)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gierl and Huettl (2010) • Jung and Kellaris (2004) • Lynn (1991) 			
Pop-ups and buzz	5. Buzz from a pop-up is more likely to occur for brands with hedonic benefits, in particular for fashion and luxury brands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Berger and Schwartz (2011) • de Lassus and Freire (2014) • Gatignon and Robertson (1985) • Hirschman (1981) • Klein et al. (2016) • Taube and Warnaby (2017) • Acemoglu et al. (2011) • Backstrom et al. (2006) • Becker (1970) • Bénabou and Tirole (2006) • Calvo-Arlengol, Patacchini, and Zenou (2009) • Gatignon (2010) • Granovetter (1973) • Theriault (2008) • Weiman (1982) 	
		6. Individuals with marginal positions in their social network are more likely to initiate buzz about pop-ups	• Berger and Schwartz (2011)
			• de Lassus and Freire (2014)
			• Gatignon and Robertson (1985)
			• Hirschman (1981)
			• Klein et al. (2016)

7. Buzz is more likely to involve the transfer of positive reactions about pop-ups
- Berger and Milkman (2012)
 - East, Hammond, and Wright (2007)
 - Godes and Mayzlin (2004; 2009)
 - Arndt (1967)
 - Bowman and Narayandas (2001)
 - De Angelis et al. (2012)
 - Gagnon and Robertson (1985)
 - Hornik et al. (2015)
 - de Lassus and Freire (2014)
 - Mizerski (1982)
 - Richins (1983)
 - Berger and Milkman (2012)
 - Burroughs and Mick (2004)
 - Keltner and Haidt (2003)
 - Russel (1980)
 - Taube and Warnaby (2017)
 - Har, Nunes, and Dreze (2010)
8. Buzz becomes more negative as it spreads, especially when emanating from brand-loyal and experienced customers who are more likely to communicate a balanced mix of positive and negative information.
9. The more positive the emotions arising from the pop-up experience, the stronger the buzz generated
10. Consumers high on need for status are more likely to engage in digital conversations to create buzz for a pop-up that they have visited.
11. Conditional on visiting a pop-up, consumers high on need for uniqueness are less likely to be interested in creating buzz and to participate in social media activities to share their pop-up experience
12. Positive effect of pop-ups on brand awareness, brand image, and brand loyalty is mediated by the surrounding buzz.
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- The effects of the pop-up experience and buzz on the brand
- Hoffman and Fodor (2010)
 - Grewal, Stephen, and Coleman (2016)
 - Sung et al. (2015)
 - Veblen (1899)
 - Pierce, Kostova, and Dirks (2003)
 - Bruhn et al. (2012)
 - Feick and Price (1987)
 - Forrest and Cao (2010)
 - Lu, Chang, and Chang (2014)

The simplest experiment researchers can design to improve our understanding of pop-ups is an observation of consumer behavior within the pop-up itself: which displays receive the most attention, which get the most buzz, which products on which shelves are purchased more, and so on. These behaviors can then be tied to demographic, personality, and psychographic information, brand awareness, and brand attitude dimensions.

Researchers can also go a step further by employing mobile eye-tracking devices to study consumers' gaze patterns and fixation times across different displays, shelves, and products (Hayhoe and Ballard 2005). While there is literature employing this methodology to study online shopping behaviors (Hong, Thong, and Tam 2004; Buscher, Cutrell, and Morris 2009), few studies have attempted to study offline shopping behaviors with the same methodology (Chandon et al. 2006). Pop-ups thus represent an innovative retail solution to foster research opportunities in order to better understand consumers' shopping behaviors, attention patterns, preferences, and choices. To turn a pop-up into almost a laboratory setting, researchers can also assign consumers to manipulation versus control conditions based, for example, on different days, or different times within a certain day.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have discussed the importance of pop-ups as both ephemeral and experiential retail solutions to engage novelty-seeking consumers. We highlighted the centrality of buzz in enhancing brand awareness, positive brand image, long-term brand loyalty and, eventually, sales. Indeed, there is evidence in the marketing literature suggesting that earned media, which is media generated when consumers promote the company's products or content at no cost to the company itself, such as WOM, buzz, or social media posts (Edelman and Salsberg 2010), are generally more persuasive than traditional media—although the two are complementary (Godes and Mayzlin 2004; Cheema and Kaikati 2010).

While we have focused on the positive consequences of buzz, as they are predominant, we would be remiss if we did not mention some potential downsides of the phenomenon. First, while buzz has mostly positive consequences for the brand (awareness, image, loyalty), there is the risk that the message and content about the ephemeral experience could be "hijacked" by some opposing consumers. Hijacked media (Edelman and Salsberg 2010) refers to all those instances where consumers take an original message and make negative allegations about the product or the brand. Given the speed and virality of buzz on social networks, these mes-

sages put the brand's reputation at risk if the company does not quickly take a stand and reappropriate the message. Second, if pop-ups are instruments of buzz marketing for companies, when buzz is negative, whether due to a negative direct experience from a consumer or the social network amplifying it, buzz runs the risk of backfiring. In this instance as well, companies must act quickly to identify the culprit of the negative buzz and respond in order to try and rectify a negative experience.

Notwithstanding these potential negative consequences, pop-ups seem to be a potentially important topic that is receiving academic attention. For scholars, pop-ups represent a laboratory for testing ideas on evolving consumer behavior. Such stores can be a form of test market for new retail concepts likely to appeal to evolving consumer tastes and trends that emphasize experiences more than ownership.

The phenomenon is very much of interest to managers. Pop-ups are a vehicle that can be part of an integrated marketing program. They are not a stand-alone means of reaching consumers but are combined with omnichannel and communication strategies to create multiple consumer touch points and perhaps to break through the clutter of traditional marketing instruments (Kleinlercher et al. 2018).

As envisioned in this article, the key to the potential success of a pop-up is to offer the consumer an ephemeral opportunity and a novel experience. We recognize, however, that the life cycle of a pop-up is limited because the novelty value is limited. The novelty decay function tends to be fairly steep. The duration period of buzz is even shorter. When this novelty declines to some point, the consumer value moves toward zero and it is time to close the pop-up. We have seen the recognition of the decay in novelty in a number of cases. Comme des Garçons (2004), for example, ceased doing pop-ups when it felt that they were no longer *new*. Recently, it was reported that Hermès would open its last pop-up of an interactive dip-dye scarf concept called "Hermèsmatic" after moving it to four cities in the United States over the course of a few months (Medina 2017). Thus, the value of a pop-up is proportional to its novelty value. If pop-ups are to be part of a marketing program, they may be "moveable" from city to city, or new concepts will have to be designed to attract consumer attention.

As indicated earlier, sales at a pop-up are not the major criterion for success. Rather, it is the level of buzz generated and the media mentions that result that are meant to build brand awareness and reputation. This suggests the need to monitor consumer posts in social media and potentially to use influencers to capture positive feedback to repost. Mon-

itoring social media mentions may also provide useful feedback for design modifications of the pop-ups and for the design of future pop-ups. The frequency of consumer mentions over time also is a strong indicator of the wear-out of the pop-up's novelty. Finally, text analysis may indicate the consumer sentiments being revealed as to how the pop-up is viewed, so that management can adapt quickly. The conceptual framework developed in this article and the set of propositions should provide directions for and encourage future research on retailing environments that are ephemeral and experiential, two characteristics that fit the tendencies of consumption in today's markets. Whereas our objective has been mainly conceptual, we recognize that retailing is in a state of flux and that new ideas, such as pop-ups, although a meaningful component of the evolving retail ecosystem, may only survive if they can continue to provide novel consumer experiences.

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