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The evolution of retail scholarship: looking back to move forward

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Abstract: Retail research has undergone significant strategic, behavioural, and technological transformation, prompting academic institutions to establish dedicated retail-focused faculty and programs. Despite this growth, retail scholarship remains scattered across disciplinary boundaries, limiting its development. This article contributes to retail scholarship development by providing an empirically rich mapping of research published in four dedicated leading retailing journals from 2000 to 2023. A content and thematic analysis of 5,199 articles were conducted using Leximancer and manual coding to examine topical, theoretical, and methodological trends. Within these retail-centric journals, five retail eras were identified: operations, digital and experiential retail, consumer behaviour and sector specialisation, optimisation and service integration, and COVID-19 and social media. The results indicate that quantitative research predominates the field, with the stimulus-organism-response (SOR) theory functioning as a prominent framework. This periodic conceptual synthesis establishes intellectual boundaries, highlights dominant theoretical perspectives, reveals evolving research priorities, and identifies underexplored domains for retail scholars.

Keywords: retail scholarship; retail strategy; content analysis; thematic analysis; retail research; retail transformation.

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1 Introduction

Retail is one of the largest global industries, serving as a critical junction between producers and consumers. The discipline of retail research is inherently interdisciplinary, drawing on marketing, economics, geography, and business strategy to examine the mechanisms, strategies, and consumer behaviour that animate the retail sector (McArthur et al., 2016). Over the past two decades, the retail industry has undergone transformative shifts: the rise of e-commerce and omnichannel strategies (Asmare and Zewdie, 2022; Jain et al., 2021), the proliferation of digital technologies and data analytics, the integration of artificial intelligence into retail operations (Shankar et al., 2021), and the emergence of social media as a retail environment. These changes have implications for how scholars conceptualise and study retail phenomena.

The process of periodic conceptual synthesis of a field of study establishes intellectual boundaries, highlights dominant theoretical perspectives, reveals evolving research priorities, and identifies underexplored domains. Prior reviews of retail research have made substantial contributions to this work. Early narrative reviews (e.g., Mayer, 1989) conceptualised retail research in successive eras, mapping the field's progression from practical 'how-to' guidance toward theoretical sophistication and strategic inquiry. More recent reviews have employed bibliometric and thematic approaches to identify influential authors, journals, and conceptual clusters (Findlay and Sparks, 2010; Runyan and Hyun, 2009; Wang et al., 2024). However, these reviews have typically focused on narrow time windows or single journals, limiting their capacity.

For the purposes of this study, we define the boundary of retail as a distinct exchange and/or interaction between consumers and organisations that sell goods or services, regardless of where that exchange occurs (i.e., physical, online, or hybrid retail environments). This definition recognises that retail draws on multiple disciplines, including marketing, management, and information systems, while also maintaining a distinct focus on retail-specific contexts. In this sense, retail can be understood as a vertical subject area: a field in which different interdisciplinary perspectives converge

around business-to-consumer exchange. This distinguishes it from horizontal subject areas, such as marketing, whose concepts and methods can be applied across many contexts, such as retailing or hospitality. Retail has transformed through the adaptation of core concepts, the integration of established theories, and the gradual development of shared methodological rigour. For example, the field has moved from generic measures of satisfaction toward more retail-specific concepts such as engagement and consumer behaviour, while frameworks such as the stimulus-organism-response (SOR) model have become widely used in retail contexts. Accordingly, this review examines how retail research has developed based on the identified core set of journals.

Compared to recent reviews, this study examines a broader timeframe across multiple retail journals and integrates thematic, methodological, and theoretical patterns. The study contributes to the retailing field by examining the thematic development, methodological progression, and theoretical patterns of top retail-focused journals. These leading dedicated retail journals provide an analytically useful and bounded corpus for examining the journal-based core of retail research. Thus, we address the following questions:

- RQ1 What are the key themes that have emerged in dedicated retail journals, and how do they interrelate?
- RQ2 How have these themes transitioned across different phases of retail-journal scholarship?
- RQ3 What methodological approaches characterise research published in dedicated retail journals, and what gaps can future retail researchers address?
- RQ4 What theoretical frameworks have guided retail-journal scholarship, and how have they been adapted to new contexts?

2 Background and context

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the retail industry has accelerated its transformation (Shankar et al., 2021), prompting the evolution of retail-specific degree programs and educational infrastructure. For example, this institutional shift is evident across Canadian universities: Toronto Metropolitan University and McGill University have established dedicated retail-focused faculty, with programs such as the Bachelor of Commerce in Retail Management at Toronto Metropolitan University and the Master of Management in Retailing at McGill University. These developments have fundamentally reshaped the academic landscape. At the same time, student demand for retail has decreased as both universities and retailers have faced resource constraints. The evolution of retail faculty and programs signals academic recognition of retail's distinctiveness. Yet, without a comprehensive understanding of the field's intellectual foundation and evolution, institutions cannot effectively prepare students and the broader retail industry for the challenges ahead. Thus, an analysis of existing literature is essential to predict the trajectory of retail-focused journals and inform the development of rigorous, relevant educational programs.

In prior reviews of retail research, there has been a gradual shift from a historical narrative review (e.g., Mayer, 1989) to a more current focus on bibliometric (e.g., Findlay and Sparks, 2010; Runyan and Hyun, 2009) and thematic analyses (e.g., Ketron et al.,

2017; Wang et al., 2024). While early narrative reviews provide a more qualitative commentary on the state of the field, bibliometric analyses identify key publications (e.g., most influential journals), impact factor, and productivity trends (e.g., Ketron et al., 2017; Runyan and Hyun, 2009; Wang et al., 2024). Thematic analysis is also used to identify keywords and systematically categorise research streams (e.g., Samanta and Aithal, 2024; Wang et al., 2024).

Earlier reviews focused on the evolution of retail research by conceptually categorising literature into different periods or eras (e.g., Findlay and Sparks, 2010; Mayer, 1989). One of the first reviews conceptualised eras of retail from 1950 to 1988 (Mayer, 1989). Despite exclusively focusing on one journal, this article laid the foundation for conceptualising retail eras. There is a need to update the findings for retail scholarship. This research further establishes the thematic understanding of retail research bounded by top retailing journals by building on the thematic and methodological strengths previously examined by Wang et al. (2024).

Review findings have investigated retail's progression as a discipline influenced by marketing, management, and strategy (e.g., Findlay and Sparks, 2002, 2010; Mayer, 1989). Subsequent reviews focus on ranking key retail journals, authors, and institutions using a systematic approach (e.g., Runyan, 2008; Runyan and Hyun, 2009). More recently, many reviews began categorising literature into specific retail themes (e.g., Ketron et al., 2017; Runyan and Droge, 2008; Wang et al., 2024). Oftentimes, these reviews limit their thematic understanding of the retail literature by analysing a small number of academic articles for interpretation (e.g., Hänninen et al., 2021). This article fills the gap by employing a systematic approach to analyse a larger sample of 5,199 academic articles, providing an empirical evaluation of retail journals since 2000.

More importantly, while recent papers have provided valuable insights on retail scholarship, they tend to limit the review to a smaller timeframe, scope, and conceptual depth. For example, Wang et al. (2024) explicitly restricts their analysis to a single journal over an eight-year period. A longer timeframe allows for a macro-level analysis to capture the retail scholarship shifts that have defined the current scope of retail-specific journals. Thus, this research empirically updates Mayer's framework of retail 'eras' by demonstrating transitions within dedicated retail journals and then providing actionable insights for researchers.

As retail reviews evolve to provide future support for researchers, it becomes important to establish a bounded roadmap of retail literature based on the development of key themes. This review provides a structured overview of four key retail journals to identify dominant themes, methodological patterns, theoretical trends, and future gaps.

3 Methodology

This study uses a hybrid review strategy to generate an empirical periodisation of retail-journal scholarship. The approach combines three analytical components: corpus-assisted thematic analysis, temporal comparison across five-year periods, and manual content coding of methodological and theoretical patterns. We use the term empirical periodisation to refer to the process of identifying eras from observed patterns in the selected journal corpus rather than imposing era labels in advance. The analytical sequence involved five steps:

- 1 defining a retail-specific journal corpus
- 2 generating Leximancer theme maps for the full corpus and five-year sub-periods
- 3 comparing theme transitions across periods; manually coding the methodological and theoretical orientation of each article;
- 4 synthesising these outputs into an interpretive framework of retail scholarship's evolution.

3.1 Inclusion criteria and data collection

We conducted a review of research articles published in four anglophone dedicated retail journals: *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management*, *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, *Journal of Retailing*, and *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*. These journals were selected because they are commonly used in prior reviews of retail research and provide a focused corpus for examining the journal-based core of retail scholarship (Findlay and Sparks, 2002; Ketron et al., 2017; Runyan and Hyun, 2009; Samanta and Aithal, 2024). Accordingly, the study's periodisation highlights the thematic, theoretical, and methodological evolution within this dedicated retail-journal corpus.

The dataset includes research articles published between 2000 and 2023. For this review, research articles were defined as full-length scholarly articles that developed a conceptual argument or reported an empirical study. Editorials, special issue introductions, practitioner notes, book reviews, calls for papers, and other non-research items were excluded. Article type was assessed using the journal or database classification where available. The final dataset includes 5,199 articles. Conceptual, qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods articles were included to avoid privileging one research approach and to reflect the methodological diversity of retail literature. After downloading the full-text articles and recording bibliographic information, we conducted the thematic and content analyses described below.

3.2 Thematic analysis

To systematically identify and analyse research themes within this large body of literature, we employed Leximancer, a text mining software. Leximancer utilises machine learning algorithms to identify frequent terms and co-occurrence patterns in textual data, thereby extracting concepts that are clustered into higher-level themes based on their interrelationships (Sotiriadou et al., 2014).

Following the approach of Fares et al. (2022), we input the collected corpus of articles divided across the 5-year sub-periods into Leximancer. The concepts are grouped to identify higher-level themes. Here, a theme refers to a prominent concept or cluster of related concepts that frequently appear with high frequency and connectivity in the corpus. To avoid researcher bias in theme identification, a priori categories were not utilised. This decision was a key element of the periodisation logic. Rather than beginning with pre-existing labels for retail eras, the study first allowed dominant concepts and co-occurrence patterns to emerge from the corpus. Era labels were then assigned by comparing each period's thematic structure with its corresponding methodological and theoretical patterns within the dedicated retail-journal corpus. This

sequencing reduces the risk of reproducing earlier narrative accounts of retail history, while acknowledging that the era labels reflect the selected retail-journal corpus rather than the broader interdisciplinary body of retail-related scholarship. The resulting concept map was then interpreted and manually refined using Leximancer's built-in thesaurus editing. Refinement involved removing non-substantive terms, such as common verbs and generic words that did not contribute meaningfully to interpretation, and merging closely related concepts where needed for clarity. Theme interpretation was based on Leximancer's ranked theme output, the frequency and connectivity of concepts within each theme, and the substantive relevance of each theme to the research questions. As reported below, the analysis focused on the three to five most prominent themes in each five-year period since these represented the primary intellectual focus of the corresponding sub-corpus.

To address RQ2, we segmented the retail-journal corpus into five distinct periods. While prior research often analyses a 10-year period (Mayer, 1989), the rapid rate of retail innovation and technological change necessitated a shorter 5-year period. We conducted separate Leximancer analyses for each period. The same analytical procedure was applied across the full corpus and the five-year sub-periods to support comparability. Each run used the article corpus for that period as the unit of analysis and followed the same sequence of theme generation, thesaurus refinement, theme ranking, and interpretive comparison. This temporal segmentation enabled us to capture the rise and fall of specific themes between periods and compare thematic differences. For each period, Leximancer provided a set of ranked themes based on their frequency of occurrence (i.e., a percentage of all concept occurrences in that sub-corpus) and co-occurrence strength. We focused on the top themes in each period (i.e., the three to five most prominent themes), as they represent the primary intellectual foci of retail research.

3.3 *Content analysis*

In addition to mapping thematic content, our methodology incorporated an analysis of the research methods and theoretical frameworks utilised in the retail literature (addressing RQ3 and RQ4). A complementary manual coding was conducted by examining the methods section for each article in our dataset regarding these two dimensions. First, we coded each article ($n = 5,199$) for its primary research design or methodological approach. The goal was to determine the proportion of studies employing each type of method. There were four main types of research: quantitative empirical research, qualitative research, mixed methods research, and conceptual/theoretical papers. These categories were used to describe broad methodological patterns across the corpus and to characterise field-level trends in research design, rather than to compare studies on dimensions such as quality, rigour, or causal credibility. For example, studies coded as quantitative include surveys, experiments, modelling studies, and other forms of statistical analysis. Accordingly, method coding functions as a descriptive framework for mapping variation in research approaches across the literature, rather than as a hierarchy of evidentiary strength within categories. By quantifying methodological trends (e.g., the percentage of articles using quantitative methods in each period), we can highlight periodical shifts in research design.

Second, we also identified the predominant theoretical frameworks or models used in each article. This was accomplished by examining the introduction and literature review

sections of the articles to identify theories that were used. Identifying these patterns help reveal how the intellectual underpinnings of retail research have shifted.

4 Findings

A review of articles published in the selected dedicated retail journals over the last two decades reveals a clear progression within anglophone retail-journal scholarship. The initial emphasis on physical retail spaces gradually shifted toward digital technologies, customer experience, and the growing influence of social media. Although the findings are presented in chronological order, they should not be read as a linear replacement of one retail concern with another. Instead, each era focuses on certain themes while earlier concerns (e.g., work or trust) recur in new forms of focus. In the following sections, we introduce the five retail eras within the retail-journal corpus.

4.1 The era of operations

At the beginning of the 21st century, the retail literature was primarily focused on the tangible world of physical stores. This era represents the early beginnings of 21st century retail literature prior to the widespread use of social media and smartphones. Although e-commerce giants like Amazon began in the late 20th century (Forbes Technology Council, 2024), the findings of this era suggest that the research was still primarily focused on the physical side of retail. The most prevalent theme was ‘store,’ with its character defined by key conceptual associations such as ‘grocery’ (41%), ‘chain’ (38%), and ‘food’ (37%). This reflects a focus on large-scale food retailing operations, with studies frequently examining consumer preferences in grocery shopping (Geuens et al., 2003) and store chain management (Cliquet, 2000). The concept of ‘sales,’ with 30% frequency, emphasised interest in tangible store performance metrics. This physical-world orientation extended directly into the conceptualisation of the ‘market,’ the second most dominant theme. The primary concerns were ‘competitive’ (26%) and ‘local’ (26%) market dynamics. Research often explored challenges such as market saturation and barriers to entry within specific geographic contexts (O’Kelly, 2001). The high incidence of ‘UK’ (19%) as a key term highlights a regional rather than global research focus.

The ‘customer’ theme was understood primarily through the lens of in-store interactions and relationship management. The dominant associations of ‘satisfaction’ (38%), ‘loyalty’ (36%), and ‘service’ (31%) suggest that the customer was viewed as a service recipient whose loyalty could be secured through effective in-store management. The literature focused on empirically measuring customer satisfaction with product offerings and service experiences (Szymanski and Hise, 2000). At the same time, the literature also focused on understanding the drivers of store loyalty through spending patterns and commitment (Kumar and Shah, 2004).

Rounding out this physically grounded perspective were the themes of ‘work’ and ‘trust.’ ‘Work’ represented a logical component of the operational focus, examining the human element of retail through concepts like ‘people’ (12%) and their ‘role’ (7%) within the organisational ‘environment’ (6%). Furthermore, the theme of ‘trust,’ though less frequent, served as an important forward-looking concept. While its primary association with ‘relationship’ (7%) reinforced the period’s focus on interpersonal dynamics (Harris and Goode, 2004), a small yet significant association with ‘online’

(4%) acted as an early signal of the anxieties surrounding the novel e-commerce. As a result, this theme represented a direct scholarly response to the perceived risks of a dematerialised retail space, foreshadowing the massive disruption that would define the next period (Newholm et al., 2004).

The findings under this era reflects a time where retail research was organised around the actual operations of a physical retail store. Retail was essentially considered a store-based system in which value was created through geographical, people-based, and management connections. This era helps establish the baseline for which future retail research evolves from, as subsequent periods introduce new transformations. As such, this era marked the beginning of how retail scholars would understand the mechanisms of retail value creation.

4.2 *The era of digital and experiential retail*

While the physical store remained a central object of study from 2005 to 2009, its conceptualisation evolved from a purely functional space to an experiential one. The theme of 'store' remained dominant, but its character changed. The earlier operational focus on 'grocery' and 'food' was supplanted by new associations emphasising aesthetics and atmosphere: 'image' (44%), 'environment' (24%), and 'design' (23%). This reflects a growing focus on understanding the store's experiential qualities. Another development of this period was the emergence of 'shopping' as a major theme. Its top association, 'online' (30%), alongside 'internet' (20%), signaled the arrival of e-commerce as a mainstream topic. Research began to focus on consumer behaviour in these digital interfaces (Demangeot and Broderick, 2007). The emergence of 'experience' (23%) as another key association served as a bridge, connecting the new digital focus with the evolving, experiential understanding of the physical store (Millan and Howard, 2007). The digital findings in this era are reflective of the broader retail industry where more e-commerce platforms like Shopify were introduced in 2006, platforms like Twitter emerged, and the App Store was introduced in 2008 (Retail Brew, n.d.).

Furthermore, the 'market' theme showcased the increasing international perspective in retail research. The narrative of retail competition shifted from local to global, as evidenced by 'local' and 'UK' evolving to 'international' (40%) as the top conceptual association. This signaled a new scholarly focus on cross-border expansion strategies and the challenges of operating in multiple global markets (Wigley and Rachel Chiang, 2009). Moreover, the rise of 'brand' (14%) and 'price' (14%) as key associations reflects this more complex and competitive international landscape. Additionally, during this period, the themes of 'work' from the previous era did not disappear and were instead subsumed into the 'customer' theme through the new key association of 'employees' (34%).

In comparison to the previous era, this one marked a movement from operational retail to a more experiential and international view of retail research. Physical stores were not only looked at as a place of operations, but as an environment that shaped customer behaviours. At the same time, the incorporation of online shopping and internet-based retail signaled the early integration of digital interfaces into retail research. This era represents a transitional phase, moving beyond the physical store's operational focus while maintaining it as a strategic touchpoint for customer experience.

4.3 The era of consumer behaviour and sector specialisation

The focus here shifted inward, toward the psychological and behavioural drivers of consumer choice, and outward, toward the unique dynamics of specific, high-value market sectors. This period marked a shift from the identification of new phenomena to explanatory research that sought to understand them. This evolution is evident in the 'shopping' theme, which underwent an internal transformation. The technological focus of the previous era, characterised by terms like 'online' and 'internet' gave way to a psychological one. New top associations like 'behaviour' (19%) and 'intentions' (14%) came to the forefront, signaling a deeper inquiry into the cognitive and affective processes underlying consumer actions. Research began to dissect phenomena like impulse buying (Kacen et al., 2012), moving beyond simply acknowledging the existence of online channels to explaining why and how consumers behave within them. This period reflected a broader change in retail practice, as social channels became an increasingly important source of product information that shaped consumer choices and reinforced loyalty (Deloitte, 2014).

This trend toward specialisation was also reflected in the 'market' theme. The general study of market strategy evolved into focused analyses of specific industries, with 'food' (16%) and 'fashion' (15%) emerging as key sectors of investigation. The simultaneous rise of 'share' (35%) as the theme's top association suggests a scholarly recognition of a more mature, competitive environment where market position had become a key performance indicator to be studied and managed (Rubio et al., 2013). Moreover, the 'store' theme continued its experiential trajectory, but also began to specialise, developing a notable focus on high-end retail. This is evidenced by the new key association of 'luxury' (18%). This pointed to a growing body of literature examining consumer experiences and motivations within luxury brand stores (Joy et al., 2014). Meanwhile, the 'customer' theme saw the resurgence of 'relationship' (19%) as a key concept, suggesting a renewed interest in the long-term dynamics between consumers and retailers. This period represents a time of increasing sophistication, where the foundational paradigms established in the previous era were applied with greater precision. Ultimately, this era reflects a critical turning point by shifting towards consumer psychology and specialised markets. Retail researchers began to explain, in more detail, why consumers behave the way they do, helping to develop retail into a more complex discipline.

4.4 The era of optimisation and service integration

The years 2015 to 2019 witnessed a reorientation of retail scholarship. Here, the 'store' was dethroned as the primary theme, supplanted by the 'product' itself. This development signifies a pivot in research attention from the place of the transaction to the object of the transaction, a direct consequence of e-commerce's rise. In a digital environment, the product and its digital representation become the primary interface between retailer and consumer. The emergence of 'product' as the new top theme is the central story of this period. Its key associations, including 'category' (45%), 'price' (27%), 'quality' (25%), and 'choice' (21%), indicate a clear shift toward product attributes and the ways consumers evaluate and select goods. There was an increasing focus on how product categorisation influences consumer behaviour (Trivedi et al., 2016), how price and

quality perceptions interact to shape purchase intentions (Konuk, 2018), and what drives product choice (Reynolds-McIlInay et al., 2017).

Simultaneously, the ‘customer’ theme grew in importance and became more nuanced. The re-emergence of ‘employees’ (41%) as a top association, alongside the concepts of ‘satisfaction’ (42%) and ‘service’ (34%), points to a deep integration of service delivery into the customer experience. This suggests a growing recognition that as routine transactions become more automated and digital, the human touchpoints that remain become exponentially more critical for building loyalty and delivering value.

Finally, the ‘market’ theme continued its trajectory of specialisation, with research concentrating on high-value sectors. ‘Luxury’ (9%) and ‘fashion’ (8%) remained prominent associations, reflecting the continued scholarly interest in these dynamic sectors (Kautish and Sharma, 2018). The introduction of ‘performance’ (6%) as a new key association indicates an increasing focus within the literature on measurable outcomes, firm performance metrics, and the return on investment for complex retail strategies (Schmidt et al., 2017).

Altogether, the journal-bounded empirical shifts highlighted within this era reveal how the physical and digital retail divide were bridged. This aligns with the growing importance of omnichannel retail, where customer experiences are integrated across various touchpoints to enable seamless movement between digital and physical retail spaces (Rizzo, 2019). The findings showed that although shopping has become more automated, high-quality human service remains essential for effective customer experience and for business success. This era helped continue the development of future omnichannel research.

4.5 The era of COVID-19 and social media

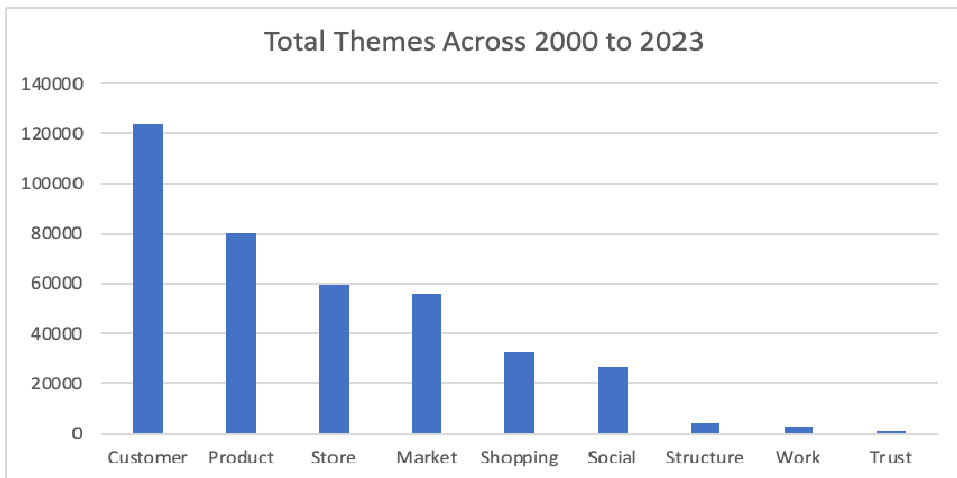
The most recent period, spanning 2020 to 2023, is characterised by the integration of technology into the customer journey and the rise of social media as a retail environment. This era reflects the clearest alignment between the retail industry and literature due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted global logistics (Retail Brew, n.d.). However, in our findings, the pandemic is treated as an accelerator of existing retail trends rather than the sole cause of change. Since this study is thematic rather than causal, it cannot fully separate lasting structural changes from temporary pandemic effects. Thus, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, this era saw the concept of the customer evolve from a value recipient to an active co-creator (e.g., Agrawal, 2023).

‘Customer’ became the top theme, but its meaning was redefined by new associations: ‘engagement’ (41%), ‘technology’ (18%), and ‘mobile’ (18%). This shift is significant; the goal is no longer simply to achieve ‘satisfaction,’ a relatively passive outcome, but to foster ‘engagement,’ a dynamic process requiring active customer participation, such as liking and sharing. This reflects a more interactive and continuous relationship, mediated by technology (Gligor and Bozkurt, 2020). The defining feature of this period, however, is the emergence of ‘social’ as a major new theme. Its dominance by the association ‘media’ (99%) demonstrates the centrality of social media as spaces for retail activity. The fact that ‘social’ emerged as a top-level theme signifies that social media is not merely viewed as a channel for commerce or a tool for engagement. It is being studied as a retail environment with its own unique social dynamics, psychological influences, and behavioural rules (Hussain et al., 2023). The inclusion of ‘covid’ (13%)

as an association links the theme's rapid rise to the pandemic's role in curtailing physical interaction and shifting to digital and social commerce (Liu et al., 2023).

'Product' remained a key focus, with its context embedded in the digital realm. The key associations of 'information' (24%) and 'fashion' (20%) highlight the paramount importance of digital content, such as visual presentations and textual descriptions, in shaping consumer perceptions and reinforcing the prominence of the apparel sector in online and social commerce (Kim et al., 2021). This contemporary landscape is one where the customer journey is digitally native, socially embedded, and centred on active engagement. By demonstrating that retail has become deeply integrated with social interaction, this era displays the transition from traditional retail research to a highly interactive, co-creative dynamic between customers and retailers. See Figure 1 for the top themes that emerged in the dataset.

Figure 1 2000–2023 major themes (see online version for colours)



4.6 The methods and theory of retail research

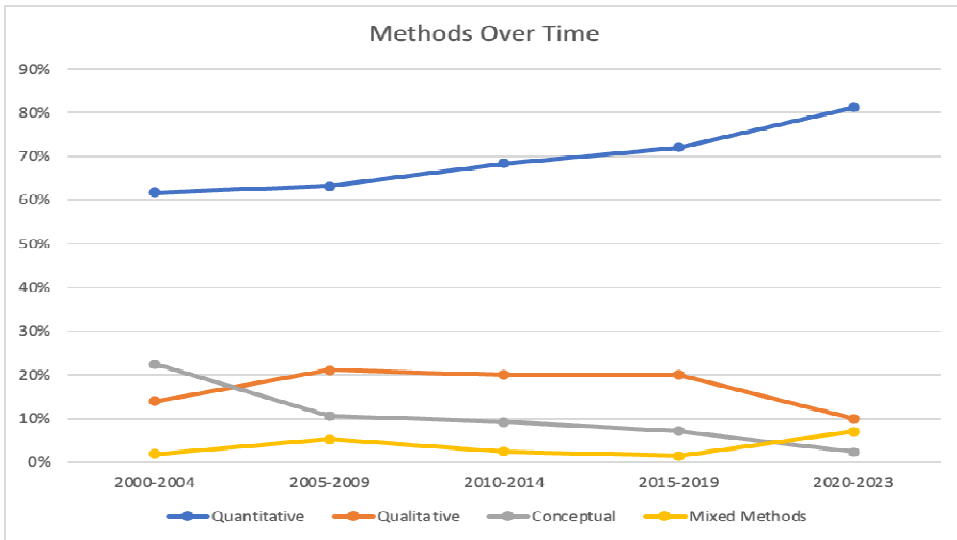
Beyond tracking what is being studied, a comprehensive understanding of the journal-bounded retail scholarship requires an analysis of how it is being studied. The evolution of research methods and foundational theories over the past two decades reveal a field that is undergoing significant maturation. The methodological and theoretical shifts are not independent of the thematic changes. Rather, they are inextricably linked, demonstrating how the scholarly architecture of the discipline has evolved to provide the necessary tools to investigate an increasingly complex and data-rich environment.

4.6.1 Methodological trends

Over the past two decades, there has been a shift from a greater reliance on conceptual and descriptive work toward a stronger presence of quantitative empirical studies in retail. The key evidence for this trend is the steady rise of quantitative methods, which grew from a 62% majority of published journal-bounded articles in the 2000–2004 period to 81% in the 2020–2023 period (Figure 2). While surveys have remained a staple for

capturing consumer attitudes and behaviours (Javed and Wu, 2020), some studies also use experiments to examine causal relationships (Tascioglu et al., 2019). The increase in quantitative research appears alongside a decline in conceptual papers; in the 2000–2004 period, conceptual work was the second most common approach, accounting for 22% of articles. As these foundational theories are established, the logical next step for the discipline was to test and validate them with empirical data. Consequently, the prevalence of conceptual papers plummeted, reaching a recent low of just 2%, which aligns with external scholarly trends and the pressure of academic publication.

Figure 2 Retail methods over time (see online version for colours)



Qualitative research remains a valuable, though non-dominant, approach for gaining in-depth insights into consumer experiences and perceptions through methods such as interviews and ethnographies (Sit et al., 2018). After peaking at 21% of publications in the 2005–2009 period, its usage declined to 10% in the 2020–2023 period. A potentially significant recent development is the resurgence of mixed methods (e.g., Siregar et al., 2023), which, after reaching a low of 1% in 2015–2019, rose to 7% in the latest period, surpassing conceptual papers. Leveraging mixed methods allows researchers to capture both quantitative metrics and the complex human experiences that define the modern retail landscape. This uptick may signal a new phase of maturity, where retail researchers aim for a more holistic analysis. These findings underscore the necessity of integrating qualitative research to provide depth and nuance, effectively balancing the predominant reliance on quantitative methods.

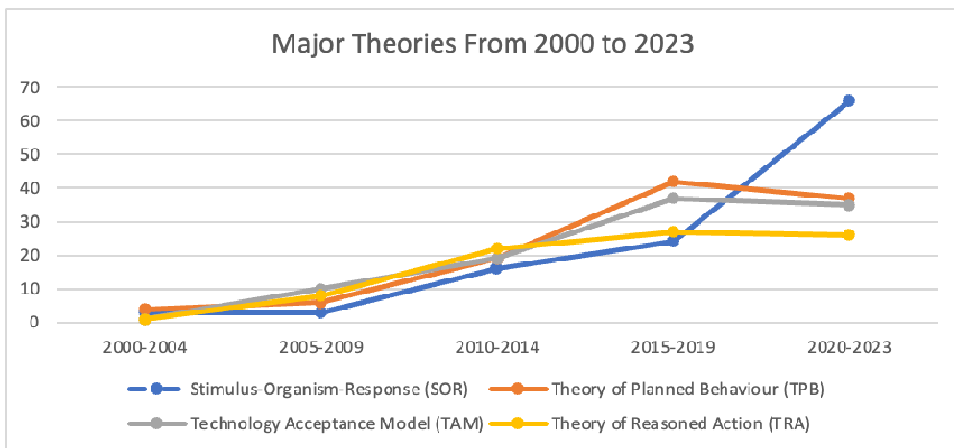
4.6.2 Theoretical framework trends

We tracked and analysed the theoretical frameworks that have been used over time to uncover their popularity in the journal-bounded retail research (Figure 3). The most versatile and increasingly dominant framework has been the S-O-R model, with 112 occurrences. The model's enduring popularity lies in its high level of abstraction. The 'stimulus' can be a physical store's layout (Thang and Tan, 2003) or an augmented

reality application (Watson et al., 2020), making it a highly adaptable framework that can evolve with the field.

Another powerful and interconnected family of theories, rooted in social psychology, has also been central to retail research: the theory of reasoned action (TRA) (84 occurrences), its extension the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) (108 occurrences), and the technology acceptance model (TAM) (102 occurrences). TRA provided the foundational logic for understanding how attitudes shape intentions (Lee and Park, 2009). The theory has been extended in the TPB and TAM, which became more prominent due to their greater explanatory power in specific retail contexts. The rise of TAM, in particular, corresponds to the digitisation of retail. As there was a shift toward technology, researchers sought to understand consumer adoption of online shopping (Domina et al., 2012), social networks (Pookulangara and Koesler, 2011), and smart technologies (Roy et al., 2018). Ultimately, these findings highlight retail as a discipline that is reliant on older, more established theories. As retail research evolves, scholars should place greater emphasis on conceptual work that moves beyond established theories and develops new frameworks for understanding retail as a distinct and changing discipline.

Figure 3 Top theories in retail over time (see online version for colours)



5 Discussion

This review maps the journal-based core of retail scholarship by identifying what four dedicated retail journals have published, how their priorities have shifted, and which theoretical and methodological toolkits have been used most often. The periodisation that emerges from 5,199 articles surfaces a set of recurring logics that have shaped retail research (and that now constrain it). Firstly, the field repeatedly redefines the focal unit of analysis as retail technologies and channels evolve. This shifting focus shows how retail as a discipline naturally develops over time. As Bryant (1975) argues in the application of Kuhnian paradigms to social science, new social contexts make disciplines adapt and create ‘new occasions for theorising’ (p. 358, citing Peel). Secondly, theoretical adaptation has outpaced theoretical renewal, with established social-psychological and

environmental-response models repeatedly repurposed to fit new contexts. Finally, methodological choices track data availability and publication incentives, producing a field rich in measurement and prediction but less developed in explaining institutional change, workforce dynamics, and the shifting boundaries of retail itself. These patterns explain why retail research can appear both expansive and fragmented (McArthur et al., 2016), and why periodic syntheses can serve as field-building interventions (Findlay and Sparks, 2010; Runyan and Hyun, 2009; Wang et al., 2024).

The findings clarify how retail has developed as a distinct interdisciplinary research domain within the journal-based core of retail scholarship. The five eras deepen the theoretical contribution of periodisation by showing how the object of dedicated journal-based retail research has shifted over time. Throughout, retail is reshaped and defined through the shifting environment happening in real-time. In the earliest period, retail is theorised through the tangible aspect of physical stores, whether that be through its operation, elements, or environment. In the second period, retail becomes an experience that integrates elements of both physical and online interfaces. In the third period, retail is increasingly theorised through consumer behaviour and sector-specific logics, which shifted attention toward why consumers behave the way they do within distinct retail contexts. Within the fourth period, retail is centred around products, categories, and service integration, which reflects a more optimised understanding of retail exchange. The most recent period theorised retail as a socially-embedded discipline, with customer engagement, technologies, and social media reshaping retail activity.

This theorisation showcases retail's evolution from store-based to omnichannel, making way for digital retail. Further, retail has evolved beyond its connections to marketing, operations, and information systems to become a central intersection of technology, society, and organisation. Additionally, the shift toward quantitative and mixed methods research indicates that retail research has reached the methodological consistency required to become a mature and independent discipline. Finally, the use of modern retail scholarship adapting distinctive theories like S-O-R or TAM showcases the boundary conditions that are unique to the retail environment.

5.1 Retail research eras

Earlier reviews argued that retail scholarship could be understood through eras that reflect the field's evolving preoccupations (Findlay and Sparks, 2010; Runyan and Hyun, 2009). Mayer's (1989) decade-based account culminated in strategic retailing, signalling an inflection point where retail research increasingly engaged predictive analysis and firm strategy rather than purely operational guidance. Our findings extend that logic, but the data support a finer temporal grain: retail change since 2000 has been fast enough that 5-year windows better capture the emergence and evolution of central themes.

The five eras identified here collectively show retail scholarship repeatedly re-centering what retail is assumed to be. The Era of Operations (2000–2004) anchors retail in physical formats, operational performance, and store-based relationships (Cliquet, 2000; Kumar and Shah, 2004; O'Kelly, 2001; Szymanski and Hise, 2000). Importantly, this period already contains an early tension that later becomes defining: trust and relational mechanisms remain store-based, yet begin to be reinterpreted through nascent online risk and credibility concerns (Harris and Goode, 2004; Newholm et al., 2004). The Era of Digital and Experiential Retail (2005–2009) marks a reframing of the

store from a functional site to an experiential environment, while online shopping becomes sufficiently mainstream to motivate theory-building on digital consumer behaviour (Demangeot and Broderick, 2007; Millan and Howard, 2007). In parallel, retail competition is increasingly discussed as international rather than local, consistent with work on retail internationalisation (Wigley and Rachel Chiang, 2009). This period is less a digital turn than a dual expansion: stores are studied as designed experiences and digital channels are studied as new environments requiring distinct behavioural explanations.

The era of consumer behaviour and sector specialisation (2010–2014) shifts from describing new channels toward explaining consumer decision processes inside them. Work on impulse buying and motivational drivers illustrates this move toward behavioural mechanisms (Kacen et al., 2012). At the same time, the literature becomes more sector-attuned, particularly in food, fashion, and luxury, where consumption logics and service expectations differ (Joy et al., 2014; Rubio et al., 2013). The era of optimisation and service integration (2015–2019) represents a structural pivot: as retail becomes more mediated by digital interfaces, ‘product’ becomes a dominant analytic object, while the study of category structure, price-quality inference, and choice architecture intensifies (Konuk, 2018; Reynolds-McIlroy et al., 2017; Trivedi et al., 2016). Yet, this is not a retreat from service. Rather, it is a reallocation of service attention toward the touchpoints that remain most differentiating, including employee-mediated encounters and recovery processes (Bougoure et al., 2016). The era therefore reflects a deeper question that retail research will increasingly face: what constitutes the retail experience when transaction mechanics are optimised and partially automated?

Finally, the era of COVID-19 and social media (2020–2023) consolidates engagement, mobility, and platform-mediated interaction as core concerns. Pandemic disruption accelerates digitisation and reshapes shopping patterns (Agrawal, 2023; Liu et al., 2023), while social media becomes studied as a retail environment with its own behavioural rules and influence dynamics (Hussain et al., 2023; Siregar et al., 2023; Vazquez et al., 2023). This period also sharpens a field-level implication: if retail is increasingly enacted across apps, platforms, and content ecosystems (Kim et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2022), then the boundaries of retailing shifts from places and firms toward socio-technical systems and ongoing customer participation (Gligor and Bozkurt, 2020). These eras provide a cumulative account of retail scholarship’s moving object: retail research has tracked the industry’s channel and technology evolution, but it has done so by repeatedly re-centering the unit of analysis rather than by consolidating a shared set of boundary conditions for what retail is (McArthur et al., 2016). This is important because without clearer boundary conditions, findings accumulate within sub-streams but travel less effectively across them, reinforcing the fragmentation noted in prior syntheses (Findlay and Sparks, 2010; Runyan and Hyun, 2009; Wang et al., 2024).

While these five eras are presented in chronological order, they are not considered a linear progression that causes the disappearance of earlier retailing concerns. Instead, the findings suggest that earlier concerns, such as work and trust, reappear in new forms across later eras and function as central cross-era tensions. For example, trust shifts from a concern with relationships and early online transactions to later concerns about social media and technology-mediated retail. Although not specifically labelled as ‘trust’ in later eras, the topic sets the foundation for broader consumer psychological and behavioural concerns. Similarly, work shifts from an operational focus to a less visible but important issue embedded within service, digital interactions, and employee relationships. Therefore, the five eras are better understood as overlapping and recurring

in evolving forms rather than a strictly linear progression. This shows how earlier retail concerns are reorganised over time in response to changes in the retail industry and its broader environment.

5.2 *Method and theory co-evolution*

A second contribution of this review is showing how thematic change is mirrored by shifts in method and theory. The increasing reliance on quantitative designs suggests a growing emphasis on measurement, prediction, and generalisability. Surveys remain central for attitudinal and post-purchase outcomes (e.g., Javed and Wu, 2020), while experimental studies offer one route for testing causal links in retail contexts (Salhieh et al., 2021; Tascioglu et al., 2019). Qualitative approaches retain a smaller but important role in capturing lived experience, channel tensions, and consumer sensemaking (Sit et al., 2018). The recent uptick in mixed methods work (e.g., Siregar et al., 2023) is a promising signal because it supports both mechanism discovery and empirical validation in complex omnichannel settings. However, the evidence of quantitative as the dominant methodology used in retail literature should not be interpreted as quantitative research being more mature or rigorous as a whole. Instead, it reflects an increasing pattern within retail as a field. Qualitative, conceptual, and mixed methods remain essential for retail scholars to use for theory building and research development to diversify the methodology of the field.

Theoretical trends reveal a parallel pattern: rather than frequent introduction of new theories, retail research has largely advanced through adaptation and extension of a relatively stable set of frameworks. S-O-R model's prominence reflects its portability across contexts, from store atmospherics to newer digital stimuli such as augmented reality (Watson et al., 2020). The interconnected family of TRA, TPB, and TAM likewise fits a field repeatedly studying adoption, intention, and usage across successive technologies and channels (e.g., Domina et al., 2012; Gupta et al., 2020; Lee and Park, 2009; Pookulangara and Koesler, 2011; Roy et al., 2018). In other words, retail scholarship has maintained continuity in its behavioural explanatory core even while the empirical contexts have changed substantially.

This continuity is productive, but it also has a cost. When established models are repeatedly transported into new contexts, there is a risk that novelty is located primarily in the setting rather than in the explanation. The field then accumulates contextual variants faster than it develops integrative propositions that travel across contexts. That pattern helps explain why retail scholarship can appear highly active, but less convergent at the level of shared theory. One concrete implication is that future work should treat theory adaptation as an explicit research outcome, not a default. For example, our thematic analysis tracked a clear progression from physical operations in the first identified era, to the introduction of digital and experiential retail in the second era, to the most recent era reflecting social media, a form of platforms that are heavily studied in retail literature. Following this empirical trajectory, the next technological development can potentially follow with platform-related retail and hybrid human-technology encounters as retail environments are continually shaped by them (Lu et al., 2023; Shankar et al., 2021). Although these specific topics were only beginning to develop in our analysis, highlighting them serves as an empirical extension of the patterns recognised in the fifth and final era. The central question is thus not only whether TPB/TAM-style mechanisms still predict adoption, but also what new constructs are

required to explain agency, trust, and value creation when the retailer includes automated systems and third-party infrastructures. The now growing attention to AI applications and AI-human interaction points to this need (Lu et al., 2023; Mahajan and Chauhan, 2025).

The eras identified within this review reflect the wider theoretical currents across other major disciplines. While retail has matured into a distinct field with its own theoretical foundation, our findings highlight its deep interdisciplinary roots, reflecting critical intersections with marketing, information systems, and organisation theory. The movement from operational to digital and experiential retail reflects the shift within marketing towards service-dominant logic and customer experience perspectives. For example, service-dominant logic is used to understand value as something customers experience and make sense of over time (Helkkula et al., 2012). Similarly, the shift to online and technology-based research in retail literature parallels the growing influence of information systems perspectives, which examine how people shape technology and vice versa (e.g., sociotechnical theory/perspective; Sarker et al., 2019, citing Lee, 2004). Finally, the retail eras reflect organisational theory concerns with how firms adapt their structures and practices in response to environmental change (e.g., Wischnevsky, 2004). For example, institutional theory is used to explain organisational behaviours that are not purely based on profit or efficiency (Suddaby, 2013). This parallels the era findings by showing that retail scholarship increasingly examines how retailers adapt to environmental and technological changes.

5.3 Paradigm and institutional change applied to retail research

The era shifts can be interpreted through Kuhnian and institutional perspectives. More specifically, drawing on Kuhn (1970), the observed era transitions do not appear to indicate complete paradigm replacement, but rather a shifting focus within a relatively stable behavioural and managerial paradigm. Across the five eras, retail scholarship within the dedicated retail journals incorporates new contexts while continuing to extend and apply existing theories and methods to new retail phenomena, rather than abandoning its dominant assumptions. In retail research, this is evident in the repeated use of frameworks such as TPB and TAM across different contexts. This suggests that retail's development resembles a normal science, where theories are simply extended and adapted by researchers to solve new problems rather than questioning established retail ideas.

At the same time, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) discuss 'institutional isomorphism' (p.147), where organisations become more similar over time. Applying this idea, it can help explain why retail research changes topics or contexts while remaining relatively stable in theory and methodological use. The shifts in the five eras can be explained as gradual retail research changes rather than complete and separate paradigm revolutions. This helps explain why new topics such as social media, technologies, or digital retail are often examined through existing theories and methods, gradually reshaping what counts as retail scholarship in the bounded corpus of journals instead of changing the entire paradigm.

Table 1 Research gaps and future directions

Themes	
Gap	Actionable future insights
Customer:	
• Opportunity to explore other behaviours and sector-specific patterns (e.g., grocery vs. automotive) • Explore other customer behaviour measures beyond satisfaction and loyalty	• Extend the analysis of customer experiences through other behaviours such as variety-seeking, habitual shopping, and other buying behavioural patterns
Product:	
• Limited understanding of product categories, particularly to understand behaviour and decision-making • Develop updated conceptual frameworks to guide timely and relevant research agendas	• Opportunity to explore product categories depending on the retail sector to understand how it increases perceived value, decision-making, and guides behavioural responses.
Social:	
• Limited attention to social dynamics with a greater emphasis on social media platforms	• Explore and compare online and offline social dynamics as an influence on consumer behaviour and engagement with a retailer
Market:	
• Lack of research on how automation and technology influence retail markets	• Consider strategic market dynamics in underexplored sectors such as automotive or e-commerce
Methodology	
Gap	Actionable future insights
• Opportunity for researchers to use observational studies and secondary data analyses • Opportunity for ethnographic-based studies and content analyses of secondary studies	• Use longitudinal, ethnographic, and mixed methods to develop well-supported insights and expand research • Integrate greater use of observational studies or secondary analyses prior to conducting main studies to better support insights • Collaborate with retailers to stay updated to current, pressing retail issues
Theoretical	
Gap	Actionable future insights
• Over-reliance on established theories (e.g., TPB, TAM) without updating them	• Revisit and update theories (e.g., TPB, TAM, TRA) • Develop updated conceptual frameworks to guide timely and relevant research agendas • Use recent theories (e.g., unified theory of acceptance and use of technology) to support research and expand the use of conceptual papers

5.4 The next phase of retail research

The periodisation yields a forward-looking agenda that identifies where the field's current trajectory leaves blind spots that matter for both theory and practice. First, the rise of customer engagement and social commerce research suggests a risk of over-indexing on digitally observable behaviour at the expense of harder-to-measure but consequential phenomena. For instance, employee-customer interactions and organisational design recede as the customer journey becomes more digitally mediated, yet prior work shows service failure and credibility dynamics remain central to value and loyalty (Bougoure et al., 2016). The implication is not a return to purely store-based research, but stronger models of how human service, automation, and digital interfaces jointly produce outcomes across channels.

Second, the overall workforce and organisational environment emerged as an important but comparatively underdeveloped area of retail scholarship as research continued throughout the years. In the 2000 to 2004 period, 'work' appeared as a distinct theme, occurring 2,676 times in the literature and connecting to 'people' (157 co-occurrences), 'role' (143 co-occurrences), 'environment' (130 co-occurrences), and 'organisational' (78 co-occurrences). This indicates that early retail research paid closer attention to the physical environment, structure, and people behind store operations. However, in later periods, workforce-related concepts become a less significant touchpoint for retail researchers while often being linked to the overall customer experience. Since automation and AI continue to become more integrated into the workforce, research should focus on revisiting retail work and the organisational environment to better understand how labour practices are being reshaped by technological change.

Third, the product turn in 2015–2019 shows that retail scholarship has become highly effective at studying attributes, choice, and presentation. Yet as products become inseparable from their digital representations and associated content (Kim et al., 2021; Vazquez et al., 2023), future work needs to connect product-level mechanisms to broader system dynamics such as platform effects, algorithmic visibility, and multi-sided interactions. However, because the reviewed corpus ends in 2023, the discussion of platformisation and AI should be interpreted as a forward-looking extension of the literature's observed trajectory up to that point, rather than as an empirically established era. Additionally, this is also where method diversification matters: many of these questions are not well served by one-shot surveys alone (e.g., Javed and Wu, 2020) and often require longitudinal and multi-source designs to observe learning, habit formation, and feedback loops. Fourth, the pandemic period should be interpreted as an accelerator, not an anomaly. COVID-19 did not create digital retail; it compressed adoption timelines, reshaped risk perceptions, and normalised social and mobile commerce practices (Agrawal, 2023; Liu et al., 2023). The research task now is to distinguish durable behavioural shifts from short-term adaptations, and to identify which mechanisms persist when constraints are lifted.

Finally, the strongest signal across the last two decades is that retail's technological substrate keeps changing faster than the field's dominant explanatory frameworks. Work on technology's role in retail already frames this as an ongoing transformation (Shankar et al., 2021). The next phase is likely to intensify this gap as AI becomes embedded across the customer journey and operations (Lu et al., 2023). Whether this becomes an era of AI will depend on whether scholarship moves beyond treating AI as a context

variable and instead theorises AI as a co-actor that reshapes retail agency, trust, and decision architecture, including emerging attention to AI-human interactions (Mahajan and Chauhan, 2025). However, while the findings suggest early movement towards technology-based retail, this is speculative as the corpus does not provide sufficient evidence to define the next era as distinctly retail AI. In order to guide future retail researchers, Table 1 has been developed to address the gaps in the literature and provide insights into future areas of value. The future areas are suggested based on the predicted major themes, methods, and theories of focus in upcoming years.

6 Implications

Our findings help retailers and managers understand the trajectory emphasised within dedicated retail journals, while also pointing to areas where insights from adjacent disciplines may broaden future research and practice. Although purchasing (e.g., Khoshtaria et al., 2021), online shopping (e.g., Rajendran and Wahab, 2022) and social media (e.g., Banerji and Singh, 2024) are predicted to continue being dominant areas of retail research, it is essential to broaden scholarly pursuits to technological and retail innovations. Thus, by interpreting the evolution of retail research, they can make more informed decisions about the adoption of AI, technologies, and consumer engagement. To ensure applied retail research, we encourage retailers to collaborate with researchers and provide access to emerging challenges that reflect current and pressing issues, calling for a stronger connection between academic researchers and retailers in future scholarship. Additionally, identifying underexplored areas for retail researchers to address will help increase the field’s relevance and depth to provide meaningful academic contributions.

Table 2 Era implications for curriculum and executive development

<i>Era</i>	<i>Competency cluster</i>	<i>Curriculum/executive development implication</i>
Operations	Store operations and analytics	Understand store management, metrics, and supply chain
Digital and experiential retail	E-commerce and experiential design	Understand online retailing, environmental experience, and digital touchpoints
Consumer behaviour and sector specialisation	Customer analytics and sector insight	Understand consumer decision-making, perceptions, segmentation, and sector-specific strategy
Optimisation and service integration	Omnichannel and service integration	Understand pricing, performance metrics, omnichannel coordination, and service design
COVID-19 and social media	Social interaction and technological-based retailing	Understand social commerce, mobile engagement, and technology-mediated customer engagement

Academic institutions should expand scholarship by supporting departments dedicated to retail, which would help guide the future of retail education for both students and managers. More specifically, the five eras identified in this review can be used to structure retail curricula and executive development around key areas of retail expertise. Table 2 presents each era as a competency cluster and outlines its corresponding

curriculum and executive development implications, demonstrating how periodisation can inform both academic and executive retail education. These can be potentially integrated into different retail courses, training modules, and professional development to better prepare students and managers for the retail industry.

While recognising the recent and ongoing university budget cuts, retail programs need the resources to adequately market their programs to incoming students, and their parents, who would be the next generation of employees and leaders in one of the largest employment sectors worldwide. By supporting retail-specific programs, institutions can drive the future of retail scholarship and employment by focusing on emerging trends in social, customer, and product-related work. This not only expands the scope of retail research, but also dedicates more focus to retail-specific work, addressing gaps identified in our analysis and helping maintain the field as a distinct discipline within management.

7 Limitations

Although a significantly larger sample of journal articles was incorporated in the analysis, this study is limited to four dedicated retail journals. While this approach follows prior retail reviews (Findlay and Sparks, 2002; Ketron et al., 2017; Runyan and Hyun, 2009), it may privilege the journal-based core of retail scholarship and reproduce existing field-level gatekeeping structures. Retail-related work published in broader marketing, information systems, logistics, urban studies, geography, management, consumer research, or more critical interdisciplinary outlets may emphasise different topics, theories, regions, and methods. Therefore, the five eras should be interpreted as patterns within the selected dedicated retail journals rather than a comprehensive account of all retail-relevant scholarship. Since the five eras were interpreted as patterns resulting from the selected journal corpus, this study did not systematically analyse geographic representation across each era unless location was indicated as an occurrence for a specific time period.

However, because retail is global, future research should examine whether these eras apply across regions and whether the identified patterns generalise to emerging markets, where retail development may follow different trajectories. Additionally, our sample did not include retail articles from 1995 to 1999, which could have further explained the transition of thematic findings from 2000 onwards. Regarding the interpretation of each theme, this process relies on human judgement which may vary depending on the coder. Further, another limitation is that when it comes to large global disruptions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, this study cannot fully distinguish between long-term retail trends and short-term effects. Additionally, the coding method used broad categories (i.e., quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, and conceptual/theoretical). These categories are useful for identifying field-level methodological patterns, but they do not distinguish among different forms of quantitative evidence, such as survey research, experiments, modelling, or descriptive regression. As a result, the findings should not be interpreted as assessing the rigour or causal credibility of individual studies. Future reviews could extend this work by coding more specific research designs and forms of evidence. Additionally, future reviewers should examine whether AI and platformisation become sufficiently central in subsequent periods of retail literature to constitute a distinct future era. Finally, our analysis did not consider non-published textual factors, such as institutional influence.

Declarations

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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