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The Revolution of Brick-and-Mortar-Retail Pop-up Stores – a Taxonomy

In recent years, the phenomena pop-up store has been spreading all over the world. Numerous reasons have compelled various companies from different industries to adopt this new retail format. Just as versatile are the strategic objectives and forms of appearances of pop-up stores. This article, therefore, aims to identify different pop-up store types and to categorize them according to their applicability.

Sophie Schüller, Bianca Viola Jud
Challenges in the current retail environment

An inflationary number of products, brands and communication measures are competing in the current market environment (Esch/Hermann/Sattler, 2008). Various offerings do not differ anymore in their functional-technological characteristics or quality and customers perceive them as interchangeable (Freundt, 2006). Markets are mature in most industries, globalization and e-commerce boost supply pressure even more (Kilian, 2008). Therefore, it has become increasingly important for companies to provide superior customer experiences, which are personalized and where customers interact with the brand while shopping (Littich/Zimmermann, 2010; Niehm/Fiore/Kim, 2007; Pine/Gilmore, 1998).

Furthermore, an enhanced vertical competition can be observed: the power of retailers has increased due to access to customer data as well as advanced retail concentration (Kilian, 2008), which was even intensified by online retail (Gassmann, 2017). Hence, manufacturers are also increasingly entering the retail competition by operating own brand stores interacting directly with customers (Kahn/Inman/Verhoef, 2016; Kilian, 2008).

New opportunity: pop-up stores

Pop-up stores are one response to the changing customer expectations. They appeal to customers on a hedonic level with the surprise-factor of popping up without announcement and exclusivity due to the limited time present (Klein/Falk/Esch/Gloukhovtsev, 2016; Picot-Coupey, 2014). Pop-up stores are revolutionizing brick-and-mortar becoming a popular experiential or even guerilla marketing tool, “aimed at creating brand experiences and increasing word of mouth within existing and new target groups simultaneously” (Klein et al., 2016, p. 5761). They provide consumers “with stimulating brand experiences via a unique store concept, a pleasant store atmosphere, and by delivering hedonic shopping value” (Klein et al., 2016, p. 5761). Due to its novel, ephemeral and surprising nature as well as its guerilla and event characteristics, pop-up stores can be used to create buzz and attract customer and media attention (Niehm et al., 2007). Some pop-up stores are even called guerilla stores, when the focus lays on image building and they are primarily used as a communication tool, which deliberately decouples from conventional sales channels (Hutter, 2013; Hutter/Hoffmann, 2013). It can although be seen as one sub-type of pop-up stores which can have different primary objectives (Hutter/Hoffmann, 2013; Ryu, 2011).

Furthermore, Pop-up stores may be used as an additional temporary distribution channel to stimulate impulse shopping during an event or season (Surchi, 2013). It is especially favorable for pure online retailers to interact with customers directly (Messedat, 2016). Other brands, however, benefit from the short-term nature of pop-up stores using them to test new markets, locations, products or retail concepts before taking large investments (Center for Economics and Business Research [Cebr], 2014).

Conceptional Frame

Definition of pop-up stores and distinction to similar concepts

Temporary stores are not new phenomena, they have been existing for cen-
Pop-up stores have traditionally been discounters that have been taking advantage of vacant spaces to sell excess stock (Barr, 2008). In the recent past, mobile temporary retailers appeared in the form of ice cream or fish and chips vans as street-vendors.

During the last years, established brands have discovered pop-up stores as part of their overall omnichannel strategy. Pop-up stores have evolved into a new, widely accepted retail format. They suddenly pop up at a particular place and gain special attention the first time they appear (de Lassus/Anido Freire, 2014; Messedat, 2016). Another important characteristic of pop-up stores is their ephemerality: as fast as they appear, they also disappear (Cebr, 2014; Kim et al., 2010; Klein et al., 2016). This can be seen as an innovative marketing concept, which uses the effect of deliberate or “artificial” scarcity of product offering, based on the assumption that the (conscious) reduction increases attractiveness for customers and thus positively affects buying behavior (Pick/Kenning, 2012).

Definitions of pop-up stores are heterogeneous, especially with regard to the length of a pop-up store and the format. Pop-up stores are temporary stores, which can be used to sell goods or services (Cebr, 2014; Kastner, 2015; Klein et al., 2016; Messedat, 2016). Although, pop-up stores do not necessarily sell products, in any case, they are a way to promote products or brands (Kim et al., 2010; Ryu, 2011). The main focus of most pop-up stores is to create unique brand experiences, nevertheless some brands have also used pop-up shops to generate short-term sales in vacant spaces with low leases exploiting seasons such as Christmas time (Güttler/Schüßler, 2013) or position themselves as discount/stock clearance stores (Picot-Coupey, 2014).

Pop-up stores range from a couple of days up to one year (de Lassus/Anido Freire, 2014; Klein et al., 2016). They are usually smaller than regular retail outlets and often only comprise of a limited product presentation (Fauquetnot, 2016; Niehm et al., 2007). Some definitions also include pop-up stores in motor vehicles and market stalls (Cebr, 2014). However, common market stalls or food trucks are not in the scope of this article, because it is in their business model itself to “pop-up” at any place and move to another place. Thus, a brand opening a pop-up store must have another (regular) distribution channel such as physical stores or an online shop. Nevertheless, there are also mobile vehicles, which are properly used as pop-up shops (Cebr, 2014). Kastner (2015) and Niehm et al. (2007) argue that a pop-up store is usually limited to only one location. However, according to the Ausschuss für Definitionen zu Handel und Distribution (2006) a pop-up store enables retailers or brand manufacturers to operate physical stores at changing locations.

For this article, characteristics of pop-up stores are defined as follows:

**A pop-up store**

- temporarily displays a brand three-dimensionally,
- represents an additional channel to company’s regular distribution channel(s),
- opens in only one location at a time (uniqueness),
- promotes selected products or brands, and
- may or may not sell products on the premises.

**Prior research**

Even though pop-up stores are omnipresent, they have generated few academic attention, also because of its relatively young tradition and its initial consideration as a fad (Hurth/
Schwerpunkt Temporäre Kommunikation gestalten

Krause, 2010; Marciniak/Budnarowska, 2009; Pomodoro, 2013). According to Kastner (2015) the phenomenon was investigated either vastly fundamental or exclusively in terms of particular and isolated factors of success (see Kim et al., 2010; Marciniak/Budnarowska, 2009; Niehm et al., 2007; Rittinghaus, 2013). Other authors focused on specific sectors (see Baumgarth/Kastner, 2012; de Lassus/Anido Freire, 2014; Grüninger, 2014; Güstrau, 2013; Klein et al., 2016; Ryu, 2011). Kastner (2015) identified factors of success for pop-up stores in fashion industry based on their strategic objective. Few authors addressed different pop-up store types: Surchi (2013) examined temporary stores and made a rough distinction between different forms of appearances. Quartier (2014) classified pop-up stores into a five phases evolution. Alexander and Bain (2016) were the first to identify and function of pop-up stores, focusing on SME fashion brands in Canada. However, a fundamental taxonomy classifying those stores based on their strategic objective and their form of appearance (design) irrespective of their sector is still outstanding.

Research question

Although pop-up stores have been defined now for closer investigation, pop-up store types are versatile, depending of the strategic objectives of a brand. Thus, this study aims to investigate the versatility of pop-up stores to identify a taxonomy, which enables the classification of different kinds of pop-up stores. In particular, the authors observe how the different types of pop-up stores are characterized and what kind of pop-up store is most suitable for certain strategic objectives.

Design elements of pop-up stores

Location

Pop-up stores are not limited to capital cities, but are located in towns around the globe (Cebr, 2014). The city where the pop-up store is located matters at a macro level (Barth, 2008). The choice of the city depends on the strategic objective of the pop-up store (Kastner, 2015). Local events such as fashion shows, sports events or similar, which are taking place simultaneously in the same city, can positively influence the pop-up store’s media attraction, the client base and its visitor frequency.

At a micro level, the location within a city, meaning the district or neighborhood in which a pop-up store is situated, is crucial (Barth, 2008; Hutter, 2013). A pop-up store can be seated on mainstream locations such as on high-streets and shopping malls or in trendy, artistic neighborhoods, depending on the target audience a brand aims to address (Kastner, 2015).

Architecture/shop type

Usually pop-up stores are smaller than regular sales venues (Cebr, 2014; Niehm et al., 2007; Picot-Coupey, 2014). In terms of architecture and store type, pop-up stores differ greatly. Pop-up store formats may range from flexible, mobile spaces such as busses or market stalls, to more permanent solutions such as temporarily moving into vacant premises on a high-street or in a shopping center (Cebr, 2014; Hutter, 2013; Weinswig, 2016). Pop-up stores can have a dedicated space integrated in another existing structure, or can be even characterized by a unique

Management Summary

1. In this qualitative study, firstly design elements of pop-up stores were identified.
2. Secondly, from expert interviews seven different pop-up store types emerged, were visually represented with regards to their focus on sales/turnover and brand building, and were again validated by experts.
3. Thirdly, the seven types were grouped into three groups, according to the strategic objectives sales-orientation, innovation and brand-orientation.

Main Propositions

1. Firstly, brands have to determine, which strategic marketing objective they would like to fulfill and if a pop-up store is a suitable mean to do so.
2. Secondly, given the strategic marketing objective is either sales-orientation, innovation and brand-orientation, brands have to choose a pop-up type which is suitable to reach the objective.
3. Thirdly, brands should design the pop-up store according to the design elements of this type.
temporary architecture with specifically constructed objects (Gursch/ Gursch, 2014; Hutter, 2013). What unifies almost all pop-up stores is a strong emphasis on the design and architecture of the retail concept and its creative use of space (Fauquenot, 2016; Niehm et al., 2007).

Interior architecture, furniture and features

The interior design depends on the product category sold (Gursch/Gursch, 2014). The pop-up shop design should be aligned with the brand identity but at the same time emphasize the temporary and provisional character of the pop-up store (Kastner, 2015). Those two characteristics face a trade-off and should be assessed depending on the pop-up store’s strategic objective and the company’s existing brand awareness (Baumgarth/Kastner, 2012). Furthermore, pop-up stores can use new technologies to support customer experience in-store, to communicate additional information or to allow customizing e.g. augmented reality, location based services, 3D-printing (Messedat, 2016).

Communications

Accompanying communications before, during and after the duration of the pop-up store enhances image and awareness effects (Kastner, 2015). Some brands deliberately renounce traditional media in favor of word of mouth, PR, text messages and social media (Messedat, 2016; Picot-Coupey, 2014, Cebr, 2014). Viral communication, especially through social media addressing opinion leader or influencer, may stage the effect of surprise parallel to pop-up retail’s overall aim and is an inexpensive mean of communication (Hutter, 2013; Kastner, 2015). To achieve a sustainable effect with the pop-up store, the communication activities around the store should be formally, textually and temporally integrated into the subordinate marketing communications activities, telling authentic, emotional and experience oriented stories (Kastner, 2015). However, to create a moment of surprise, pop-up stores may cause a discrepancy on a narrative, creative and experience-oriented level (Kastner, 2015).

Lessons Learned

1. While choosing the right pop-up store type, companies should foremost consider their brand awareness in the target market, their target group, their product characteristics and foremost their strategic marketing objective. These may vary depending on the brand, especially whether the brand is an established or newcomer brand, native online or native offline.

2. Established, especially sales-oriented native offline brands, who want to sell excess stocks without brand reinforcement objectives, should choose an Outlet Pop-Up Store. Those who aim to generate sales, possibly exploiting a season or an event, and simultaneously gaining brand awareness, should go for a Retail Pop-Up Store.

3. Brands focusing on innovation can either test a new market, test a new concept or test unconventional media and communication strategy. Established brands, who aim to enter a market or to test the reception of a new product (line) or concept on the current market, receiving direct feedback from customers, should operate a Market Testing Pop-Up Store. Newcomer brands with a restricted budget, who aim to generate brand awareness and direct sales, to connect and interact personally with customers as well as to receive feedback about their concept/product, usually operate a Start-Up Pop-Up Store. Established as well as newcomer brands, who are courageous and strive for immediate attention innovating the way they communicate should open a Guerilla Pop-Up Store.

4. When brand-orientation is the overreaching marketing objective, brands can choose between the Brand Experience and Brand Interaction Pop-Up types. Established brands, online or offline natives, who aim to create brand awareness, present a new product or a cooperation and allow customers to perceive the brand in a conventional mindset, should choose a Brand Experience Pop-Up Store. If a brand desires to gain customer and media attention, convey a particular lifestyle and interact with customers, but do not primarily aim to generate direct sales, the Brand Interaction Pop-Up Store is recommended.

5. The pop-up type used by a brand can in some cases be an evolution. For example, brands with little offline retail experience may firstly use testing pop-up stores (Start-up Pop-Up Stores or Market Testing Pop-Up Stores). Once a brand is established, the use of other formats depending on the respective objective may be considered.
Supporting program and events

Side events can reinforce the customer experience in-store. For instance, many pop-up stores organize a kick-off event or an opening similar to a vernissage. Brands can support their pop-up stores sensually by hosting concerts, DJ-sets, performance artists, workshops, auctions of special products, interactive games, contests or alike (Gursch/Gursch, 2014; Kastner, 2015; Pomodoro, 2013). Side events can also involve cooperations with partners (Kastner, 2015). Furthermore, pop-up store brands may use local or international brand ambassadors, who act as hosts, guests or PR supporters (Kastner, 2015). Some brands also use “internal celebrities” such as star designers.

Product policy

Pop-up stores usually carry a narrow range of products compared to regular stores (Picot-Coupey, 2014). However, the product policy of pop-up stores can range from presenting the full range of products to selective and exclusive assortments comprising of one collection or some key items only (Cebr, 2014; Kastner, 2015). Pop-up stores may also make use of shortages on product level through limited editions, capsule collections, co-brandings or product personalization (Baumgarth/Kastner, 2012).

Furthermore, it is possible that brands do not sell products on the premises of their pop-up location, only promoting products, serving as a showroom enabling customers to try products or experiencing the brand (Kim et al., 2010). With regards to the pricing, products are either sold at regular prices, at higher prices, e.g. for limited editions, or at lower prices, offering temporal price promotions (Baumgarth/Kastner, 2012; Picot-Coupey, 2014).

Brand representatives

With regard to store representatives and managers in-store, it is important not only to have externally recruited personnel but to also have internal employees or owners on-site (Hutter, 2013, Johow, 2011, in: Kastner, 2015). Personnel in a pop-up store is essential not only to advise customers but to receive customer feedback (Kastner, 2015). Thus, a company must carefully plan how their pop-up store representatives are trained and which competences are required.

Length of existence

As previously mentioned, pop-up stores can be open from a few days up to one year (de Lassus/Anido Freire, 2014; Pomodoro, 2013). If the store only exists for a short time, it may not gain enough customer and media attention. Opening for an extended period, the store may not be perceived as a pop-up store anymore (Gursch/Gursch, 2014). Furthermore, the pop-up store can move and change its location. Some pop-up stores communicate the length of existence from the beginning (Cebr, 2014), others suddenly disappear without communicating it (Messedat, 2016).

Findings – Pop-up store taxonomy

Methodology

In order to find a comprehensive pop-up taxonomy, eleven semi-structured interviews with an average length of 65 minutes with representatives of different players in the pop-up retail sector were conducted. Among the interviewees were brand representatives (BELOWZERO, LUSH, Ochsner Sport, Sofacompany, and an internationally known fashion and lifestyle brand), store designers experienced in the construction of pop-up stores, agents for temporary pop-up locations (Brickspaces), and operators of premises hosting pop-up stores e.g. shopping centers (Bikini Berlin, Sihlcity, SBB, and Pop-Up Market). To ensure maximum reliability, the interviewees represent brands from various sizes, origins (international as well as national brands), selling different product categories through different distribution channels (online shops, retailers, manufacturers). The interview guideline covered the design dimensions as well as questions about pop-up store strategies, types and company/sector specific differences. All experts pointed out two main strategies: marketing and sales oriented pop-up stores. Furthermore, a third reason to operate pop-up stores was emphasized: innovation & testing. Hence, from these eleven interviews, seven pop-up types were identified. However, to increase the reliability of the pop-up types and the dimensions mapping the types in a model, three additional validation interviews were conducted with experts constructing pop-up stores and a marketing academic. The interviews guides, the transcripts of the interviews and the additional materials can be provided upon request.

Outlet Pop-up Store: Its main purpose is to sell as much remnants or surplus productions as possible by reaching a positive profit/loss ratio. Hence, products are sold with high discounts and brands make low investment into the appearance of the store. There is low brand engagement because it serves predominantly as a commercial tool. However, by addressing the existing customer base, companies can reach customer loyalty.
### Table 1: Pop-up store types

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary focus/Design element</strong></td>
<td>Sales-orientation</td>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Brand-orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>Inexpensive central or remote, but accessible location</td>
<td>Accessible location, may be season-driven</td>
<td>Typical test city, economically significant city</td>
<td>Not specified, similar location to permanent store</td>
<td>Economically significant city with high media density, may be season/event-driven</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Architecture/Shop type</strong></td>
<td>Vacant store or warehouse</td>
<td>Vacant store</td>
<td>Vacant or mobile store</td>
<td>Vacant store, specifically constructed object, mobile store or in a store with another function (e.g. café)</td>
<td>Vacant store, specifically constructed object, mobile store or in a store with another function (e.g. café)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Style</strong></td>
<td>Basic, functional, in-expensive, promotional, DIY, industrial</td>
<td>In line with CI, inexpensive, functional, similar to permanent store</td>
<td>In line with CI, strong branding, extensive use of design</td>
<td>Basic, DIY, inexpensive</td>
<td>In line with CI, strong branding, extensive use of design</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Features</strong></td>
<td>Digital features possible</td>
<td>No additional features</td>
<td>Additional possible to create buzz possible</td>
<td>No additional features</td>
<td>Digital features (e.g. interactive games) recommended</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Objective/Tone of voice</strong></td>
<td>Focus on price, opportunistic, no storytelling</td>
<td>Opportunistic or focus on price, brand awareness, may support storytelling</td>
<td>Focusing on brand awareness, interaction with customers, may support storytelling</td>
<td>Aim to generate PR and WOM, unique and unconventional storytelling, contradictions</td>
<td>Support overall communication strategies and storytelling, focus on emotional branding experience</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Channels</strong></td>
<td>Social media, little advertising</td>
<td>Social media, personal communication</td>
<td>Social media, personal communication</td>
<td>Strong focus on social media, PR</td>
<td>Focus on social media, possibly accompanied by large brand campaign, PR</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborations</strong></td>
<td>No collaborations, partnerships or similar</td>
<td>Collaborations and partnerships (e.g. co-branding) possible</td>
<td>No collaborations, partnerships or similar</td>
<td>Collaborations and partnerships (e.g. co-branding) possible</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Supporting program</strong></td>
<td>Events, contests and use of testimonials for customer attraction possible</td>
<td>Events contests, or games and testimonials possible</td>
<td>Events contests, or games and testimonials possible</td>
<td>Typically supported by events and/or testimonials</td>
<td>Events contests or games for interaction, use of testimonials possible</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Assortment</strong></td>
<td>Mixed assortment, old collections, high density of products</td>
<td>Focus of best-sellers, or representative product range, shortage on product level possible</td>
<td>Exemplary assortment or broad range, no shortage on product level, if possible</td>
<td>Assortment varies (broad vs. narrow), shortage on product level very common</td>
<td>Rather narrow assortment (e.g. one product line or limited edition)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Product policy</strong></td>
<td>Purchase option necessary</td>
<td>Purchase option possible, mostly essential</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Price level</strong></td>
<td>Regular price positioning</td>
<td>Regular price positioning</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Skills of brand representatives</strong></td>
<td>Good sales skills</td>
<td>Good sales skills, high product and brand knowledge</td>
<td>Good sales skills, high product and brand knowledge, record feedback</td>
<td>Good sales skills, high product and brand knowledge, storytelling (e.g. by founders)</td>
<td>High product and brand knowledge, offering an appealing atmosphere, storytelling</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Existence</strong></td>
<td>3 to 6 months or short outlet sales</td>
<td>3 to 4 months, shorter when seasonal</td>
<td>At least 3 months</td>
<td>2 weeks to 2 months</td>
<td>1 week to 3 months</td>
<td>Not specified, usually short opening period</td>
<td></td>
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Source: Own illustration.
Retail Pop-up Stores: The main focus of Retail pop-up stores is to sell goods. They strongly resemble regular stores, but benefit from the high flexibility and low risk nature of a pop-up store and may exploit seasonal or events. Unlike Outlet pop-up stores, Retail Pop-up Stores aim to strengthen brand awareness by providing brand visibility.

Market Testing pop-up Store: Established companies operate market testing pop-up stores to test a new market, product or retail concept. Usually budgets are high in order to provide ideal conditions in terms of location, assortment, shop design/architecture but also to create awareness for the brand or new product in that market. They aim to gain customer feedback.

Start-Up pop-up Store: As the name suggests, this type is operated by young companies with low financial resources. It is designed in a do-it-yourself manner and aims to create awareness, establish the brand and to learn from customer feedbacks. Start-ups in particular depend on product sales in their pop-up stores.

Guerrilla Pop-up Store: A Guerrilla Pop-Up Store is considered to be a sales and marketing tool. It is characterized by its surprising, unexpected and unusual nature. It aims to sell goods in an unconventional setting which can be given through its sudden and unannounced appearance, an atypical location for the brand or the product or an alternative customer approach/communications. Operating a Guerrilla Pop-Up Store, companies aim to create a hype around the brand, causing WOM and creating media and customer attention.

Brand Experience pop-up Store: Brand Experience Pop-Up Stores aim to stage a brand in its appropriate setting, to fill the brand with emotions and to convey its values. Unlike Guerrilla Pop-up Stores, they present the brand in a relatively conventional setting similar to a flagship store. They usually involve high budgets to attain brand awareness and may focus on limited editions or single product lines. This type can be used by pure online retailers as a showroom.

Brand Interaction pop-up Store: The Brand Interaction Pop-Up Store is a highly experiential pop-up store and features strong event characteristics. The interaction with the brand, and the supporting program takes center stage, whereas the sale of the product remains a side issue or may not even occur. By using storytelling, this type aims to make the brand perceived by all senses and to create brand awareness, buzz as well as customer and media attention.

To visually locate the different types of pop-up stores, the two axes “primary focus on sales/turnover” and “primary focus on brand building” were chosen. They only represent the primary focus, although there might be more objectives a pop-up store can pursue.

From this taxonomy three overarching strategic marketing objectives were identified: sales-orientation, innovation and brand-orientation each comprising of two to three different pop-up types. Some pop-up store types overlap, but this paper aimed to cover the major types. The major managerial implication of this study is to give support to managers who are currently planning a pop-up store for a brand in the concept phase, identifying which pop-up type suits their objectives best. Theoretically, the contribution of this article is a first taxonomy of pop-up stores, which can be further validated and investigated empirically more in-depth in the future.

Limitations and Further Research

It has shown, that pop-up store types do not differ between different sectors, but brands have different needs,
if they are selling products with different characteristics such as size or constitution. Therefore, further research should examine the design of pop-up stores in different sectors in more detail. Moreover, the experts interviewed were almost all from the German-speaking region. It would therefore be beneficial to conduct further interviews with experts from other regions such as the Americas and Asia, where pop-up stores are currently very popular as well. Additionally, further research is needed to accurately assess the image, brand awareness, customer loyalty and WOM/PR effects of the different pop-up store types developed.

Literature


