

Brand Pilgrimage in Fashion and Beauty Tourism

Abstract

Purpose: This paper examines how branded retail environments become embedded within tourism as symbolic travel anchors. It introduces the concept of brand pilgrimage to explain how digitally mediated retail spaces become ritualised tourism destinations through youth influence, omnichannel engagement, and family travel planning.

Design/methodology/approach: An inductive qualitative design was adopted using three semi-structured focus groups with twelve tweens (aged 9–12) and follow-up interviews with six parents. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis to explore how branded retail experiences become integrated into family tourism practices.

Findings: Brand pilgrimage operates through an interconnected process linking algorithmic visibility, anticipatory ritualisation, household negotiation, in-store performance and memory circulation. Omnichannel ecosystems generate desire before travel, while tweens influence destination evaluation and itinerary planning through digitally mediated engagement. Retail visits become performative and socially meaningful experiences that extend into post-visit sharing, reinforcing future travel aspirations. The findings also reveal variation in participation, highlighting differences between active and passive engagement and gendered patterns of anticipation and performance.

Originality/value: The paper introduces brand pilgrimage as an analytical framework for understanding how youth-led, platform-mediated practices may position branded retail environments as components of contemporary tourism systems. Rather than proposing a universally applicable model, the study identifies the conditions under which branded retail environments may become travel anchors within family tourism.

Keywords: *brand pilgrimage; retail tourism; destination formation; omnichannel ecosystems; algorithmic visibility; tween influence*

Article classification: research paper

时尚与美妆旅游中的品牌朝圣

摘要

研究目的：本文探讨品牌零售环境如何嵌入旅游体验，并成为具有象征意义的旅行锚点（*symbolic travel anchors*）。研究提出“品牌朝圣”（*brand pilgrimage*）这一概念，以解释数字媒介驱动的零售空间如何通过青春期前儿童的影响、全渠道互动（*omnichannel engagement*）以及家庭旅行规划，逐渐演变为具有仪式化特征旅游目的地。

研究设计／方法：本研究采用归纳式质性研究设计，通过开展三场半结构式焦点小组访谈，收集12名9至12岁青春期前儿童（*tweens*）的观点，并进一步对6位家长进行后续访谈。研究采用反思性主题分析（*reflexive thematic analysis*），探讨品牌零售体验如何融入家庭旅游实践。

研究发现：品牌朝圣通过一个相互关联的过程形成，该过程涵盖算法可见性（*algorithmic visibility*）、旅行前的仪式化期待（*anticipatory ritualisation*）、家庭协商（*household negotiation*）、门店体验中的表演性实践（*in-store performance*）以及旅行记忆的传播（*memory circulation*）。全渠道生态系统在旅行开始前激发消费者的向往，而青春期前儿童则通过数字媒介互动影响旅游目的地的评估和行程规划。品牌零售体验逐渐成为具有表演性和社会意义的活动，并延续至旅行后的分享行为，从而进一步强化未来的旅行意愿。研究结果还揭示了参与方式的差异，包括主动参与与被动参与之间的区别，以及不同性别在期待和体验表现方面呈现出的差异。

原创性／研究价值：本文提出“品牌朝圣”作为一种分析框架，用于理解由青春期前儿童主导、平台媒介化（*platform-mediated*）的实践如何使品牌零售环境成为当代旅游体系的重要组成部分。研究并未提出一个具有普遍适用性的理论模型，而是识别了品牌零售环境在何种条件下能够成为家庭旅游中的旅行锚点。

关键词：品牌朝圣；零售旅游；目的地形成；全渠道生态系统；算法可见性；青春期前儿童的影响力

Peregrinación de Marca en el Turismo de Moda y Belleza

Resumen

Propósito: Este artículo examina cómo los entornos comerciales de marca se integran en el turismo como puntos de referencia simbólicos del viaje. Introduce el concepto de peregrinación de marca (*brand pilgrimage*) para explicar cómo los espacios comerciales mediados digitalmente se convierten en destinos turísticos ritualizados a través de la influencia de los preadolescentes, la interacción omnicanal y la planificación de los viajes familiares.

Diseño/metodología/enfoque: Se adoptó un diseño cualitativo de carácter inductivo mediante la realización de tres grupos focales semiestructurados con doce preadolescentes (de 9 a 12 años), complementados con entrevistas de seguimiento con seis progenitores. Los datos se analizaron mediante análisis temático reflexivo con el fin de explorar cómo las experiencias comerciales de marca se integran en las prácticas de turismo familiar.

Resultados: La peregrinación de marca opera a través de un proceso interconectado que vincula la visibilidad algorítmica, la ritualización anticipada, la negociación familiar, la

interacción performativa en tienda y la circulación de recuerdos. Los ecosistemas omnicanal generan deseo antes del viaje, mientras que los preadolescentes influyen en la evaluación del destino y en la planificación del itinerario mediante su participación digital. Las visitas a establecimientos comerciales se convierten en experiencias performativas y socialmente significativas que se prolongan a través del intercambio de experiencias tras la visita, reforzando así las aspiraciones de viajes futuros. Los resultados también revelan variaciones en la participación, destacando diferencias entre formas de implicación activa y pasiva, así como patrones de anticipación y comportamiento asociados al género.

Originalidad/valor: El artículo introduce la peregrinación de marca como un marco analítico para comprender cómo las prácticas lideradas por los jóvenes y mediadas por plataformas digitales pueden situar los entornos comerciales de marca como componentes de los sistemas turísticos contemporáneos. En lugar de proponer un modelo de aplicación universal, el estudio identifica las condiciones bajo las cuales los entornos comerciales de marca pueden convertirse en puntos de referencia del viaje dentro del turismo familiar.

Palabras clave: peregrinación de marca; turismo de compras; formación de destinos; ecosistemas omnicanal; visibilidad algorítmica; influencia de los preadolescentes.

Introduction

Tourism consumption is increasingly shaped within households, yet the role of tweens (children aged 9–12) as active contributors to travel decision-making remains under-examined. Tourism research has largely focused on adult consumers or treated families as homogeneous decision-making units (Carr, 2011; Small, 2008). However, children influence destination choice, activities and consumption practices (Aguiló-Pérez, 2017; Blichfeldt *et al.*, 2011; Gram, 2007; Poria and Timothy, 2014), while their holiday experiences carry distinct emotional and social meanings (Hilbrecht *et al.*, 2008). Despite this, tweens remain marginal within destination marketing and tourism branding scholarship.

Research on retail and fashion tourism increasingly recognises shopping as part of contemporary tourism experiences (Rabbiosi, 2016; Richards, 2018; Timothy, 2025a). Yet retail is still commonly framed as a secondary activity associated with expenditure, leisure or souvenir consumption. Fashion and beauty retail spaces are typically viewed as sites of transaction or entertainment rather than drivers of destination choice (Terkenli, 2025), despite evidence that fashion-related experiences contribute to destination image, brand equity, e-WOM and revisit intention (Cho and Ko, 2025). Consequently, the symbolic and experiential role of fashion and beauty brands in destination formation remains under-theorised.

Research on omnichannel branding demonstrates how consumers engage with brands across interconnected digital and physical touchpoints (Ameen *et al.*, 2021). However, it has largely prioritised customer journey optimisation and platform efficiency, paying less attention to how omnichannel ecosystems shape travel desire, place attachment and destination meaning (Pine and Gilmore, 2011). Tourism research has likewise been slow to integrate insights from fashion and retail marketing, resulting in fragmented accounts of how branded commercial environments influence tourism experiences (Batat, 2022; Richards, 2018; Zukin, 2018).

This paper addresses these gaps by examining how tweens transform fashion and beauty retail spaces into symbolic tourism destinations through what we conceptualise as brand

pilgrimage. Rather than treating retail engagement as incidental to tourism (Jansen-Verbeke, 1991; Baek and Park, 2024; Cheung and Yiu, 2024), we argue that branded retail environments become travel anchors when embedded within omnichannel ecosystems, anticipated before travel, ritualised through family routines and experienced as emotionally meaningful sites of participation and memory-making.

Focusing on Sephora, we examine how a global beauty retailer becomes a symbolic and experiential node within family mobility. Its globally standardised retail format, strong omnichannel integration and cultural visibility make it an analytically revealing case. We identify a broader mechanism through which omnichannel brand ecosystems restructure destination value formation by linking platform visibility, anticipatory ritualisation, household negotiation, in-store performance and post-visit memory circulation.

Drawing on three focus groups with twelve tweens aged 9–12 and follow-up interviews with six parents, the paper makes three contributions. First, it demonstrates that destination value can be anchored in branded retail micro-destinations. Second, it reconceptualises tween influence as affective, ritualised and relational rather than merely instrumental or episodic. Third, it introduces brand pilgrimage as a mechanism explaining how branded retail spaces become symbolically charged travel anchors through the interaction of digital mediation, family practice and embodied experience.

Theoretical Background

Tween agency in family tourism

Family travel decisions are increasingly recognised as negotiated rather than parent-led, with children gaining greater influence as they mature (Carr, 2011; Small, 2008). Tweens act as co-decision-makers across consumption domains including food, fashion, media and travel (Aguiló-Pérez, 2017; Lindstrom, 2004). Yet tourism scholarship continues to treat children as passive dependants or subsume their influence within homogenised family units (Gram, 2007; Poria and Timothy, 2014), despite evidence that their holiday experiences carry distinct emotional and social meanings (Hilbrecht *et al.*, 2008).

Where children's influence is acknowledged, it is typically framed as requests, persuasion or pester power rather than relational and emotional participation in family experiences (Evans *et al.*, 2017). However, tweens employ sophisticated strategies including negotiation, alliance-building and emotional labour, positioning them as active contributors to shared consumption practices (Blichfeldt *et al.*, 2011; Chaudhary *et al.*, 2018).

Digital media further amplifies tween influence by embedding brand desire within peer cultures and platform visibility (Chaudhary and Gupta, 2014). Social media practices, including 'get ready with me' videos and shopping hauls, connect fashion and beauty brands with identity performance and aspiration (Abidin, 2016). Yet tourism research has paid limited attention to how these digitally mediated relationships shape destination evaluation and travel imaginaries among younger consumers.

Retail and fashion tourism as experiential micro-destinations

Shopping has long been recognised as part of tourism but has traditionally been viewed as a secondary activity associated with expenditure, souvenirs and leisure (Rabbiosi, 2016; Timothy, 2025b). More recent research positions retail as a travel motivator, with destinations increasingly attracting visitors through experiential retail environments and branded shopping districts (Chang *et al.*, 2023; Shim and Santos, 2025; Timothy, 2025a). Fashion-related experiences similarly contribute to destination image, brand equity, electronic word-of-mouth, and revisit intention (Cho and Ko, 2025). Despite these developments, shopping tourism research continues to prioritise destination competitiveness and economic outcomes over the symbolic, emotional and embodied dimensions of retail experiences (Ben Said *et al.*, 2024).

Fashion and beauty retail environments are increasingly recognised as experiential spaces that foster attachment, participation and memorable encounters beyond commercial transactions (Alexander and Varley, 2025; Borghini *et al.*, 2021; Errajaa and Bilgihan, 2025). Yet tourism scholarship continues to position retail as complementary to destinations rather than as destinations in their own right (Jansen-Verbeke, 1991; Baek and Park, 2024; Cheung and Yiu, 2024). This is particularly evident for younger consumers, whose engagement with fashion and beauty brands is frequently dismissed as superficial rather than recognised as culturally meaningful and spatially embedded (Belk, 1989).

Omnichannel ecosystems and destination imaginaries

Contemporary retail operates through omnichannel ecosystems integrating digital and physical touchpoints into seamless brand experiences (Ameen *et al.*, 2021). Although omnichannel research has advanced understanding of customer journeys, it continues to prioritise optimisation and operational efficiency over destination meaning and affective engagement (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Pine and Gilmore, 2011). Emerging research further demonstrates how digitally structured retail environments shape consumer perceptions through platform architecture and experiential design (Alexander and Varley, 2025; Cho and Cho, 2026).

Tourism scholarship has been slower to integrate these developments, producing fragmented explanations of how branded environments influence destination imaginaries (Richards, 2018; Zukin, 2018). Fashion communication research demonstrates that mediated representations construct destination meaning (Xie *et al.*, 2025), while collaborations, retail drops and event-based consumption increasingly position branded experiences as destination-like encounters (Wright, 2023). Social media further embeds brands within anticipatory travel narratives (Chrismardani *et al.*, 2025).

For younger consumers, repeated platform exposure transforms brand awareness into emotional attachment before physical visitation, reinforcing anticipatory desire through omnichannel engagement (Vichiengior *et al.*, 2023). Yet tourism research has paid limited attention to how these digitally mediated processes reposition branded retail environments within family travel.

From omnichannel brandscape to travel anchor: defining brand pilgrimage

Existing research demonstrates that children influence household consumption (Gram, 2007; Carr, 2011), retail environments motivate travel (Murphy *et al.*, 2011), and omnichannel ecosystems shape engagement across digital and physical touchpoints (Verhoef *et al.*, 2015; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). However, how these processes converge to transform branded retail environments into travel anchors within family tourism remains under-theorised.

We address this gap through the concept of brand pilgrimage, defined as a ritualised, anticipatory and symbolically charged travel practice in which a branded retail environment functions as a travel anchor within destination choice, itinerary formation and memory-making (Belk, 1989; Collins-Kreiner, 2010). Rather than functioning simply as a store, the brand becomes a digitally mediated destination that is anticipated before travel, negotiated through family routines and experienced as socially and emotionally meaningful (Verhoef *et al.*, 2015; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

Brand pilgrimage differs from related constructs (Table I). Experiential retail focuses on immersive in-store experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 2011), whereas brand pilgrimage incorporates pre-trip anticipation and destination evaluation. Shopping tourism primarily explains expenditure and retail attractiveness (Murphy *et al.*, 2011; Timothy, 2025a), while brand pilgrimage emphasises symbolic completion and ritual. Place attachment captures emotional bonds with locations (Kyle *et al.*, 2005) but does not account for digitally mediated anticipation, whereas brand community explains social affiliation (Muniz Jr and O'Guinn, 2001) without considering how these affiliations reshape household travel practices.

[Insert Table I]

Brand pilgrimage operates through five interconnected mechanisms. Platform visibility reflects repeated exposure through influencer content, peer circulation and algorithmic amplification (Abidin, 2016; Poell *et al.*, 2021). Anticipatory ritualisation transforms countdowns, wish lists and pre-trip planning into travel desire (Belk, 1989; Vichiengior *et al.*, 2023). Household negotiation translates tween preferences into family travel planning (Carr, 2011; Gram, 2007). Ritualised in-store performance converts digitally mediated anticipation into embodied participation (Pine and Gilmore, 2011), while memory circulation extends experiences through documentation, sharing, and recollection, embedding brands within future travel expectations (Hosseini *et al.*, 2023). Collectively, these mechanisms position branded retail environments as potential anchors of destination value within digitally mediated family tourism. Figure 1 summarises this conceptual mechanism.

[Insert Figure 1]

Method

Research design

This study adopted an inductive qualitative design to explore how tweens (aged 9–12) influence family travel decision-making. This approach was appropriate given the limited research on tweens as co-decision-makers in tourism planning and the emerging theorisation of retail as a travel destination. Qualitative inquiry is well suited to examining socially constructed meanings and lived experiences (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). The aim was to allow themes to emerge inductively rather than impose predefined theoretical categories.

Although the study focuses on Sephora, the brand was not predetermined as the analytical focus. It emerged organically during early discussions. Sephora provides an analytically revealing case for three reasons: it operates through a globally standardised retail format, offers a mature omnichannel ecosystem integrating stores, mobile applications, loyalty programmes, social media, influencer marketing and digital commerce, and has strong cultural visibility among younger consumers (Wehbe, 2026). Consistent with Yin's (2018) logic of analytical generalisation, Sephora is treated as a strategically revealing case rather than as representative of all retail brands.

Data collection

Data were collected through three semi-structured focus groups, chosen for their ability to facilitate interaction and shared meaning-making among younger participants (Morgan, 1996; Kitzinger, 1995; Krueger and Casey, 2015). One group comprised four girls, one four boys, and one two girls and two boys, enabling exploration of gender-specific and mixed-group dynamics (Table II).

[Insert Table II]

Twelve participants were recruited through purposive criterion-based sampling (Palinkas *et al.*, 2015). Eligibility was based on age (9–12 years; born 2012–2015). Recruitment was facilitated through two primary schools and one secondary school in South-West England. The schools served mixed local communities, although detailed socio-economic information was not collected. Familiarity with Sephora was not required; references to the brand emerged spontaneously during discussion.

Each focus group lasted 45–60 minutes and followed a semi-structured guide covering holiday experiences, destination preferences, shopping, brand awareness, social media and pre-trip planning. Retail experiences were not framed as pilgrimage, allowing meanings to emerge from participants' own language. Sessions were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and anonymised.

To complement tween perspectives, six follow-up interviews were conducted with parents, four mothers and two fathers, between March and April 2025 (Table III). Interviews explored children's influence on travel decisions, household negotiation, brand importance and travel planning routines. Conducted after initial analysis, they allowed emerging insights to inform the interview guide (Charmaz, 2014).

[Insert Table III]

Parent interviews provided methodological triangulation (Flick, 2018) and contextualised children's accounts within household practices. Research with children presents recognised methodological challenges, as younger participants may have varying cognitive, linguistic and reflective capacities (Christensen and Prout, 2002; Alderson and Morrow, 2020). The interviews therefore complemented rather than verified children's perspectives, providing richer insight into family routines and decision-making.

Ethical considerations

Given the involvement of children aged 9–12, ethical considerations were central to the research design. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Panel, with a subsequent amendment approved for parent interviews. Parents provided informed consent after receiving a Participant Information Sheet outlining the study purpose, procedures, data handling, and participant rights. Children gave age-appropriate assent before each focus group. Participation was voluntary, participants could withdraw or decline questions at any time, and no coercive incentives were offered.

Recruitment was facilitated through school gatekeepers who supported access while maintaining participant autonomy. Two researchers held valid Disclosure and Barring Service clearance, with additional school-specific safeguarding requirements met where necessary. Focus groups were conducted in a university-based community reflection space designed to provide a safe and informal environment. Small group sizes encouraged participation, reduced power imbalances and enabled researchers to monitor participant wellbeing.

All recordings were transcribed verbatim, anonymised using pseudonyms, and securely stored in accordance with institutional research governance and UK General Data Protection Regulation requirements. Parent interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams, audio-recorded with consent, and anonymised. The study followed established ethical principles for research involving children and young people, including voluntary participation, confidentiality, minimisation of harm and respect for participant autonomy (Alderson and Morrow, 2020; British Educational Research Association, 2024).

Data analysis, data sufficiency and reflexivity

Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021). Analysis involved repeated familiarisation with transcripts (Braun and Clarke, 2006), inductive coding, and iterative development of higher-order themes through constant comparison across focus groups and parent interviews (Charmaz, 2014). Comparisons between girls, boys, and mixed groups enabled analysis of gendered similarities and differences, while parent interviews provided contextual triangulation (Flick, 2018).

Rigour was enhanced through peer debriefing, an audit trail, and systematic documentation of coding decisions (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Data sufficiency was assessed using information power (Malterud *et al.*, 2016), with no substantially new themes emerging during later analysis. Reflexivity was embedded throughout. The facilitator's experience with young participants informed age-appropriate questioning, while care was taken to avoid leading questions or introducing concepts such as brand pilgrimage during data collection. Interpretations were continually checked against the data and alternative explanations considered, strengthening the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

Findings

Although brand pilgrimage was introduced conceptually in the theoretical framework, the analysis remained inductive. The themes emerged through iterative engagement with the data rather than being imposed during coding. Table IV summarises the three themes through which platform visibility, anticipatory ritualisation, household negotiation, in-store performance and memory circulation collectively explain how Sephora becomes a travel anchor.

[Insert Table IV]

Figure 2 presents the thematic structure of the findings, showing how inductively derived sub-themes are organised into three higher-order themes and relate to the broader process of brand pilgrimage. It illustrates that these themes operate as interconnected processes rather than discrete stages.

[Insert Figure 2]

Sephora as a ritualised travel destination

Sephora functions not as a discretionary retail activity but as a ritualised travel anchor, shaping how destinations are evaluated and holidays imagined before departure. This reflects the interconnected processes of anticipatory ritualisation and household negotiation, whereby the presence of a branded retail environment becomes embedded within expectations of what constitutes a 'complete' trip.

Participants consistently framed Sephora as symbolically necessary rather than optional:

"If there isn't a Sephora, it feels like something's missing from the holiday" (P4, female, FG1)

The absence of the brand was therefore experienced as a disruption to the holiday, positioning Sephora as a criterion of destination value. Participants also described routinely checking for store locations before travelling:

"We always check if there's a Sephora before we go somewhere" (P2, female, FG1)

These practices demonstrate how destination evaluation increasingly incorporates branded retail environments. Parents confirmed that children's expectations frequently shaped travel planning:

"Sometimes we actually choose where to go based on what shops are there" (PR2, male, aged 42)

However, this pattern was not uniform and revealed gendered differences in engagement. Girls expressed stronger emotional anticipation and intentional planning, whereas boys more frequently described Sephora visits as part of the expected routine of the trip:

"I wouldn't ask to go there, but we always end up going anyway" (P3, male, FG2)

This distinction suggests that brand pilgrimage operates through both active enthusiasm and normative participation, becoming embedded within family travel routines even where individual motivation differs. Together, these accounts show that Sephora functions as a ritualised and negotiated destination anchor shaping itinerary formation and expectations of a meaningful holiday.

Omnichannel ecosystems and algorithmic visibility

Sephora's role within travel imaginaries is not formed solely through physical experience but through algorithmically structured omnichannel ecosystems, where repeated exposure embeds the brand within anticipatory travel desire. This reflects the platform visibility stage of

brand pilgrimage, through which digital environments shape destination imaginaries before travel.

Participants consistently described encountering Sephora across social media platforms:

“You see it everywhere on TikTok... people showing what they bought there” (P2, female, FG3)

Importantly, participants recognised that this visibility was reinforced algorithmically:

“After you watch one video, more keep coming up, so you just keep seeing it” (P1, female, FG3)

Repeated exposure created digitally mediated familiarity, making the store recognisable and desirable before physical visitation. Rather than simply generating awareness, platforms functioned as pre-visit environments in which the experience was mentally rehearsed. Peer interaction further reinforced these processes:

“Everyone at school talks about what they got there” (P3, female, FG1)

Parents confirmed that this anticipation translated into concrete planning behaviours:

“They already know what they want before we even go” (PR5, female, aged 47)

Engagement with omnichannel ecosystems nevertheless varied. Girls more frequently described actively following influencers and engaging with branded content, whereas boys were more likely to encounter Sephora incidentally through algorithmic feeds:

“I don’t follow it, it just shows up sometimes.” (P2, male, FG2)

This distinction demonstrates that algorithmic visibility operates through both deliberate engagement and ambient exposure, broadening the ways digital ecosystems shape travel imaginaries. These findings demonstrate that omnichannel ecosystems actively generate travel desire by embedding branded retail environments within anticipatory tourism practices.

In-store performance and memory circulation

The in-store experience represents the ritualised performance stage of brand pilgrimage, where anticipated desire is translated into embodied, sensory and socially mediated participation. Rather than functioning solely as a site of transaction, Sephora becomes a performative environment in which interaction with products and the retail space forms part of the experience.

Participants consistently described the store as immersive and distinct from everyday shopping:

“It feels different when you’re actually there... like it’s more fun than just shopping” (P1, female, FG1)

The visit connected digital anticipation with physical participation:

“You want to go there so you can actually see it in real life” (P3, female, FG1)

The experience was also inherently social:

“We all try things together and talk about what we like” (P2, female, FG3)

Its significance extended beyond the visit through memory circulation, where experiences were documented, shared, and incorporated into future travel narratives:

“When we get back, I show my friends what I bought” (P4, female, FG1)

Memory circulation therefore sustained the experience through post-visit storytelling and social positioning, reinforcing identity and future travel expectations.

Variation again emerged in how participants engaged with these practices. While some actively documented and shared experiences, others participated more passively without extending them into digital or social contexts. Girls more frequently described visible and performative memory practices, whereas boys emphasised observation:

“I just look around... I don’t really take pictures or anything” (P3, male, FG2)

Together, these accounts show how anticipation is realised through embodied participation and extended through memory circulation, completing the brand pilgrimage process.

Brand pilgrimage as an emergent process

Overall, the findings indicate that brand pilgrimage links platform visibility, anticipatory ritualisation, household negotiation, in-store performance and memory circulation. Variation between active and passive participation demonstrates that brand pilgrimage is dynamic rather than linear. Figure 3 presents the empirically refined framework of brand pilgrimage. Rather than depicting a sequential model, it illustrates an iterative system in which algorithmic visibility, household negotiation and memory circulation reinforce future travel expectations through interconnected feedback loops and both active and passive pathways.

[Insert Figure 3]

Discussion

The findings show that branded retail environments can operate as travel anchors rather than incidental shopping activities within family tourism. Destination value may therefore be organised around branded, commercially mediated micro-destinations, particularly where younger consumers shape travel expectations. The study identifies a mechanism through which omnichannel ecosystems become embedded within tourism practices.

These findings require a reconsideration of tween agency within tourism research. Previous studies acknowledge children's influence on family decision-making (Carr, 2011; Gram, 2007) but largely frame it as episodic or negotiation-based (Chaudhary *et al.*, 2018; Nørgaard *et al.*, 2007). The present study instead demonstrates that tween influence operates through anticipation and ritual, shaping how destinations are evaluated, experienced and remembered. It builds on research positioning children as active co-creators of family experiences (Blichfeldt *et al.*, 2011) by showing that their influence structures broader travel practices rather than individual purchasing decisions alone.

The findings also reveal variation in how this influence is enacted. Girls more frequently described anticipatory and performative engagement, whereas boys tended to express passive or habitual participation. This suggests that brand pilgrimage operates through both

desire-driven and socially embedded forms of engagement, becoming normalised within family travel routines even where individual motivation differs.

These dynamics are particularly evident in destination formation. Although shopping tourism is increasingly recognised as a travel motivator (Chang *et al.*, 2023; Timothy, 2025a), research continues to privilege expenditure, destination competitiveness and adult consumers (Ben Said *et al.*, 2024; Rabbiosi, 2016). The findings indicate that globally recognised retail brands may function as symbolic and experiential destinations within family tourism where they are embedded within omnichannel ecosystems and family travel practices. They reinforce the view of destinations as culturally constructed and experience-driven (Richards, 2018; Zukin, 2018) while extending fashion destination research beyond shopping districts and large-scale events to repeatable, globally standardised retail environments.

This process cannot be understood without considering omnichannel ecosystems and algorithmic visibility. Repeated exposure through influencer content, peer circulation and platform curation generated familiarity and desire before travel. Rather than simply connecting digital and physical touchpoints, omnichannel ecosystems structured destination anticipation. Algorithmic visibility therefore functions as a form of cultural mediation, embedding brands within travel imaginaries and enabling algorithmic wayfinding (Hudson *et al.*, 2016). These findings align with research on platform power and digital mediation (Poell *et al.*, 2021) while demonstrating how mediated fashion representations shape destination meaning (Wright, 2023; Xie *et al.*, 2025).

The in-store experience reinforces this mechanism by translating digitally mediated anticipation into embodied participation through interaction, play and shared experience. This supports experiential consumption theory (Pine and Gilmore, 2011) and research describing retail environments as affective spaces (Borghini *et al.*, 2021), while extending these perspectives into family tourism. Memory circulation further prolongs the experience through documentation, sharing and peer interaction, reinforcing identity construction and future anticipation (Hosseini *et al.*, 2023; Pfoser and Stach, 2025).

Taken together, the findings support brand pilgrimage as a dynamic process through which omnichannel mediation and social reinforcement embed branded retail environments within tourism practices. Unlike traditional pilgrimage, centred on singular sacred sites, brand pilgrimage operates through distributed and repeatable commercial environments whose significance is continually reproduced through anticipation, participation and post-visit circulation. Branded retail therefore moves beyond enhancing tourism to actively shape destination value.

Although the findings are grounded in the case of Sephora, the proposed mechanism should be understood as a contextually contingent analytical framework rather than a universally applicable model. Brand pilgrimage is most likely to emerge where branded retail environments combine global recognisability, strong symbolic value, omnichannel integration and opportunities for ritualised participation within family travel. While Sephora provides the empirical context for this study, similar enabling conditions can be observed across other experiential retail sectors. Luxury fashion retailers, technology brands and family-oriented retail destinations increasingly function as attractions offering immersive experiences beyond commercial exchange (Pine and Gilmore, 2011; Verhoef *et al.*, 2015).

The way these conditions are expressed, however, differs across sectors. Luxury fashion retailers may emphasise exclusivity and heritage, technology retailers innovation, and family-oriented retailers play and participation. For instance, luxury retailers such as Prada and Harrods leverage iconic architecture and the redevelopment of historic buildings to reinforce prestige and destination appeal (Moore and Doyle, 2010; Pantano and Dennis, 2019). Apple Stores illustrate how omnichannel integration encourages product exploration beyond traditional retailing (Verhoef *et al.*, 2015). Likewise, LEGO House demonstrates how branded environments can become destinations through immersive storytelling, participation and play, encouraging families to travel specifically to experience the brand world (Botorić, 2024).

Nevertheless, the extent to which branded environments evolve into tourism destinations is unlikely to be uniform. Socio-economic conditions, disposable income, access to global retail brands, retail infrastructure, digital platform penetration and culturally specific meanings attached to consumption are all likely to influence whether branded spaces become embedded within family travel practices. Accordingly, this study does not suggest that all branded retail environments function as travel anchors. Rather, it identifies the contextual conditions under which branded retail ecosystems may evolve into experiential micro-destinations capable of motivating travel and generating destination attachment.

Consistent with Yin (2018), the study offers a framework for analytical rather than statistical generalisation. The findings therefore suggest that destination formation can increasingly be shaped through branded, digitally mediated and affectively charged environments where these enabling conditions exist, and where commercial brands become integral components of tourism experiences while younger consumers play an active role in constructing destination meaning.

Conclusion

This paper contributes to tourism, fashion and consumer research by conceptualising brand pilgrimage as a mechanism through which branded retail environments become travel anchors within family tourism. It identifies how omnichannel brand ecosystems embed these environments within destination formation, providing a new perspective on the relationship between retail, tourism and digitally mediated consumption.

The study makes three principal theoretical contributions. It demonstrates that destination value can be anchored in branded retail micro-destinations rather than solely in heritage, leisure, or accommodation-based attractions, reconceptualises tween influence as affective, ritualised and embedded within travel practices, and shows how platform mediation shapes destination anticipation and evaluation (Richards, 2018; Zukin, 2018; Blichfeldt *et al.*, 2011; Poria and Timothy, 2014; Hudson *et al.*, 2016). Together, these contributions position destination formation as increasingly organised through commercially mediated environments.

Beyond these theoretical contributions, the findings have practical implications. Destination marketing organisations (DMOs) should recognise branded retail environments as tourism anchors by developing co-branded visitor itineraries, destination-exclusive retail experiences and partnerships between global brands and local retailers. Such collaborations can leverage international brand appeal while preserving local identity. Retailers should design destination-specific environments that encourage interaction and memory-making (Ameen *et al.*, 2021; Pine and Gilmore, 2011).

Beyond practice, the findings highlight important ethical and societal considerations. Omnichannel ecosystems intensify the commercialisation of childhood by embedding brand desire within everyday digital practices and peer cultures (Abidin, 2016; Evans *et al.*, 2017). Algorithmic visibility amplifies social comparison and emotional labour as young consumers increasingly perform consumption through digital platforms. These findings highlight the need for destination marketers, retailers, platform providers, and policymakers to promote age-appropriate marketing, greater transparency around algorithmically amplified commercial content and responsible destination development.

Beyond the empirical case itself, this study proposes brand pilgrimage as an analytical framework for understanding how branded retail environments may become travel anchors under particular conditions rather than as a universally applicable model. The mechanism is most likely to emerge where global brand visibility, omnichannel integration, symbolic value and opportunities for ritualised participation converge (Ameen *et al.*, 2021; Pine and Gilmore, 2011). However, the way these processes are expressed is likely to vary across socio-economic, cultural and geographical contexts, retail infrastructures and levels of digital platform adoption, consistent with the principle of analytical rather than statistical generalisation (Yin, 2018).

Several limitations should nevertheless be acknowledged. The study was conducted with a relatively small sample drawn from schools in South-West England and focused on a single retail brand, limiting the scope of analytical transferability. In addition, detailed socio-economic information was not collected, making it impossible to examine how socio-economic circumstances, cultural values or geographical context may shape access to branded retail environments and the meanings attached to them. Future comparative research should, therefore, examine brand pilgrimage across different retail sectors, destinations and cultural settings to identify which aspects of the framework remain consistent and which are context dependent. Longitudinal research could further examine how early experiences of brand pilgrimage influence later travel behaviours, consumer identities and retail-led tourism dynamics (Ben Said *et al.*, 2024).

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that destination formation is increasingly shaped through branded, digitally mediated and affectively charged environments. Recognising the role of younger consumers in these processes provides a more contemporary understanding of destination formation in platform-mediated tourism.

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