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The Engaging Experience Economy: A Systematic Literature Review of Stakeholder Engagement, Value Co-creation, and Experiential Retail

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Abstract
Background: Physical retail is evolving from transactional exchanges towards experience-driven ecosystems where stakeholders collaboratively create value. Understanding of how multiple stakeholders collectively create, manage and sustain engaging retail experiences remains a challenge.
Aim: This systematic literature review aimed to consolidate evidence on stakeholder engagement within experiential retail. It also proposed an Engaging Experience Economy (eEE) framework that traces how management, employees, and customers exchange value inside a shared retail environment.
Methodology: Following PRISMA 2020 guidelines, a systematic literature review was conducted using eight academic databases. Studies published between 2020 and 2026 were examined using thematic analysis. 18 peer-reviewed articles focusing on experience economy, experiential retail, stakeholder engagement, customer engagement, value co-creation and technology-enabled retail environments were analysed.
Results: Six key themes emerged explaining that retail experiences are increasingly created through collaborative exchanges among customers, employees, managers, technologies and broader ecosystem actors rather than through retailer-controlled activities alone. eEE is linked with exchange relationships, a shared playground of sensory and technological conditions, and a staged sequence of outcomes running from immediate satisfaction to long-term loyalty.
Conclusion: This study concluded by proposing the eEE framework, which integrated engagement, environment and outcomes into a multi-actor perspective of experiential retail.

Keywords: Engaging Experience Economy; Stakeholder Engagement; Value Co-Creation; Experiential Retail; Retail Playground; Customer Experience.

1 Introduction

Physical retail is an environment where customers are sold products through a physical store where they can visit, see, and buy items in person. Contemporarily, it is operating under sustained structural pressure around the world. In 2024, the United States closed 7,325 stores alone, where this number was expected to reach nearly twice as many stores in the United States in the next year (Danziger, 2025). In the same period, Great Britain also closed 12,804 stores, which the chains could put the stores half as busy as pre-pandemic (Saker-Clark, 2025). The industry has responded by repositioning instead of retrenching. Mature market retail sales are still approximately 72 to 83% (made within stores) and reported behaviours of 57% of consumers of not being able to see, touch, and feel items prior to purchase (Curtis, 2024). The most recent growth has focused on the leisure and experience environment as compared to transactional formats. The rivalry between store operators has, as a result, shifted beyond price and assortment to the quality of the experience a space can create, which can be seen through increasing investments in atmospherics, in-store technology, and entertainment-led formats (Kent et al., 2025). The contemporary retail store functions less as a distribution point and more as a venue for customer engagement.

This retail transformation is closely associated with the emergence of the experience economy, introduced by Pine and Gilmore (1998) and reviewed by White et al. (2023). The experience economy proposes that experiences represent a distinct economic offering beyond commodities, goods, and services. While commodities are extracted, goods are manufactured, and services are delivered, experiences are staged by organisations to create memorable events for consumers (Dubois et al., 2025).

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Under the experience economy, businesses do not compete solely on what they offer, but also on the way customers experience and interact in the process of consumption. The concept indicates a wider trend toward the shift of product-based value creation towards experiential value creation, where the role of emotional, cognitive, and social reactions is a key element of consumption. The concept of experience has been extensively examined within marketing and retail research (Gallarza & Sánchez-Fernández, 2023). In branding research, brand experience is the subjective feelings or internal behaviours of consumers to brand stimuli, such as sensation, feeling, thinking, and behavioural reactions to the brand-related stimuli (design, communication, packaging, and environment) (Bapat, 2020). These perspectives demonstrate that experiences emerge through interactions between consumers and the different elements surrounding consumption.

Within retail contexts, this understanding has contributed to the development of customer experience research. Customer experience describes customers' perceptions and responses resulting from interactions with firms, products, services, and environments throughout the consumption journey (Gahler et al., 2023). Retail scholars have emphasised that customer experience is influenced by multiple factors, including store atmosphere, employee interactions, technology, and social surroundings (Disse & Olsson, 2023; Moore et al., 2022). However, although customer experience research has significantly advanced understanding of experiential consumption, much of the literature has traditionally positioned customers as the primary recipients of experiences and firms as the primary designers of those experiences.

The inherent nature of such studies creates limited clarification in the way experiences are generated in joint interactions within retail ecosystems using several actors. To deal with this shortcoming, the conceptualisation of engagement gives a more extensive orientation in how to interpret the meaning of participation as well as value construction. Engagement was first introduced by Kahn (1990) as the degree to which people contribute their physical, cognitive and emotional selves to their jobs (Eresia-Eke et al., 2023). Subsequent marketing research extended this concept and found that customers are active participants who commit cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and social resources to brand and organisational interaction (Hamzah & Johari, 2023). Since consumers are active participants who contribute to value creation, unlike the traditional perspectives of consumers as passive receivers, engagement perspectives view them as active.

Similarly, employee engagement is another significant aspect in the creation of the retail experience. The frontline staff members have an influential impact on customer perceptions as their attitudes, emotional, and behavioural aspects directly impact service interaction (Wu et al., 2023). Laborers in stores are not merely operational resources, but they actively have a part in the atmosphere, relationship quality, and emotional nature of customer engagements. Thus, retail experiences cannot be regarded without paying attention to customer participation, as well as the involvement of employees.

Extending beyond the descriptions of individual actors, the term stakeholder engagement underlines the significance of a connection between several participants involved in value creation. According to stakeholder theory, organisations exist in sets of relationships amongst interacting actors whose interests and input affect the results of an organisation (Goyal, 2022). In service ecosystems, value is co-created involving various actors as opposed to being incorporated solely through products or services (Landry & Furrer, 2023). This thinking follows the concept of value co-creation, which suggests that companies and consumers co-create value in the process of inter-relating, sharing and integrating knowledge and resources (Abdollahi et al., 2023). As a result, retail experiences are regarded as the outcome of the collective processes of customer and employee, managerial, retailing, technological and physical environment.

The physical environment in which these interactions take place is also considered an essential element of experience creation. Retail space is not just a physical place where people make transactions, but rather it is an ecosystem that influences ways of thinking, actions and interactions among actors. Ustazah et al. (2025) came up with the use of atmospherics in which environmental factors such as design, lighting, sound and layout were put into perspective in showing how these influence consumer reactions. Similarly, Espitia et al. (2025) showed that servicescapes influence both customers and employees in terms of their influence on social interaction and behavioural outcomes. Thus, there are no passive backgrounds; retail spaces are active objects of experience creation.

The traditional experience economy treated experience as an economic offering, built on four realms of entertainment, education, aesthetics, and escapism, where firms staged a setting, and customers largely absorbed it (Ristevska-Jovanovska et al., 2024). Recent literature extended this baseline by adopting technologies such as chatbots, augmented reality, and virtual reality, showing that the four realms can be reshaped by tools the original framework did not anticipate (Garaus et al., 2025). Engaging experience economy (eEE) is comparatively an updated concept derived from experience economy that builds on a shift by placing active participation and sustained exchange at the centre rather than treating engagement as one dimension among several (Kadasah, 2024). eEE is defined as a process in which collaborative exchanges among customers, retailers, and employees are enhanced through the application of store attributes, technology, and retail spaces to achieve the holistic integration of emotional, cognitive, social, and behavioural value within a shared, memorable episode (Kadasah, 2024). Studies on experiential value showed that engagement forms through relational mechanisms such as service quality, playfulness, and perceived return, not through passive consumption of a themed setting (Rahman et al., 2025). Work on customer experience orientation added that firms succeed when they build continuous learning loops with customers rather than deliver a fixed, pre-scripted experience (Arkadan et al., 2024). This distinction holds critical significance for the present study because it separates experience as a one-time output from experience as an ongoing relationship, which lets the study treat engagement as a measurable, evolving construct instead of a static design feature.

Although there is growing attention to the concept of experience-based retail, there is still a gap in the current literature. Customer experience research has mainly looked at individual responses among customers; technology research has primarily conducted studies of digital interventions; engagement research has looked into actor-to-actor relations; while co-creation research has frequently focused on online settings (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; De Keyser et al., 2020). The formation of experience by several stakeholders that coexist in physical retail ecosystems has been given little focus (Hollebeek, Urbonavicius, et al., 2022). Thus, the detailed knowledge of the stakeholder engagement processes and environmental factors, as well as the results of the experiential retail, is not explored comprehensively.

This systematic literature review addressed this gap by synthesising existing research on stakeholder engagement within experiential retail and proposing an eEE framework as a multi-actor perspective of experience creation. The construct restored the economic half of the experience economy because it specifies who produces experiences, through which exchanges, within what environment, and with what consequences. Its significance ran in two directions. For theory, the eEE carries stakeholder engagement into a concrete consumption setting and gives retail research a multi-actor unit of analysis in place of the customer dyad. For practice, it offers store managers and mall operators a map of engagement levers that spans people and environment together, from managerial support and employee readiness to sensory design and technology deployment.

This systematic literature review is therefore aimed at synthesising existing evidence on stakeholder engagement within experiential retail and to reconceptualise the experience economy through the eEE framework. The primary review question is: How has stakeholder engagement in experiential retail evolved, and how do engagement mechanisms across physical, digital, and phygital retail spaces shape value co-creation and outcomes, such that this evidence can be synthesised into an eEE framework? Specific objectives of this systematic literature review are:

1. To study the evolution of the experience economy towards eEE.
2. To explore stakeholders involved in creating retail experiences and understand their engagement mechanisms.
3. To understand the process of physical, digital, and phygital retail spaces preconditioning the involvement and value co-creation
4. To explore the immediate, short-term and long-term outcomes of engagement-led experiences and propose an eEE framework.

2 Materials and Methods

Review Design

This review adhered to the PRISMA guidelines 2020 in identifying, screening, and reporting of studies (Page et al., 2021). A systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted because the constructs of interest, engagement, experience, and co-creation were not found in a single journal, but were spread among marketing, retailing, service and hospitality journals, and a protocol-based search was the only way to put them on an equal footing.

Database Selection and Search Strategy

Eight databases were searched during 2026, as shown in Table 1, including Scopus, Web of Science, EBSCOhost Business Source, Emerald Insight,

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ScienceDirect, SAGE journals, Taylor and Francis online and Google Scholar. Google Scholar was only used to cross-check coverage. The search string combined three blocks: (\ “Experience Economy\” OR \ “Customer Experience\” OR \ “Experiential Retail\” OR \ “Retail Experience\”) AND (Engagement OR \ “Co-Creation\” OR \ “Value Co-Creation\” OR Stakeholder) AND (Retail OR Store OR Mall OR \ “In-Store\”). These blocks were populated with 14 keywords and their variants, and the string was translated to the syntax of the different databases. The coverage period was 2020 to 2026 to ensure they cover the decade where smart, phygital, and engagement-based retail research hastens. Included studies had their reference lists screened; they did not represent any additional records that could have been missed by the database search.

Table 1. Data Selection Strategy (Source: Authors)

Years	**Search Engines**	**Keywords**
2020-2026	✓ Scopus	✓ Experience Economy
	✓ Web of Science	✓ Experiential Retail
	✓ ScienceDirect	✓ Retail Experience
	✓ Emerald Insight	✓ Stakeholder Engagement
	✓ SpringerLink	✓ Customer Engagement
	✓ Taylor & Francis	✓ Value Co-creation
		✓ Service-Dominant Logic
		✓ Retail Ecosystem
		✓ Customer Experience
		✓ Omnichannel Retail
		✓ Phygital Retail
		✓ Smart Retail
		✓ Digital Retail Experience

Eligibility Criteria

The eligibility criteria included both inclusion and exclusion elements as demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria (Source: Authors)

Inclusion Criteria	**Exclusion Criteria**
• Peer-reviewed journal articles published in English	• Conference papers, book chapters, editorials, dissertations, and non-peer-reviewed publications
• Studies published between 2020 and 2026	• Studies published before 2020
• Studies focusing on experience economy, stakeholder engagement, experiential retail, customer engagement, retail ecosystems, or value co-creation	• Studies unrelated to retail or experiential consumption (e.g., healthcare, education, tourism without retail relevance)
• Quantitative, qualitative, mixed-method, conceptual, and review studies	• Articles lacking sufficient methodological or theoretical information
• Full-text articles accessible through selected databases	• Duplicate publications and inaccessible full texts

Study Selection

The searches returned 3,842 records. After removal of 1,426 duplicates, reviewers screened 2,416 titles and abstracts independently and excluded 2,068. Among 348 requests for full-text reports, 12 could not be retrieved, while 318 articles were excluded based on the eligibility criteria. Specifically, 138 articles did not incorporate engagement or experience-related constructs,

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94 were not situated within a retail context, 52 were not peer-reviewed journal articles, and 34 lacked sufficient methodological detail for evaluation. There was a total of 18 studies included in the review. The flow of records through each stage is reported in Figure 1.

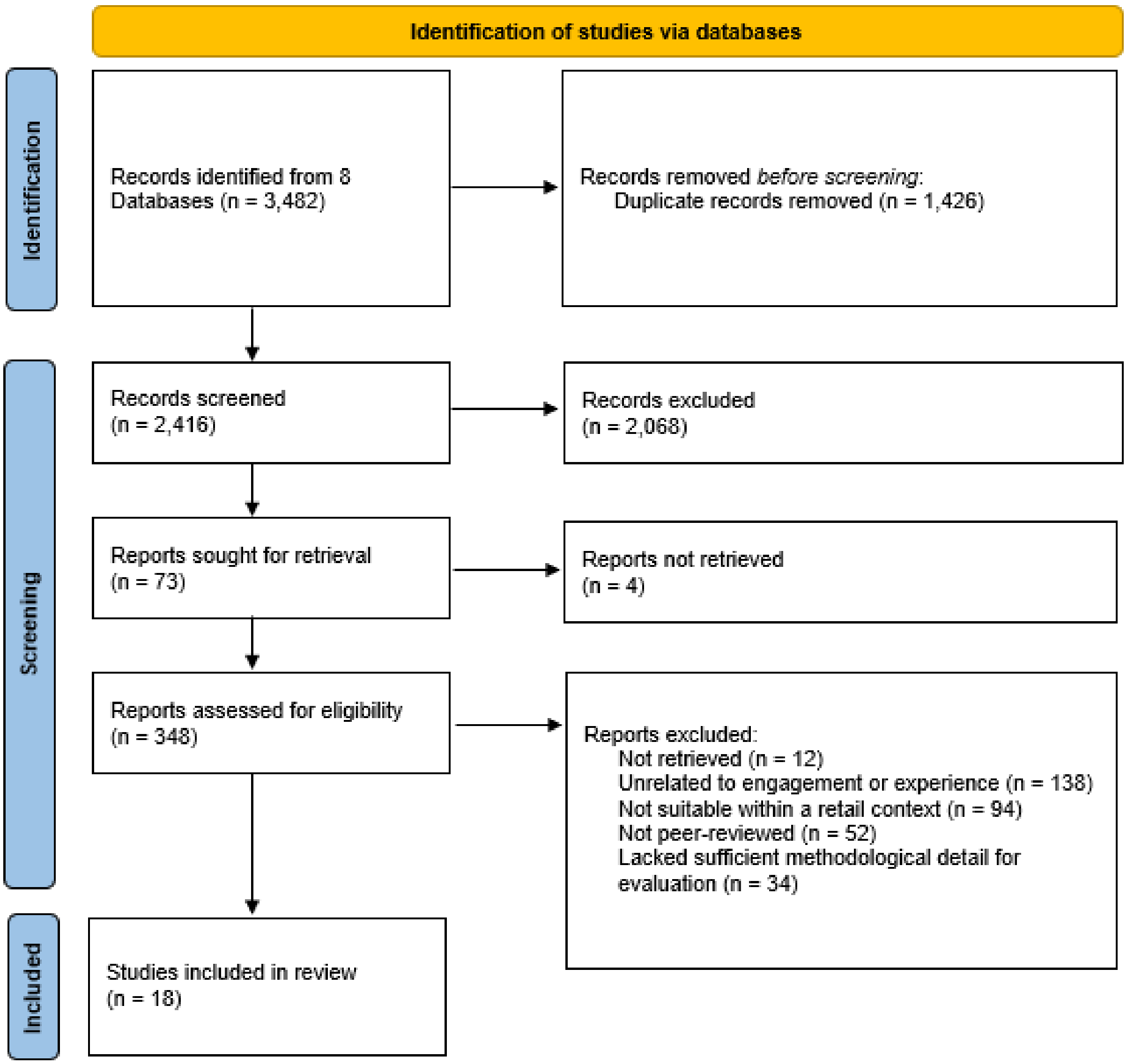

Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram

Data Extraction and Synthesis

For each study, the citation, country, research design, theoretical lens, retail context, and main findings were extracted into a structured matrix. Synthesis proceeded thematically, where all constructs were discussed under six different themes. Since the corpus is a mixture of conceptual and empirical work, no meta-analytic pooling was pursued; quality was addressed by a quality assessment tool, namely the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT).

3 Results

The review incorporated 18 articles that were published from 2020 to 2026 (See Table 3). These studies, in general, investigated the experiences related to retail via customer involvement, stakeholder involvement, service-dominant logic, co-creation, in-retail atmospherics, and technology-facilitated experience approaches. Results suggested that customer responses were found predominantly in the reviewed literature, whereas empirical findings on employee, management and overall

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stakeholder interactions remain comparatively unexplored.

Table 3. Characteristics of the Reviewed Studies (n = 18)

S#	Citation	Country	Research design	Theory/lens	Retail context	Main findings
1.	(Venkat et al., 2026)	Canada	Survey	Relationship Marketing Theory; Customer Engagement Framework	Customer Engagement	Examined antecedents and outcomes of retail engagement.
2.	(Hollebeek, Kumar, et al., 2022)	Multi-country (conceptual)	Conceptual synthesis	Stakeholder theory; S-D logic	General service and retail	Explored the transitions between customer and actor to stakeholder engagement; stakeholders had different ends of value to gain, and engagement must be coordinated across actors.
3.	(Sarkum et al., 2020)	Indonesia	Quantitative survey (SEM)	Engagement; dynamic capability	SMEs and retail firms	Engagement of several actors at once, customers, employees, and partners, strengthens the marketing function and firm responsiveness beyond single-actor engagement.
4.	(Rahman et al., 2025)	United States	Quantitative survey	Customer Experience Theory; Customer Engagement Theory	Omnichannel retail	Findings showed that Omnichannel Customer Experience (OCX) positively affected direct engagement outcomes such as repurchase intentions and indirect engagement behaviours, including influence, feedback, and referral intentions.
5.	(Abid et al., 2026)	Multi-country	Qualitative study; thematic analysis	Service-Dominant Logic (S-D Logic); Value Co-creation and Value Co-destruction Perspective;	Technology-enabled physical retail environments	Identified four key moments in customer journeys (innovation, truth, meaning, and experience) that influenced whether customers perceive interactions as value co-creation or co-destruction.
6.	(Abu El-Samen et al., 2026)	Multi-country	Two experimental studies using real AR applications; PLS-SEM analysis	Customer Engagement Theory; Value Co-creation Theory; Service-Dominant Logic (S-D Logic)	Augmented Reality (AR)-enabled retail services	Demonstrated that AR service experiences enhanced experience quality and contributed to customer co-creation through engagement.
7.	(Itani et al., 2020)	Lebanon/ USA	Quantitative survey	Personality; engagement theory	Retail services	Extrovert customers had stronger engagement than introverts; the relationship time moderated the relationship; engagement increased word of mouth and value of loyalty.
8.	(An & Han, 2020)	South Korea	Quantitative survey	Experiential value; engagement	Experience-based retail	Experience-based retail increased customer engagement, thus producing hedonic and utilitarian value; a psychological process linked motivation to value creation.
9.	(Kaveh et al., 2021)	Iran	Quantitative survey	Customer engagement	Retail sales promotion	Promotion-related benefits feed the dimensions of customer engagement, which then translate into satisfaction and behavioural loyalty toward the retailer.

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Cont. Table 3

S#	Citation	Country	Research design	Theory/lens	Retail context	Main findings
10.	(Roy et al., 2020)	Australia/ India	Quantitative survey (SEM)	Engagement behaviours: convenience	Retail services	Service convenience dimensions and organisational characteristics led to engagement behaviours, such as feedback, helping other customers, and advocacy.
11.	(Yen et al., 2020)	Taiwan	Quantitative survey	Co-creation; engagement	Hospitality (experiential services)	Perceived innovativeness enhanced customer engagement, and engagement mediated its impact on value co-creation behaviours (such as participation and citizenship).
12.	(Bhatt et al., 2020)	India	Qualitative interviews	Atmospherics (S-O-R)	Retail stores	Separates attractive stimuli that arouse and draw customers from facilitating stimuli that ease task completion; both classes support in-store engagement.
13.	(Lashkova et al., 2020)	Spain	Experiment with a survey	Sensory marketing (S-O-R)	Retail stores	Sensory stimulation has a dual effect: it raises engagement while also prompting diversive exploration; emotions mediate the behavioural response.
14.	(Hilken et al., 2022)	Netherlands/ Australia	Conceptual research agenda	Psychological mechanisms; presence	AR/VR retail	Builds a framework of psychological mechanisms for reality-enhancing technologies, with propositions on how augmented experiences reshape customer decision journeys.
15.	(Fan et al., 2020)	China	Quantitative survey	Experience quality; engagement	Smart retail	Dimensions of intelligent experience quality raise smart retail engagement; perceived value channels quality into continued engagement with the format.
16.	(Cuomo et al., 2020)	Italy	Qualitative exploratory study	Omnichannel brand experience	AR-enabled retail	AR supports an immersive omni-customer brand experience; managerial configurations connect physical and digital touchpoints around the customer.
17.	(Liao, 2026)	Taiwan	Two-stage quantitative study	Mehrabian–Russell (S-O-R) Model; Smart Retail Experience Perspective	Smart retail stores / technology-enabled physical retail	Smart technology performance expectancy, privacy/security, retailer reputation, and physical store environment influenced interactive experience, which affected behavioural intention, word-of-mouth, shopping effectiveness, and retailer stickiness.
18.	(Irshad et al., 2025)	United Kingdom and the UAE	Quantitative cross-cultural survey	Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) Theory; Technology Acceptance Perspective	Augmented Reality (AR)-enabled brick-and-mortar retail	AR enhanced experiential value and psychological engagement, which strengthened satisfaction and loyalty outcomes.

4 Discussion

The reviewed literature is discussed by adopting six key themes, including 1) evolution from the experience economy to the eEE, 2) stakeholder engagement as the foundation of experiential retail, 3) value co-creation in retail experience ecosystems, 4) the retail playground: physical, digital, and phygital experience environments, 5) eEE dimensions, and 6) experience outcomes. The

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synthesis involved proposing an eEE Framework that drew strands into one testable account, treating engagement, environment, and outcomes as interdependent, and sets an agenda for the empirical work to follow.

Evolution from the Experience Economy to the Engaging Experience Economy

The reviewed evidence indicated that experiential retail had moved beyond the classical experience-economy assumption that firms stage memorable encounters for customers. In the emerging eEE, experience is better understood as a relational accomplishment produced through the coordinated participation of customers, employees, managers, suppliers, technologies and spatial arrangements. This shift was visible in An and Han (2020), who found that experiential motivation generated value only through active customer engagement, and in Sarkum et al. (2020), demonstrating that customer, employee and supply-chain engagement jointly strengthened dynamic marketing capability. Hollebeek, Kumar, et al. (2022) extended this logic further by arguing that engagement must be analysed at the stakeholder rather than customer level because actors enter exchanges with different goals, resources and expectations. Together, these studies repositioned engagement from an outcome of experience to the mechanism through which experience is produced.

This interpretation was also consistent with an integrative view by Becker and Jaakkola (2020) that customer experience emerged from responses to multiple stimuli across the customer journey and therefore cannot be fully designed or controlled by the firm. However, the eEE advanced beyond a customer-centred journey perspective by specifying the interdependencies among actors who enabled, modified or constrained the encounter. Empirical support was provided by Nöjd et al. (2020), whose "valuescape" model showed that value in physical retail developed through interactions among customers, service providers and digital technology; importantly, technology may enhance or disrupt these exchanges. Correspondingly, Gardiazabal and Bianchi (2021) revealed that retail co-creation worked at the micro- and meso-level, encompassing customers, employees, suppliers, neighbouring organisations and families, suggesting that the experiential effects are not limited to the immediate satisfaction or loyalty.

However, experience derived from the ecosystem cannot be regarded as necessarily harmonious. The authors Viglia et al. (2023) differentiated cooperation, collaboration and co-creation based on the behavioural, cognitive and emotional richness of stakeholder involvement, which means that the presence of actors did not necessarily lead to a truly shared experience. Hollebeek, Kumar, et al. (2022) also warned against entangling in conflicting interests and receiving unequal value by stakeholders who represent conflicting interests. This objected to more optimistic experience-economy explanations, and was supported by an argument by Echeverri and Skålén (2021) that interaction could be used to create value co-destruction when there was a mismatch between resources, practice or expectation. The eEE must not be merely the retail ecosystem that is by default more extensive, but a conditional reference point where the memorable value-addition is conditioned on alignment, mutual integration of the resources and management of stakeholder tensions. Its contribution connected staged experience to participation, coordination, governance and negotiated value across actors.

Stakeholder Engagement as the Foundation of Experiential Retail

The reviewed evidence positioned stakeholder engagement as the operational foundation of experiential retail because experiences were produced through interconnected contributions rather than through the retailer-customer dyad alone. Therefore, this theme encompassed customers, employees, managers, brands, communities and retail partners as mutually dependent actors within the eEE. Hollebeek, Kumar, et al. (2022) provided the principal theoretical basis for this interpretation, arguing that stakeholders entered exchanges with different resources, interests and expected benefits. Similarly, Sarkum et al. (2020) also proved that concomitant engagement among the customers, workers and the supply-chain partners enhanced organisational responsiveness in a way that single-actor-based engagement was not capable of doing. As a result, the customers continued to be the focus, but were no longer the inactive recipients but the participants providing feedback, knowledge, advocacy and behavioural support.

Employee engagement was also significant as frontline staff translated the brand experientials to interpersonal interactions. The reviewed studies connected engagement with feedback, customer assistance and advocacy behaviours (An & Han, 2020; Irshad et al., 2025). Extending this evidence, Han et al. (2022) identified an engagement-spillover process through which employee job and organisational engagement strengthened customer engagement. Managers therefore influence the retail experience indirectly by providing autonomy, training, information and operational support. Without these resources, employees may be expected to undertake emotional and relational work while lacking the authority or capability to resolve customer needs effectively.

Brands, meanwhile, function as organising platforms that give stakeholder participation, shared direction and meaning. In this regard, a practical example is the Spanish co-innovation programme of Mercadona, where customers got into lab-like conditions that imitated domestic life to demonstrate the use of a product and presented improvement suggestions (Albors Garrigós & de-Miguel-Molina, 2020). The success of the programme came not only due to customers' participation, but also due to customer-centred organisational culture, leadership management and supplier collaboration that then converted the suggestions into product modifications (Albors Garrigós & de-Miguel-Molina, 2020). Brand-led engagement is thus plausible when the contribution of stakeholders plays a role in making real retail decisions as opposed to symbolic consultation.

The stakeholder perspective also extended experiential value into communities and interorganisational partnerships. Gardiazabal and Bianchi (2021) realised that customers, employees, suppliers, families, headquarters and local businesses participated in retail co-creation, which had implications on the well-being of stakeholders. Likewise, an online platform aiding 100 small Italian retailers during the pandemic was based on public-private alliance, trust and empowerment, and is an example of how retail partnerships can save relationships in the community in times of digital transformation (Candelo et al., 2022). However, the plurality of the stakeholders can bring about inconsistency of priorities and asymmetry of value dispersion. Consequently, the latter motivated Viglia et al. (2023) to make a distinction between simple cooperation and actual co-creation that demanded integrated behavioural, cognitive and emotional involvement. The eEE did not thus rely on indiscriminately maximising participation, and instead it based itself on regulation of relationships, creating alignment of expectations and giving the stakeholders meaningful opportunities to make contributions.

Value Co-creation in Retail Experience Ecosystems

The reviewed literature demonstrated that value co-creation represents a fundamental mechanism through which experiential retail evolves from a firm-designed activity into a collaborative process of resource integration. According to Abu ElSamen et al. (2026), within the eEE, companies did not need to solely focus on creating value in their products, services, or store conditions; instead, it was created through the relationships between the customers, the retailers, employees, technologies, and other players within the ecosystem. This finding was also in line with Service-Dominant (S-D) Logic that interpreted value as produced in mutual exchanges and through integration of resources among actors, and not by delivering value in a unidirectional fashion by firms. Hollebeek, Kumar, et al. (2022) reinforced this perspective by arguing that stakeholder engagement extended beyond customer participation because multiple actors contributed resources, knowledge and capabilities to the value creation process.

The literature review provided empirical support for this transition, such as Yen et al. (2020), who found that perceived innovativeness enhanced customer engagement, which subsequently strengthened value co-creation behaviours such as participation and citizenship behaviours. Abid et al. (2026) also pointed out that technology-enabled physical retail settings had critical moments of interactions during which customers framed experiences either in terms of value co-creations or in terms of value co-destructions. These findings suggested that successful experiential retail was not only about the implementation of innovative features but also the provision of a sense of meaningful exchanges, in which customers felt their input was appreciated and considered valuable.

An illustrative case in this regard can be noted in the Nike retail ecosystem, specifically the Nike Live stores and integration of the Nike App (PS & Kannan, 2026). Customers provided behavioural information, preferences, product feedback, and community participation, and Nike utilised them to personalise their suggestions, create localised experiences, and deepen connections. The experience is thus co-created with customer involvement, employee engagement, digital experiences and brand strengths as opposed to the physical store. This illustrated the central argument of the concept of eEE that value emerged from continuous exchanges across interconnected actors.

Nevertheless, the literature also emphasised that co-creation did not necessarily lead to any eventual positive consequences. Echeverri and Skålén (2021) suggested that when resources are loosely coupled, expectations are unrewarded, and the actors have antagonistic objectives or interactions, it could lead to value co-destruction. This was a substantial concern in the digitally enhanced retail settings, where new technologies can enhance convenience, but also raise the question of privacy, control and authenticity. An example is Liao (2026), where the author proved that interactive experience is affected by smart retail technologies based on the factors like the expectations of performance, security perceptions and reputation of the retailer, indicating that co-creation through technology should be handled with care.

The Retail Playground: Physical, Digital, and Phygital Experience Environments

The study identified the retail environment as an active "playground" where experiential value was generated through the interaction between physical spaces, digital technologies and hybrid phygital configurations. Contrary to traditional views of stores as transactional locations, contemporary experiential retail environments functioned as platforms that stimulated emotional, cognitive, social and behavioural engagement. The findings provided by Bhatt et al. (2020) helped to conclude that the mechanism of store atmospherics worked both in terms of attracting stimuli that attract the consumer's attention and facilitating stimuli that assist shopping activities. Likewise, Lashkova et al. (2020) indicated that sensory stimulation affected engagement, such that it produced emotional responses and exploratory behaviours. These studies confirmed that physical environments remain central even as retail becomes increasingly digitised.

The transformation of retail environments was increasingly driven by the integration of digital technologies. The reviewed studies helped to conclude that augmented reality (AR), smart retail systems, and omnichannel platforms helped to take experiences past the walls of passive stores. Abu ElSamen et al. (2026) showed that retail services enabled by AR increased the quality of experiences and customer co-creation due to enhanced engagement, whilst Irshad et al. (2025) also revealed that AR increased experiential value, psychological engagement, satisfaction and loyalty. The results implied that digital technologies are not valuable merely due to their novelty; they should also add value to it, depending on the level of meaningfulness between consumers and brands.

Real-world applications illustrated this transition in the retail playground. The augmented reality app of IKEA enabled a range of customers to see furniture in their residence prior to buying the item, shifting it from the product evaluation procedure to an engaging experience (Venkateswaran et al., 2024). Similarly, the Virtual Artist technology offered by Sephora allowed the customers to have a virtual trial with cosmetic products, which made it convenient as well as enabled personalisation (Garg et al., 2024). These examples demonstrated how phygital environments reduce the separation between online and offline retail by allowing customers to participate actively in experience creation.

However, the use of technology alone did not imply high-quality experiences. Hilken et al. (2022) stated that presence, immersion and perceived control are psychological processes that reality-enhancing technologies use to impact customer journeys. Retailers need to determine if the technologies make human relationships stronger or introduce a level of complexity that is not required. Liao (2026) also emphasised that smart retail experiences were contingent on performance expectancy, perception of privacy/security and retailer reputation, suggesting that digital reinforcement required performance facilities as much as they required consumer confidence with technology facilities.

Dimensions of the Engaging Experience Economy

Fan et al. (2020) suggested that the experience economy is sustained through four interconnected dimensions of engagement: emotional, cognitive, social and behavioural engagement. These dimensions reflected various behaviours in which the stakeholders engage in retail experiences and mutually described why certain retail spaces became memorable, meaningful and relationship-building spaces (Cuomo et al., 2020). In contrast to the traditional experience economy views of entities that primarily focused on the generation of pleasurable experiences, the eEE model emphasised the notion that engagement felt must be a form of active psychological and behavioural input of the actors in the retail ecosystem.

Emotional engagement represented the affective connection developed between consumers and retail experiences. The literature revealed that emotions are a key channel through which environmental stimuli are converted into engagement outcomes. Lashkova et al. (2020) discovered that the elements of sensory marketing activated emotional experiences, which eventually led to behavioural response and exploration of business settings. An and Han (2020) also revealed that experiential retail generated hedonic and utilitarian value through the mobilisation of the psychological processes linked to customer motivation and engagement. These results implied that effective experiential retail did not fail to meet the functional needs but instead it formed emotional connections that formed relationships with the brands.

Cognitive engagement reflected the mental effort, curiosity and information processing involved in experience creation. Digital technologies increasingly enhanced this dimension by allowing customers to actively explore, compare and personalise products. (Abu ElSamen et al., 2026) illustrated that augmented reality experience generated engagement because customers became active participants in evaluating and shaping their purchase decisions rather than passive receivers of information. For example, IKEA's AR-based shopping application encourages customers to mentally simulate products within their own living spaces, transforming purchasing decisions into interactive problem-solving experiences (Venkateswaran et al., 2024). Social engagement further expanded the experience beyond individual consumption by recognising that retail experiences were socially constructed. Customers interacted with employees, other consumers, brand communities and digital networks, creating shared meanings around consumption. Hollebeek, Kumar, et al. (2022) argued that stakeholder engagement required understanding multiple actors and their interconnected goals rather than focusing exclusively on customer responses. This perspective is evident in community-based retail concepts such as Apple's Today at Apple sessions, where stores operate as social learning environments rather than purely transactional spaces (Philip et al., 2024). Lastly, behavioural engagement involved participation, advocacy, feedback and other observable behaviours whereby the stakeholders were involved in sending resources to value creation. Venkat et al. (2026) and Roy et al. (2020) emphasised that engagement behaviours comprised repeat interaction and customer feedback/positive advocacy, which proved that engagement went beyond attitudes into action.

Experience Outcomes

The final theme emerging from the reviewed literature concerned the outcomes generated through engagement-led retail experiences (Fan et al., 2020; Yen et al., 2020). Experiential outcomes developed progressively across three levels: immediate outcomes, including satisfaction, emotional responses and engagement; intermediate outcomes, including purchase intentions, trust and word-of-mouth; and long-term outcomes, including loyalty, advocacy, brand attachment and relationship quality (Fan et al., 2020). This development underscored that experiential retail is not useful merely due to its ability to produce pleasant experiences; instead, the strategic significance of this approach lies in the ability to convert short-term interactions into long-term stakeholder relationships.

At the immediate level, experiential environments influenced consumers' psychological states by generating satisfaction, enjoyment and stronger engagement. The reviewed research consistently demonstrated that experience quality functions as a critical antecedent of these responses. Fan et al. (2020) discovered that dimensions of intelligent experience quality augmented engagement in smart retail areas, and perceived value was a mediator linking experience quality with further interaction. Similarly, Bhatt et al. (2020) revealed that store atmospheric factors affected the engagement by determining emotional and behavioural reactions. These results indicated that instant experiential results were manifested when physical and technological settings were effective in stimulating consumer perceptions and emotions.

Intermediate outcomes occurred when positive experiences were converted to behavioural intentions and relational responses. The study conducted by Rahman et al. (2025) showed that the omnichannel approach in customer experience had a positive impact on their repurchase intentions and indirect engagement behaviours, such as influencing and feedback behaviour, as well as referral. Similarly, Irshad et al. (2025) revealed that the beneficial effects of augmented reality-driven experiences in retail included increased experiential value and psychological activities that ultimately reinforced the effects produced on satisfaction and loyalty. Such findings denoted that engagement was a way to bridge the gap between experience design and commercially worthy results.

Long-term outcomes represented the strategic value of the eEE because repeated positive interactions contributed to loyalty, advocacy and stronger emotional bonds with brands. However, the reviewed literature indicated that loyalty was not generated through individual transactions alone; it emerged through accumulated experiences across multiple touchpoints (Cuomo et al., 2020). For instance, Nike's ecosystem approach integrated physical stores, mobile applications, membership communities and personalised services to maintain continuous engagement beyond individual purchases (PS & Kannan, 2026). In another example, mobile ordering, personalised rewards and store experiences in the Starbucks loyalty ecosystem were combined to turn routine transactions into a lasting relationship (Jung, 2025).

However, the development of long-term relationships should be managed intensely since poor experiences may undermine and not strengthen stakeholder relationships. As emphasised by Abid et al. (2026), retail encounters based on technology may result in value co-creation or value co-destruction depending on the interpretation by the customers. Therefore, retailers should ensure that experiential innovations do not go against customer expectations, trust and value as perceived.

The eEE framework

Findings of the reviewed literature can be summarised in an eEE framework as shown in Figure 2. Collaborative exchanges ran through three dyads: management to frontline employees, employees to customers, and customer to customer, with engagement as the resource each party commits and trust as the hinge on which the employee-customer exchange turns. These exchanges unfolded inside the playground, whose sensory register stored attributes, technologies, and retailer-to-retailer relations that either amplified or drained them. Values and interactions generated there feed a staged sequence of outcomes: positive experiences and engagement in the moment, purchases in the middle distance, and repeated visits, loyalty, and positive memories over time, with the long-term outcomes feeding back into future exchanges. Against the reviewed corpus, the framework corrected five imbalances at once. It returned employees and managers to a literature that measured only customers. It converted one-way atmospherics into an arena where all parties enacted. It added the collaboration layer among co-located retailers that no previous study examined. It carried co-destruction and barriers alongside enablers, and it held the outcome chain open at both ends, so loyalty can moderate as well as result. The traditional experience economy was short of an economy, and the eEE is a first attempt to supply one.

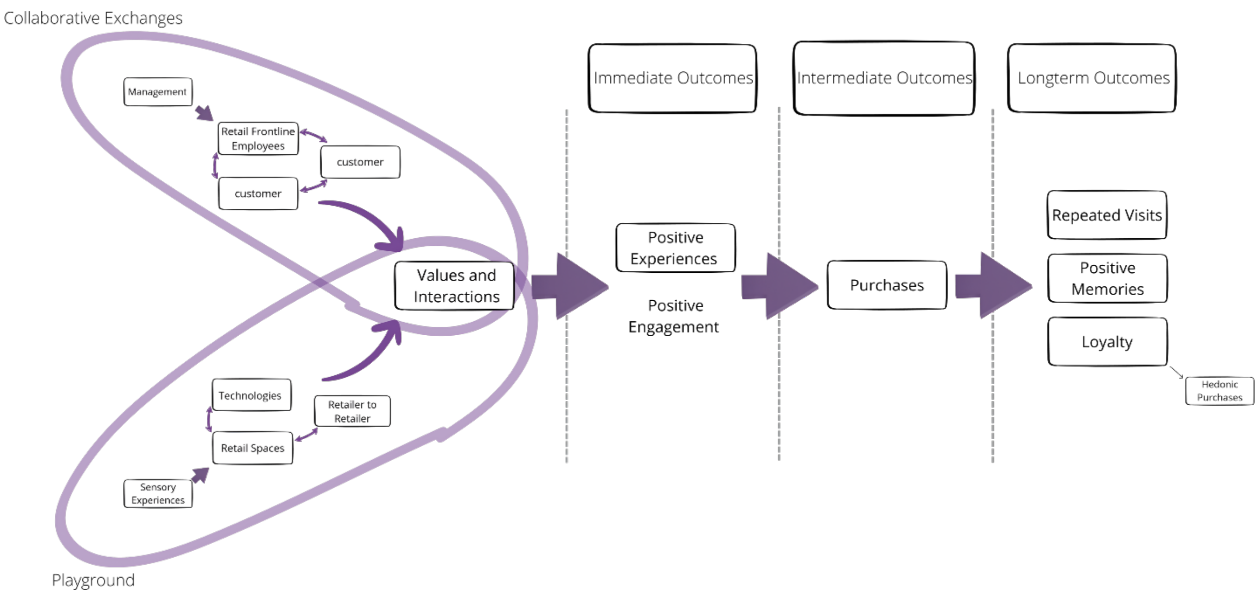

Figure 2. Proposed Engaging Experience Economy (eEE) Framework

This eEE framework revealed a pattern of strengths that aligned with the gaps it characterised and with limitations found in early-stage integrative models. The tripartite format (combination of exchanges, playground, and staged results) provided the field with a vocabulary that it had been deficient in. It was conceptually helpful to separate the relational layer and the environmental layer: sensory register, store attributes, technology and inter-retailer relations can be theorised since they condition exchange, rather than being folded together in an indistinguishable manner into "atmosphere". This separation also makes the framework more testable in principle, since each oval implies its own set of measurable constructs rather than one composite variable. Including management and frontline employees as active nodes, rather than a backdrop, addresses a documented asymmetry in the literature, which has concentrated heavily on customer-side measurement.

Future iterations of the framework, or empirical papers building on it, would benefit from specifying the construct type behind each link and the expected direction and boundary conditions of the relationship, since the diagram compresses what are effectively separate hypotheses into single words. The outcome chain currently routes all downstream effects through the experiential stage (positive experiences/engagement → purchases → loyalty). This is a reasonable default for experience-driven retail contexts, but it leaves an opening to model utilitarian or low-engagement purchase paths that bypass the experiential stage entirely - a boundary condition worth specifying explicitly rather than assuming the model is universal across purchase types.

5 Conclusion

The evidence from this systematic literature review pointed in one direction that value in physical retail comes from an exchange among customers, frontline staff, management, and the surrounding environment, not from any single actor working alone. The study proposed the eEE framework, which linked three exchange relationships, a shared playground of sensory and technological conditions, and a staged sequence of outcomes running from immediate satisfaction to long-term loyalty. The framework gave employees and managers a place in a literature that had mostly measured customers alone.

6 Limitations and Future Research

The review relied on 18 peer-reviewed articles in English that had been published in the past six years and thus did not include studies published in other languages and older foundational studies. The work was also slightly biased in its sample, with a select few countries and segments. Additionally, the eEE framework itself remained conceptual because it had been synthesised on the literature findings but not tested on empirical data. Future studies must explore and implement mechanisms for testing the framework in retail environments and across cultures.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Data Availability Statement

All data supporting the findings of this study are included within the article. No new datasets were generated or analysed.

Ethical Statement

Not applicable. This study is based on a review of published literature and did not involve human participants or animals.

Permission for Publication

Not applicable

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