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The Retail Designer in the Age of Phygital Retail: a Practice-based Retail Design Competence Framework for Retail Design Education

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During the past two decades, digitalisation and the emergence of new online/mobile channels have changed retailing dramatically (Verhoef et al. 2015). The proliferation of channels and consumers' demand for a seamless experience across them, is challenging retailers' business strategies (Melero et al. 2016). Concerning the physical channel, professional literature (e.g. blogs, newsletters, opinion articles) urges retailers to shift towards a phygital strategy. By means of integrating digital elements into the physical store, retailers can bridge the gap between the offline/online world and offer customers the convenience of the online platform combined with the authentic experience of the store (Trendwolves 2014).

Consequently, these developments will also influence the profession of retail design, as designers will have to create a brand experience in consistency with all retail channels. In this context, Teufel and Zimmerman (2015) plea for a new generation of retail designers who are able to approach the design process in a holistic way and think on the level of communication, graphics, space and the digital sphere. Along the same line, Quartier (2015) states this requires for retail designers who are capable to think and work in a more trans-disciplinary way.

In the academic discourse, and in research more particularly, retail design is seen as multidisciplinary practice. This means that the designers' occupation transcends disciplines such as interior design, architecture, product design, graphic design, social sciences, service design, communication, branding and marketing (Christiaans and Almendra 2012; Quartier 2015; Skjulstad 2014). Although, the academic field considers retail design as an autonomous

field of study, in practice the discipline is often seen as a sub-discipline of interior design (Quartier 2015; Skjulstad 2014). However, looking at the challenges from the perspective of retail design education, we believe that future retail designers need to be enabled to develop specific competences to cope with the upcoming challenges in the field of retail and retail design. Besides, as retail has reached a stage in which traditional retail formats need to be reconsidered, we need to reflect on the required retail designer's profile and consequently, on the interpretation of retail design education.

In the presented paper we would like to elaborate on our findings concerning the profile of a retail designer and discuss the accompanying competence framework (CF). The latter results from 30 interviews with 17 retail design agencies in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, conducted during the summer of 2016. In each agency, we interviewed junior designers and senior designers or other project members, whom we asked to reflect on the competences of today's and future retail designers.

This retail design CF will be further used to reflect on how future retail designers should be trained in the context of the aforementioned evolutions. Particularly, by using the CF as a point of reference, we aim to formulate specific retail design curriculum guidelines and design studio approaches. Finally, in the very near future the University, in collaboration with the Department of Design and Marketing, wishes to launch new retail design trainings. In doing so, our findings will be opportune to serve the conception of these programs and contribute to educating retail designers who are able to create innovative, durable and phygital retail concepts.

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