Do they see eye to eye? Managing customer experience in phygital high-tech retail

Abstract

Purpose - This paper aims to empirically investigate the typologies of phygital (synaeresis of "physical" and "digital") customer experiences (CXs) that can arise in high-tech retail based on the intensity of consumers' responses and reactions to the stimuli triggered by firms. Moreover, it explores how firms attempt to shape the architecture of the phygital CXs. Notably, this article identifies the flexible and agile strategies implemented by firms to enhance the several typologies of phygital CXs, with the intention of better exploiting physical and digital features to respond to the differences in customers' needs, preferences, and expectations.

Design/methodology/approach - This study performs an in-depth exploratory single-case study based on semi-structured interviews with the customers, managers, and employees of the *Webidoo* Store.

Findings - This study develops a framework illustrating the main typologies of ordinary ("hostile," "controversial," and "disappointing") and extraordinary ("passionate" and "explorative") CXs that can arise in phygital contexts. Also, it identifies some key flexible and agile strategies ("decompressive strategy," "mentoring strategy," "prompting strategy" and "entertaining strategy") that companies might follow to adjust their offerings and respond quickly to the different forms of phygital CXs to create a more compelling experience tailored to customers' needs, preferences, and expectations.

Research limitations/implications - Among the study's limitations are the single-case study methodology and a specific setting like the Italian one. As a result, future studies could broaden the study to include other research contexts and countries. The paper offers significant managerial insights based on the many forms of CX across ordinary and extraordinary CXs. Thus, it provides critical takeaways for businesses to meet customer demand.

Originality/value - This paper analyzes the different typologies of ordinary and extraordinary CXs that could occur in phygital contexts based on the intensity of consumers' responses and reactions to firms' stimuli. Also, it explores how firms attempt to shape the architecture of the phygital CXs through flexible and agile strategies. From this paper, managers and decision-makers can reflect on successful strategies they could use to affect the stimuli to which customers respond in an agile manner, thus enhancing phygital CXs.

Keywords - phygital customer experience; ordinary experience; extraordinary experience; physical store; agility; flexibility; single-case study

Paper type - Case study

1. Introduction

The customer experience (hereafter "CX") is a crucial marketing concept encompassing "customers' non-deliberate, spontaneous responses, and reactions to offering-related stimuli along the customer journey" (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020, p. 638). Literature acknowledges that, based on the intensity of consumers' responses and reactions to the stimuli within firms' controlled (e.g., sales channels) and non-controlled (e.g., customer reviews and press coverage) touchpoints, CX can range from ordinary to extraordinary (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). In this regard, CX is a continuum where an ordinary CX corresponds to weaker customer responses and reactions, while an extraordinary CX triggers more robust customer responses and reactions (Brakus *et al.*, 2009; Carú & Cova, 2003).

During the last decades, Digital Transformation—defined as the profound change in firms' business models, processes, products, and relationships due to the growing adoption of digital technologies (Cennamo *et al.*, 2020; Verhoef *et al.*, 2021)—has radically transformed CXs (Blázquez, 2014; Brynjolfsson & Mcafee, 2017; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016) and the role covered by the firms in the management of CX (Holmlund *et al.*, 2020). Today, consumers utilize online and physical channels to complete transactions, switching from one channel to another as needed (Huré *et al.*, 2017; Shen *et al.*, 2018; Shi *et al.*, 2020). Physical and virtual stores are therefore increasingly integrated to provide consumers a consistent CX regardless of the purchasing channel used (e.g., website, app, in-store) (Brynjolfsson *et al.*, 2013; Cummins *et al.*, 2016; Gao & Su, 2020; Goraya *et al.*, 2020; Rigby, 2011). For instance, consumers can use their smartphones to check products before buying them in a physical store (Flavián *et al.*, 2020) and browse for items in physical stores before purchasing and paying online (Gensler *et al.*, 2017; Kuksov & Liao, 2018; Neslin *et al.*, 2014). They can also buy online while picking up goods in the Store (Jara *et al.*, 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic has particularly accelerated these processes (Kotoulas, 2020) so businesses and consumers can no longer separate physical from digital reality (Andreula, 2020; Mishra *et al.*, 2021; Moravcikova & Kliestikova, 2017).

To this end, scholars highlight the rising importance of a *phygital* (synaeresis of "physical" and "digital") CX as a valuable solution that allows for creating more value for customers (Batat, 2019). Remarkably, the phygital CX represents "an omnichannel experience combining physical features and digital features in the same point of sale" (Belghiti *et al.*, 2017, pag. 65). It is "the most complete form of omnichannel experience in terms of omnichannel and distribution offers, in that it is a physical and digital hybrid in one spatio-temporal context, the point of sale" (Belghiti *et al.*, 2017, p. 66). Phygital CXs are transforming the function of physical stores in tandem with the growing expectations of "hyperconnected" consumers (Alexander & Cano, 2020; Alexander & Kent, 2016; Pusceddu, 2022; Verhoef *et al.*, 2015). Physical stores are, in fact, "unique in allowing consumers to touch and feel the merchandise and provide instant gratification" (Brynjolfsson *et al.*, 2013, p. 23). Phygital wide used in-store front-end innovations, such as augmented reality (Batat, 2019, 2021), virtual fitting rooms (Choi & Cho, 2012), tablets (Rigby *et al.*, 2012), digital signals (Burke, 2009), QR codes (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014), mobile apps (Shankar *et al.*, 2016), and automatic checkouts (Renko & Druzijanic, 2014), allow consumers to become real active users during their buying experience (Moravcikova & Kliestikova, 2017). The growing use of digital technologies particularly enhances the firm's capacity to be agile (Del Giudice *et al.*, 2021; Moi & Cabiddu, 2021; Reeves *et al.*, 2015) and even more flexible to the continuous changes in consumer tastes, needs, and preferences (Doz & Kosonen, 2008; Ghezzi & Cavallo, 2020; Liu *et al.*, 2020, Xing et al., 2020). Flexibility enables firms to adjust their offerings according to market changes and/or new market opportunities (Dreyer & Gronhaug, 2004; Phillips & Wright, 2009). Agility concerns the firm's ability to sense and respond to changing conditions rapidly to fulfill changes in customer needs more effectively (Hagen *et al.*, 2019; Roberts & Grover, 2012; Zhou *et al.*,

2019). Indeed, prior literature claims that digital transformation efforts promote organizational agility and flexibility, facilitating adaptation to changing external conditions to provide tailored CXs that better respond to customer expectations (Romero & Molina, 2011; Xie *et al.*, 2016).

Despite research on CX in online (e.g., Bleier *et al.*, 2019; Mclean *et al.*, 2018; Rose *et al.*, 2011, 2012) and offline contexts (e.g., Bustamante & Rubio, 2017; Khan & Rahman, 2016; Kim & Choi, 2016) is long-established, few studies have addressed CX in phygital contexts (Batat, 2019; Belghiti *et al.*, 2017; Mishra *et al.*, 2021). For example, some studies have focused their attention on the tourism context and examined the impact of phygital on tourism experiences and tourism destination management (Akmermer, 2022). Other studies have faced how human interactions with experienced salespeople may add value to the phygital experience (Pangarkar *et al.*, 2022). However, when arguing about phygital CXs, previous studies mainly refer to omnichannel CXs (Batat, 2019; Belghiti *et al.*, 2017; Shi *et al.*, 2020), suggesting only the optimization of the CX and performance across channels (Verhoef *et al.*, 2015) and not simultaneously at the same stage of the purchasing process. In contrast, a phygital CX represents "an omnichannel experience combining physical features and digital features in the same point of sale" (Belghiti *et al.*, 2017, p. 65). Thus, the omnichannel CX is only one of the dimensions that may contribute to characterizing a phygital CX (Alexander & Cano, 2019, 2020; Batat, 2019; Belghiti *et al.*, 2017). Accordingly, we still have a narrow perspective of CX dimensions in a phygital context (e.g., website, app, in-store) (Brynjolfsson *et al.*, 2013; Cummins *et al.*, 2016; Gao & Su, 2020; Goraya *et al.*, 2020; Rigby, 2011), making it necessary to advance knowledge on CX when dealing with a phygital landscape (Belghiti *et al.*, 2017; Mishra *et al.*, 2021).

Additionally, previous literature claims that CX can range from ordinary to extraordinary based on the intensity of consumers' responses and reactions to stimuli by firms (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). However, from an empirical perspective, current research does not clarify the different typologies of ordinary and extraordinary CX in a phygital context. Previous studies focused their attention on specific combinations of online and physical channels (e.g., webrooming, showrooming, and "phygital map"), studying the influence on the CX in terms of perceptions and emotions associated with smart shopping (Flavián *et al.*, 2020), or in terms of new interfaces and applications that combine digital multimedia content and digital multimedia devices (Nakazawa & Tokuda, 2007). Other studies focused on the theoretical underpinnings of conventional sales promotion and phygital as innovative instruments of contemporary marketing communication (Moravcikova & Kliestikova, 2017). Nevertheless, previous knowledge has not investigated the typologies of ordinary and extraordinary CXs taking place within phygital stores.

Finally, most studies have addressed CX, focusing only on the customer perspective (e.g., Dawes & Rowley, 1998; Homburg *et al.*, 2017; Huang, 2017; Misopoulos *et al.*, 1998). There are still few studies that have analyzed the prominent role of companies in shaping the architecture of the phygital CX (Mele & Russo-Spena, 2022) and how they could be flexible and agile in exploiting physical and digital features to respond to consumers' needs and preferences, and, therefore, enhance CX.

To fill these gaps, this study aims to investigate 1) the typologies of phygital CXs that can arise according to the intensity of consumers' responses and reactions to stimuli triggered by firms, and 2) the flexible and agile strategies defined by firms to affect the stimuli to which customers respond to enhance phygital CXs. The research question of this study is two-fold: (1) What kind of ordinary and extraordinary CXs take place in a phygital context?; (2) What flexible and agile strategies can firms use to affect phygital CXs? To this end, the study performs an in-depth exploratory single-case study research design (Eisenhardt, 1989), focusing on the case of *Webidoo Store*, the first phygital, tech-experience Store in Europe.

This study contributes to CX literature, pointing out three types of ordinary phygital CXs

("hostile experience," "controversial experience," and "disappointing experience") and two types of extraordinary phygital CXs ("passionate experience" and "explorative experience") depending on the intensity of consumers' responses and reactions to stimuli. Moreover, it shows how firms seek to affect the stimuli to which customers respond in a phygital context by adopting four flexible and agile strategies: ("decompressive strategy," "mentoring strategy," "prompting strategy" "and entertaining strategy"). While "decompressive strategy," "mentoring strategy" and "prompting strategy" are mainly used by firms to push consumers who experienced ordinary CXs to live extraordinary ones, "entertaining strategy" is instead implemented by firms to upgrade the extraordinary CXs further. From a managerial perspective, this study may help managers better address the subjectivity and contextuality related to phygital CX. They should learn how to exploit physical and digital features to influence customers' stimuli and adapt the phygital experience to satisfy consumers' needs based on the distinct types of CXs (i.e., ordinary and extraordinary).

The study is structured as follows. In section 2, we provide an overview of the prior literature about ordinary and extraordinary CX, and phygital CX; in section 3, we describe the methodology adopted in this study; in section 4, we present the study's results and conceptualize the theoretical framework; in section 5, we end with the discussion, as well as the limitations of this study and some suggestions for future research.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Customer experience: extraordinary versus ordinary

According to the extant literature, "customer experience ranges from ordinary to extraordinary, representing the intensity of customer responses to stimuli" (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020, p. 638). Remarkably, whereas extraordinary experiences are "uncommon, infrequent, and go beyond the realm of everyday life" (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014, p. 2), ordinary experiences are characterized by an opposite conception. In this regard, CX is a continuum where ordinary CX corresponds to weaker customer responses and reactions, while extraordinary CX triggers "out-of-the-box" customer responses and reactions (Brakus *et al.*, 2009; Carú & Cova, 2003). Extraordinary CXs are stronger, more desirable, intense, and enjoyable (Arnould & Price, 1993; Brakus *et al.*, 2009; Caprariello & Reis, 2013; Carú & Cova, 2003, Zaubermann *et al.*, 2009). Thus, they are seen to catch consumers' attention and endure in their memory more effectively (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014). However, the distinction between ordinary and extraordinary CXs can offer more nuanced interpretations from a practical perspective (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014). Sometimes, it could be more convenient to have ordinary, weak or mitigated reactions by customers when dealing with certain touchpoints, such as laundry service that the client does not have to worry about or a dental examination that decreases excitement and dread (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). Moreover, ordinary experiences can become extraordinary due to their intense negativity (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). Hence, ordinary experiences should be given deliberate attention to not detract from intended extraordinary ones (Duerden *et al.*, 2018).

Over the last few years, the topic of CX has been radically transformed following the proliferation of the internet, mobile, and social networking technology which has intensified consumer interaction and empowerment (Brynjolfsson *et al.*, 2013; Chou *et al.*, 2016; Rigby, 2011; Shen *et al.*, 2018). The underlying nature of digital tools concerning ubiquitous technologies (Okazaki & Mendez, 2013) (i.e., "ATAWADAC" - anytime, anywhere, any device, any content) has significantly affected how businesses reach and understand their customers (Shanahan *et al.*, 2019; Shareef *et al.*, 2018; Sheth, 2020), providing firms with a wealth of information about consumers' expectations and needs (Bradlow *et al.*, 2017).

Therefore, the increase in competition and fast commoditization of products are primary motivators for businesses to explore the potential of digital technology (Hansen & Sia, 2015), delivering engaging and unique experiences in online contexts.

Although previous literature was able to recognize the importance of integrating digital technologies into contemporary CX (e.g., Flavián *et al*., 2020; Moravcikova & Kliestikova, 2017; Nakazawa & Tokuda, 2007), less attention has been paid to how the simultaneous use of physical and digital features impact CX, especially concerning the specific features that could characterize ordinary and extraordinary CXs taking place within phygital stores.

2.2. Managerial stimuli affecting phygital customer experience

Even though scholars have long used the terms phygital and omnichannel interchangeably (Alexander & Cano, 2019, 2020; Hyun *et al*., 2022), phygital is a relatively new concept which stands for creating captivating experiences in hybrid environments by fluidly navigating consumers across digital and physical venues (Belghiti *et al*., 2017). In the literature, few studies have analyzed the specific strategies used by firms to compete in a phygital context (Batat, 2022). They have shown how managers strive to deliver exclusivity to the consumer by making the buying process smooth, personalized, and tailored, providing channel choice flexibility facilitated by phygital settings (Pangarkar *et al*., 2022). In this sense, other studies have underlined how the increasing adoption of digital technology is mainly linked to a firm's agility improvement (Moi & Cabiddu, 2021). For instance, recent research has shed light on some strategies that firms adopt to ensure that customers can confidently visit the store and utilize technology (e.g., WhatsApp, websites, and e-commerce) to complete purchases, as well as new-age innovations such as home shopping (Pangarkar *et al*., 2022). Additionally, other studies focus specifically on how managers are improving and extending the adoption of Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) technologies to provide new and better phygital experiences for customers throughout their journey (Akmermer, 2022), participating in both the digital and physical worlds at the same time and in the exact location (Belghiti *et al*., 2017). This stream of research also illustrates how these different technologies might supplement each other (Hoyer *et al*., 2020), thereby enhancing the value of the customer journey along with firms' capacity to react rapidly and more flexibly to shifting customer desires and preferences (Gligor *et al*., 2013; Lu *et al*., 2011; Overby *et al*., 2006; Shef & Rice, 2005). Indeed, past research suggests that, by using a client-centric approach, businesses may create customized CXs that better meet customer expectations (Romero & Molina, 2011; Xie *et al*., 2016). Firms, in turn, can further enhance this value through digital analytics to collect more data and get further information on consumption habits (Gupta *et al*., 2020). Furthermore, a greater alignment between customer value and the firm's strategic needs enables managers to better sustain the company's long-term viability and growth by increasing the value of products or services and/or their delivery to customers (Keiningham *et al*., 2020). Hence, whether positive or poor, consumers' impressions of the new CXs resulting from business model innovation will influence a firm's success or failure (Keiningham *et al*., 2020). Implementing and balancing human and digital touchpoints by constantly and carefully integrating the new-age technologies into existing practices in a customer-centric way can be critical for firms in their attempt to maximize customer satisfaction and loyalty (Baxendale *et al*., 2015) for a smoother and richer phygital CX that considers all age-related differences in consumers' expectations and demands (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014).

However, few studies provide evidence on how firms might be able to control the responses and reactions of customers during their experience and how "they can seek to affect the stimuli to which customers respond" (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020, p. 641). Their theorizing focuses on how firms must actively build memorable CXs to suit better consumers' demands (Pine & Gilmor, 1998), implementing effective tactics to manage and affect the phygital experience.

Therefore, identifying methods to develop and manage interactions with customers (Patrício *et al*., 2008), monitoring and responding to the stimuli that are under the firm's control (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020) becomes paramount to triggering the strong, intended extraordinary CX (Zomerdijk & Voss, 2010). In summary, prior research has either focused on the concept of CX in a phygital context or on the role of the firm in building memorable CXs. However, the concept of phygital appears ambiguous, requiring further investigation of the variety of phygital CXs that can occur empirically. In addition, it is necessary to deepen the specific agile and flexible strategies taken by firms in their attempt to affect the stimuli to which customers respond based on the different types of ordinary and extraordinary CX. This would generate more effective and better CXs both from a consumer and a managerial perspective.

3. Methodology

We address our research questions with a qualitative single-case study (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Yin, 1994). Inductive qualitative research is particularly appropriate when developing a theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). Indeed, this method is preferred to get in-depth empirical insights and build a robust theoretical inference about under-explored phenomena (Dyer Jr & Wilkins, 1991; Eisenhardt, 1989). Furthermore, adopting a single-case study approach contributes to creating a closer connection with empirical data (Eisenhardt, 1989), enriching new research streams for which existing theory appears inadequate (Eisenhardt, 1989).

3.1. Case selection and data collection

To conduct this study, we adopted a purposeful sampling approach (Patton, 2014) and selected an organization that relies heavily on phygital peculiarities in its relationship with customers and for which CX plays a critical role. With this goal in mind, we identified Webidoo Store as a noteworthy case for our study. Webidoo Store represents the first-ever tech-experience phygital store in Europe. Thus, the Store is divided into seven main macro areas. Specifically, it showcases electronics, smart mobility, smart home, gaming, sport & fitness, video & audio, and lifestyle & leisure products, offering customers new ones, thanks to a careful selection of the latest innovative digital trends coming from Asian and US markets. The company leverages the idea of a place that is both real and virtual and that aspires to serve as a hub for the promotion of innovation and previews where online and offline experiences are combined. Unlike traditional physical stores, Webidoo Store does not offer all products in-store. Customers can use digital tools like digital displays and QR codes, for example, to visit the exhibition space and test the products. Hence, they can access the virtual *Webidoo.store* to book products and try them at home by paying fees based on the duration of the trial and then decide whether to use them for a limited time or buy them directly[1], receiving a discount from the final price. This is a successful concept that has rapidly gained popularity as a venue for technology-related events and a hub for the business-to-business sector's digital transformation. Webidoo closed 2021 with a turnover of 9 million compared to 5.7 million a year earlier. To better "confront theory with the empirical world" (Piekkari et al., 2009, p. 569), we carried out fifty-four semi-structured interviews with consumers and eight semi-structured interviews with managers and employees (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Data were collected at the Webidoo Store based in Milan. The interviews with customers were conducted in December 2021, lasting twenty minutes on average. The interviews with managers and employees were carried out in February 2022 and lasted approximately one hour.

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[1] This system is known as the "Try & Buy" formula, which is similar to e-commerce, but with the added benefit of being able to view and touch products before purchasing them.

The interview protocol for customers included questions to investigate their overall evaluation of the in-store experience (Fontana & Frey 2000) (e.g., *How did you get information about the products? What was your first impression after you entered the Webidoo Store? Have you framed QR codes? How did you feel using QR codes?*). Conversely, the questions for managers and employees aimed at exploring the agile and flexible strategies used by the firm to affect the stimuli to which customers respond in a phygital context (e.g., *What are the specific needs/problems that Webidoo Store tries to answer? What kind of experience do you expect to offer your customers?*). All interviews were recorded and transcribed (Bryman & Bell 2015; Seidman 2013). We stopped collecting data when we reached theoretical saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Appendices 1 and 2 summarize the detailed information on the data collected.

3.2. Data analysis and rigor

Data coding and analysis were conducted through NVivo 11 software (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). An abductive process was implemented throughout the data analysis, combining a deductive and inductive procedure. If, on the one hand, a deductive approach guided the work with a focus on the ordinary and extraordinary CX addressed by previous scholars, on the other hand, the inductive approach gave us the possibility to discover the different typologies of ordinary and extraordinary experience characterizing a phygital context (e.g., "passionate experience", "explorative experience") (Kennedy & Thornberg, 2018), as well as the strategies used by the firm to affect customer stimuli.

We run three coding stages (Saldaña, 2015). To answer the first research question, we initially examined in-depth the interview data and identified interpretative codes describing the customers' responses and reactions (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). Following a concept-driven coding process, data were abstracted (Gibbs, 2007). Each author independently categorized and labelled direct statements (Patvardhan *et al*., 2015), creating a provisional list of codes (e.g., profound aversion to the phygital experience; the need for informative writings for the quick perception of the product; playful-educational experience lived with the whole family) (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Secondly, we employed a conventional iterative process based on associated and organized common/less common themes (Hycner, 1985) to identify and classify the CX dimensions in a phygital context. Then, we examined similarities and differences between first-order concepts, "synthesizing and clustering first-order codes into higher-order themes" (Patvardhan *et al*., 2015: 411), aiming for data relationships (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). From our categorization process, the following categories of experience emerged: "hostile", "adverse", "controversial", "disappointing", "passionate", and "explorative" (see Appendix 3).

Finally, the identified categories were classified according to the definitions of ordinary experience—intended as "common, frequent, and within the realm of everyday life" (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014, p. 2) and weak in intensity (Carú & Cova, 2003)—and the definition of extraordinary experience—conceived as a rare, unusual situation, occurring outside the realm of everyday life (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014). At this juncture, the weaker the customer responses and reactions, the more ordinary the experience, and vice versa (Carú & Cova 2003).

A similar approach was followed to discover the flexible and agile strategies that the firm used to affect the stimuli to which customers respond in a phygital context based on the different types of ordinary and extraordinary CXs (see Appendix 5). Even in this case, we run three rounds of coding. Initially, we looked for descriptive codes about what kind of behaviors have been implemented by the Webidoo Store to deal with the different typologies of CXs. The outcome of this first coding stage was a list of first-order concepts that emerged from the

analysis of each interview with managers and employees (e.g., incentivize activities outside the Store, introduce the sale of small products with direct purchase in the Store) (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

In the second coding stage, we checked whether the first-order concepts could be grouped into cohesive patterns of strategies. Four main types of strategies related to their intent to answer customers' requests were identified: "decompressive strategy", "mentoring strategy", "prompting strategy", and "entertaining strategy".

Finally, the strategies were related to the typologies of CX to which they impact (e.g., "decompressive strategy" was linked to the "hostile experience"). Appendix 4 provides some exemplary quotes of the overall data analysis process.

4. Findings

In addressing the first research question ("What kind of ordinary and extraordinary CXs take place in a phygital context?"), our analysis provides insights into the different typologies of ordinary and extraordinary CX when dealing with phygital contexts. In addition, we have answered our second research question ("What flexible and agile strategies can firms use to affect phygital CXs") showing that, based on the type of experience, there are four main strategies implemented by the firm's management to affect the stimuli to which customers respond according to the different typologies of CXs (i.e., ordinary and extraordinary).

4.1. Ordinary experience

Our empirical analysis reveals that the phygital experience within the Store is not perceived in the same way by all customers. Therefore, the typologies of phygital ordinary CX can be broken down into "hostile experience," "controversial experience" and "disappointing experience".

Among the 17% of consumers with ordinary experiences, 33% (60+ years) showed intense hostility and opposition to phygital innovations implemented by the Store (e.g., QR codes, Try & Buy). In the **hostile experience**, in particular, customers manifest an **adverse attitude to the novelty of the phygital experience**. Sometimes against modernity at all costs, these respondents are part of a generation accustomed to "essentiality" and have little interest and familiarity with modern technologies (both innovative products and phygital technologies). This fact is often related to their "sense of pragmatism". They are consumers who love buying in local corner shops and still appreciate "touch" products to evaluate the benefit of their purchase closely. Using only phygital tools makes them unable to understand the real value of the products, causing living an unusual, distorted and negative experience. Furthermore, they consider the digital transformation and phygital CXs dangerous for small neighborhood shops: *"[...] I aspire to a certain philosophy: the defense of neighborhood shops. I want these shops to keep on existing: where you enter, you chat, they know you, they advise you. Although these "things" are very convenient, I find them socially dangerous too. Here, an entire "commercial humus" is going to be destroyed which, in my opinion, should necessarily be helped and maintained [...]"* (Interview 45). They are refractory to innovations and changes in general. Moreover, not having control over new technologies, they are wary of being ripped off, feeling out of place after entering the Store: *"No! No, [I wouldn't recommend this experience] because I wouldn't even talk about these "things" here ... [these experiences] are not even a topic with people I know. That is, I don't even know how ... I don't quite understand if the theme is the electronic or something else ... ["digitization, everything" adds his wife] I don't understand. I don't understand it well! [...]"* (Interview 17).

Differently, the **controversial experience** means that the experience is related to a **constructive critique linked to the physical and digital elements' correlation improvement.** Sometimes, the phygital experience requires a basic technological background. Consumers can feel disoriented without a more in-depth explanation alongside QR codes to understand the meaning of the digital products exposed in the Store. Therefore, when exploring a product autonomously, they feel confused and do not fully understand what is around them, wrongly guessing what the products inside the Store are: "*So... I felt unable to go further because there is no written explanation […] so, I decided to leave!*" (Interview 21). In this case, to embrace the necessities expressed by all types of targets, physical elements (e.g., in-store assistance) effectively integrate phygital tools. This would allow better addressing of the confusion dictated by the little familiarity with phygital experiences. As the following quote exemplifies: "*[...] Of course, you just need to scan the QR code, and you can get information, but when someone enters like this, with curiosity, just because it is taking a walk, it expects, taking a tour, to be able to find information here - a bit like if somebody entered a museum […] If someone enters a museum, it walks by and wants to understand with two messages, with two "things" that address it. If there is no [information], it just walks by it [the product] and goes. This is it, in my opinion [...]*" (Interview 18). It is interesting to notice that people initially living a controversial experience have then changed their minds after being instructed during the use of phygital innovations. One interviewee, for example, completely changed his previous opinion after coming back to the Store accompanied by a person with expertise in digital technologies to be guided during the phygital experience: "*[…] It's wonderful for someone my age. However, it is a very long step further. I had to bring my son to understand the product I wanted. I knew I was not up to understanding certain things [...]*" (Interview 3).

Finally, 33% of respondents living ordinary experiences revealed a **disappointing experience**, with high **disillusionment between expectations and reality concerning the phygital CX within the Store** because of their high expectations. Notably, technology has "democratized" knowledge, empowering consumers at the expense of firms. Customers now have more access to pricing, product, and quality information, with constantly rising expectations towards businesses. Their experience begins even before they ever set foot inside the Store. Therefore, this particular target of consumers already familiar with digital technologies is dissatisfied with both the products displayed and the phygital tools used in the Store. These consumers expect newer, more complete, and more sophisticated experiences and find themselves disappointed and embittered once they come in and find nothing new they did not already know. As pointed out by the following quote: "*No, I mean, it's not that ... I wouldn't advise against it, and I wouldn't recommend it either. I mean, if you take a walk and want to have a look, of course… I am certainly not going to tell someone "ah I saw that store go and see it!", because I repeat: as a store it resembles many others*" (Interview 26).

4.2. Extraordinary experience

Elaborating upon the data analysis results, the typologies of CX in phygital contexts while referring to extraordinary experiences can be divided into "passionate experience" and "explorative experience".

Among the interviewees in the sample with extraordinary experience (i.e., 83%), we observed people with expertise in digital technologies who moved autonomously within the Store. Notably, 58% of consumers lived a **passionate experience** appreciating the Store's phygital features and maximizing their CX because of their advanced pre-existing knowledge. Attention to future developments becomes a fundamental element in phygital experiences, and

consumers are aware that the experience they live in now will be part of their everyday life. They show themselves **open to change and** are **interested in going beyond the lived experience, trying to capture the most convenient aspects** of phygital tools **that can allow** them **to** discover products **improving** their **daily life**. Accustomed to living a life constantly in a hurry, these customers find themselves more at ease in being autonomous with poor contact with the staff, having already collected the necessary information in advance and preferring everything at their fingertips through the Store's digital tools, as the following quotes exemplify: *"I did not ask for information since the QR-codes already provide digital information. I like to be independent in evaluating things and ask if I need to. I liked that the staff didn't come to ask if I needed help"* (Interview 9); *"[I got information] by scanning the QR codes. There was no need to ask the staff. I appreciate being independent using QR codes because it allows me to spend time on the items that interest me most and jump from one to the other without dragging a person who is there for sale"* (Interview 33).

Furthermore, our analysis has shown the **explorative experience**, characterized by **curiosity and enthusiasm aroused by the novelties of the phygital CX**. For these customers, feeling surrounded by phygital tools like QR codes and cutting-edge technological products makes the CX a moment of conviviality to be lived with family and friends or even an escape to enjoy alone. The aim is to see, experience, and discover something new and never seen before: *"I saw the Store passing by on the street [...] I entered for my grandchildren, and I must say that this is heaven for them. It's everything so amazing here!" (Interview 47).* Their curiosity for the phygital arose also after watching videos and impactful descriptions by famous bloggers with an unbridled passion for technology, who invited them to visit the Store. Hence, the phygital CX is lived first-hand to search for gifts or simply to look around: *"[...] In his videos, Andrea Galeazzi said there were all these advanced technologies. He also recorded a video here on the in-Store technologies and useful Christmas gifts we could buy [...]" (Interview 36).*

4.3. Management of phygital CX through flexible and agile strategies

In our empirical analysis, we also tried to explore the flexible and agile strategies adopted by Webidoo Store to try to affect the stimuli to which customers respond. Depending on the several forms of CX identified in the previous paragraph (i.e., extraordinary and ordinary), we then observed the strategies followed by Webidoo Store to seek, on the one hand, to adjust CX based on these forms of CX, and, on the other hand, to quickly respond to the different forms of CX to create a more compelling experience tailored to customers' needs, preferences and expectations. The firm deploys some strategies to push consumers who experienced ordinary CXs to live extraordinary CXs, notably: "decompressive strategy," "mentoring strategy" and "prompting strategy". Conversely, the firm adopts the "entertaining strategy" to upgrade and further enrich the extraordinary CXs lived by the consumer.

The data analysis reveals that managers and employees of Webidoo Store acknowledge the limits of a phygital experience. Thus, one of the biggest challenges has been underestimating how radical the phygital CX can sometimes be. For instance, when customers live a **hostile experience**, they feel somewhat "uncomfortable" and are averse to innovation. Thus, Webidoo Store deals with the inconvenient situation by swiftly and competitively responding to consumers feeling opposition or dislike: *"[...] it's a customer who must be left in a moment that is called a decompression moment, let's say a moment in which he understands, perceives where it is, and takes place as the cat does in the new home, and subsequently, it will be him, her or them to seek your field of vision [...]"* (Interview A). The specific approach adopted by the sales staff and C-suite often found in the Store is the following. First, there is a "wait-and-see" phase, in which the customer enters the Store and is free to move around, sometimes stopping at the entrance to figure out where he/she is. Immediately after, there is the second

phase of exploration, where the staff explains the concept of the tech-experience Store to customers. Finally, the "ambassadors" (i.e., the Store's shop assistants) inquire about the consumer's interests to create a tailor-made CX, with the possibility of seeing what is changing in the world through the innovative technologies exposed in the Store. As one Webidoo Store's manager states*: "[The shop assistant] has to be an ambassador, a technology enthusiast, an innovation enthusiast who transfers this passion to the customer [...] The beauty I always tell them is that they don't have to sell. They have to help the customer have the best experience [...]"* (Interview B). Through meticulous investigation and observation to understand the points that could destabilize the planned phygital experience, the sales forces tend to **relieve or reduce customer pressure by shifting from plan-ahead ways of serving customers toward a value-driven, customer-centric approach** that adapts to customer needs and preferences. We have defined this way to affect the stimuli to which customers respond **decompressive strategy**. The firm tries to adapt and adjust the phygital experience (usually lived in a highly automated way) through the accompaniment of hostile consumers by people who work inside the Store. They follow the consumer during the experience to communicate the value of the specific technological products exhibited in the Store and their usefulness in satisfying the consumer's potential or latent needs. Therefore, in addition to being flexible as the experience is adapted to these different conditions embedded in consumer's attitudes, they quickly perceive what is happening. In a highly responsive way, they try to find a solution represented by the human element (i.e., the involvement of people who work in the Store) who intervene to enhance the value of the phygital CX.

Managers feel that improving the CX is a mandate. However, predicting all the moving pieces during the phygital CX can be tricky despite planning everything out. Indeed, providing an outstanding CX necessitates thoughtfulness and the capacity to look at every interaction from the consumer's point of view, for example, taking care of less experienced consumers with little digital literacy. These consumers still cannot effectively perceive the experience by using only QR codes, strongly needing captions alongside the product. In this case, to turn their good intentions into action and identify opportunities, managers aim to take the phygital CX to the next level (e.g., creating a recognizable path through panels during the phygital experience). Notably, the company should keep on marking out the value proposition offered while fostering consumer awareness towards phygital. Webidoo Managers understand the importance of considering and choreographing flexible and agile strategies based on consumers' demands, never losing sight of their struggles when understanding the phygital CX. For instance, managers can implement a change by selling small products that can be bought directly within the Store. In this way, they also satisfy the needs of a large number of consumers still attached to the compulsive purchase. Moreover, another change implemented included a short caption or additional digital devices alongside the QR codes for particular products. Thus, the adoption of the KSP (key selling point)[2] engages the consumer on a more emotional level, allowing it to be intrigued by the QR code but at the same time have an overview of what it is looking at, what it is trying, and touching, as the following quote exemplifies: *"[...] we put some writings around, we divided the various sectors and then, next to the product, for example, the ice cream machine, we wrote "Do you want to try an ice cream?" [...] to give some of the inputs that lead people to understand what it is, stimulate the curiosity of customers a little [...]"* (Interview G). In this case, the firm pursues a **mentoring strategy**, **implementing "along the way" learning moments in the customer journey**, for example, creating a coherent and mapped path within the Store. Consumers who live the **controversial experience** do not know how phygital works

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[2] Key points for the sale and characteristics of the product. KSP tell the product through an emotional hooking customer become familiar with. Consumers become intrigued by the QR code but at the same time they already have an overview of what they are looking at, experiencing, testing and touching.

and therefore fail to appreciate the overall value of the phygital experience. Thus, Webidoo Store continually develops practices to adapt and embrace change rather than rigid steps. For instance, to overcome this problem, the firm tries to find solutions that, on the one hand, adapt to the specific need of these people and, on the other hand, promptly solve any critical issues like little understanding of what is being observed. Managers do this by inserting elements explaining the product or technology to stimulate consumer interest. The written explanation increases the knowledge of what that innovation means, its usefulness, and its value. This strategy is also sound when dealing with people who live a **hostile experience**. Thus, even people who are initially adverse because they consider phygital dangerous or not very tangible can access additional information to understand the phygital experience better.

Managers often have to understand how to adapt the phygital experience to the expectations of **disappointed** customers, who expect more and are somewhat dissatisfied. Consumers' expectations dictate the chances of success of each business. Managers are aware of the possibility of facing consumers with advanced digital knowledge. They underline the importance of face-to-face conversations. People with advanced digital knowledge provide continuous feedback, getting a pulse on their satisfaction and the areas where the firm is not keeping up with expectations. Therefore, meeting with this consumer is an opportunity for dialogue and exchanging ideas. In this case, managers do not aspire to communicate to consumers the novelty of the product itself but offer them the possibility of verifying its effective functioning through the Try & Buy: *"[…] In Webidoo Store, we want the customer to know the products, testing them […] Our mission must be to encourage people to understand what technology is through our products which may not be the latest coolest ones on this planet, but in the meantime, we allow consumers to test and try them […]"* (Interview E). Enhancing the phygital CX of disappointing consumers might be helpful to adopt a **prompting strategy**, **spurring consumer-pulled improvements via real-time feedback**. The company seeks to implement ongoing innovations in the experience led by the consumers who, thanks to their experience and knowledge of technology, can tell the company which aspects to improve. There is a moment of sharing and dialogue in which the company is open to consumer feedback to adapt the offer according to their expectations. The dialogue element is therefore inserted as an integration into the experience. Real-time feedback quickly picks up and responds to what consumers want.

Providing an excellent phygital CX means building up enriching and memorable moments to improve and sustain high satisfaction levels, adapting the customer journey to create phygital CXs that constantly excite customers. Keeping clients pleased necessitates dedication as well as creativity, for example, through ongoing improvement of the website, with an idea of virtual reality in which, through the online channel, consumers can feel as if they were shopping inside the Store. The ability to independently place orders for products online is an absolute godsend to customers with minimal time to commit to the business, which necessitates constant upgrades. Through an approach that extensively embraces change, managers constantly strive to astound consumers who live **passionate** and **explorative experiences**. Thus, managers are keen to describe the Store as a "playground" for innovation lovers: *"[…] It's a playground for those who love innovation […] But there you touch it, and above all, you don't worry that when you enter, there is someone who wants to sell you. You come in to have an experience, to take a path, to see and hear innovation, and every month you enter you find something new, and this is also very nice […]"* (Interview B). The firm may also attempt to promote events in which influencers and digital specialists accompany the phygital CX into Webidoo Store: *"[…] being phygital also means being flexible […] we are trying to organize events to let people try Unistellar - the digital telescope - […] having a night tour where you could sign up, for*

example, on Valentine's Day, and look at the stars under a starry sky [...]" (Interview E). Thus, an **entertaining strategy** drives managers to always look ahead in a dynamic context, such as the phygital one. This strategy is about **leveraging fun to entertain consumers while upgrading the phygital CX.** The passionate and explorative consumers have an extremely positive and open attitude towards the phygital experience. They are not averse, hostile, or insecure. What is unknown is for them something to discover and know ("explorative" CX) or something they recognize to be useful to improve their lives in the future ("passionate" CX). In this case, the firm wants to maintain this spirit and desire by stimulating consumers more and more, including creative elements that will further enrich their experience. The firm then adapts the offer to quickly sense and respond to their "thirst" for discovery.

The findings of this study have been synthesized in the following framework (see Figure 1). On the one hand, the framework illustrates the three types of ordinary phygital CXs ("hostile experience," "controversial experience", and "disappointing experience") and the two types of extraordinary phygital CXs ("passionate experience" and "explorative experience") based on the intensity of consumers' responses and reactions to stimuli. On the other hand, it identifies four flexible and agile strategies that can be adopted to adjust to these forms of CX and quickly respond to the different forms of CX to create a more compelling experience tailored to customers' needs, preferences, and expectations: "decompressive strategy", "mentoring strategy", "prompting strategy", and "entertaining strategy".

Fig. 1: The phygital CX: ordinary versus extraordinary CX, and the role of the firm
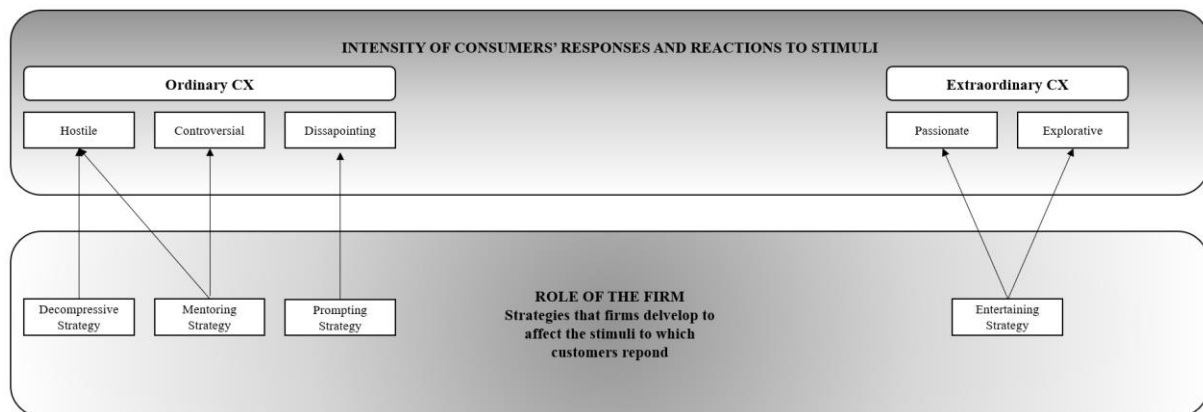
Source: our elaboration

5. Discussion

Drawing on the conceptual framework for customer experience developed by Becker & Jaakkola (2020), we develop a new framework that leverages the rich context provided by the emerging role of phygital context to examine the interplay between the different typologies of CXs and the influences of managerial strategies to affect the stimuli to which customers respond to enhance phygital CXs.
Consistent with existing studies our research demonstrates that CX can range from ordinary to extraordinary, based on the intensity of consumers' responses and reactions to stimuli by firms (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). However, we contribute to the literature by explaining the different typologies of ordinary and extraordinary CX in a phygital context. Moreover, previous studies have underlined that ordinary experiences are "common, frequent, and within the realm of everyday life" (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014, p. 2), hence weaker and worst for customers

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compared to extraordinary ones (Brakus *et al*., 2009; Carú & Cova, 2003; Zaubermann *et al*., 2009).

By extending prior research, this study shows that, in a phygital context, ordinary experiences are not necessarily related to weak experiences, where customers are poorly involved in their buying experience. Indeed, an ordinary CX in a phygital setting is often associated with an inadequate understanding of the phygital contexts (e.g., products, services, tools), which makes the overall experience unclear. This evidence, therefore, questions literature that has purely focused on an ordinary experience as a common and frequent experience (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014), clashing with our findings that see ordinary experience in a phygital context as a completely new experience, almost dangerous and at times misunderstood. Moreover, ordinary experiences can be recurrent and not new for specific targets of consumers experts in the latest phygital trends, necessitating constant incentives and motivation to maintain high the interest of the customer throughout his journey. In this sense, our study extends previous literature (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014; Brakus *et al*., 2009; Carú & Cova, 2003), highlighting how these ordinary experiences in a phygital context are among the most complex, given the consumers' confidence to know every single aspect of phygital with a little predisposition to further learning.

Furthermore, prior literature conceptualizes extraordinary CX as "intense, positive, intrinsically enjoyable" (Arnould & Price, 1993, p. 25) that "capture people's attention and endure in memories, affording happiness at any stage of life" (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014, p. 13). Scholars assume them both unusual and inherently superior to ordinary experiences (Zaubermann *et al*., 2009). By extending previous studies (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014; Brakus *et al*., 2009; Carú & Cova, 2003), this work shows how extraordinary experiences can be traced back to great familiarity with phygital experiences. Our findings demonstrate that consumers that show solid digital knowledge in the phygital field are likely to live the phygital experience grasping each function of phygital tools. Furthermore, explorative experiences lived by consumers - who might not be used to phygital and digital technologies - reverberate in extraordinary CXs due to the ability to get involved. This happens through a positive predisposition to learning and knowledge, i.e., a proactive attitude towards the phygital CX.

This article also contributes to extending prior knowledge by identifying the specific agile and flexible strategies through which firms try to affect the stimuli to which customers respond depending on the different forms of CX (ordinary and extraordinary). According to the literature, managers react quickly and flexibly to changing consumer needs and preferences throughout the CX (Gligor *et al*., 2013; Lu *et al*., 2011; Overby *et al*., 2006; Shef & Rice, 2005). In this regard, previous studies have argued about how managers strive to deliver exclusivity to the consumer by making the buying process smooth, personalized and tailored by using multiple tools (e.g., websites, e-commerce) to complete purchases, as well as new-age innovations such as home shopping, providing channel choice flexibility in phygital settings (Pangarkar *et al*., 2022). Recent studies also highlight the use of Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) technologies to provide new and better phygital experiences for customers throughout their journey (Akmermer, 2022). By improving prior literature, this study shows how a firm's management can better adjust ordinary and extraordinary CXs in phygital settings. In particular, following strategies such as "decompressive strategy," "mentoring strategy" and "prompting strategy", the firm intends to push consumers who experienced ordinary CXs to live extraordinary CXs. Conversely, the firm aims to upgrade the intended CXs based on the extraordinary CXs lived by consumers employing an "entertaining strategy." Moreover, by extending previous research, our work highlights the importance of pursuing and implementing up-to-date and revised strategies to address such a particular and challenging experience as the phygital one. Interestingly, a phygital CX is an experience that must be sustained actively and

constantly, with a watchful eye towards the latest innovation trends. Therefore, it is a continuous work of reviewing and adapting the KPIs (Key Performance Indicators), underlining the need to focus on the whole market segment than just focusing on customers' high experience in phygital settings.

5.1. Managerial implications

The present study provides significant managerial insights. Although organizations can offer the same experience to every customer, the latter will not experience the same because CX depends on their related contextual factors, e.g., mood, past experiences, or knowledge (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). Hence, given the CX's subjectivity and contextuality, business managers and owners should focus on controlled stimuli and touchpoints to trigger the intended CX. In this regard, the framework conceptualized in the present work showcase practical guidelines on the typologies of CX in phygital contexts throughout the intensity of customer responses and reactions to stimuli, i.e., ordinary to extraordinary, and valuable takeaways on how management can leverage physical and digital features to respond to the requirements of customers in an agile and flexible way, focusing on the various kinds of CX (i.e., ordinary and extraordinary) and create more effective CXs. Specifically, managers and practitioners must focus on CX's ordinary and extraordinary typologies in phygital contexts to engage every consumer in his/her customer journey, implementing targeted moves to boost extraordinary CXs. Being agile and flexible, in this sense, will be fundamental to guide the consumer who lives an ordinary experience CX towards an extraordinary one. Amplifying the extraordinary CX will still be paramount to consumers who already enjoyed this type of CX, striving to offer them an ever more unique and captivating CX.

5.2. Limitations and future research

This study owns some limitations that may be addressed by future research. First, it employs a single-case study research design. Future studies could investigate this topic in other research contexts, e.g., fashion or grocery stores. Also, this study focused on the Italian context. Extending the research to other countries would help enrich existing knowledge.

Moreover, the qualitative analysis employed by a single-case study does not ensure the generalization of our findings. Thus, an important avenue for future research could be testing the proposed framework on a larger sample through a quantitative method. For instance, it would be interesting to carry out a survey that measures the difference in the CXs based on consumer knowledge of technology and digital.

Also, what emerged from this study is a manifestation of contrasting, distorted and somehow adverse reactions to stimuli from consumers living ordinary CXs, leading them to "hostile," "controversial" and "disappointing" CXs. On the other side, extraordinary CXs have aroused positive feelings in consumers, resulting in "passionate" and "exploratory" CXs. Future studies could identify and examine additional types of ordinary and extraordinary CXs in a phygital setting.

Finally, this study has examined phygital CX through the reality of a phygital store based on Try & Buy. Future studies could focus on other phygital tools that have revolutionized the CX, such as artificial intelligence systems based on machine learning, where consumers receive the bill directly on the smartphone, without any checks, and without scanning QR or bar codes on any cash desk.

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App. 1: Summary of data (customers)

General information											CX typologies in phygital contexts
Interview	Interview date	Gender	Nationality	Age range	Educational qualification	Profession	Accompanied	First time in the store	It got to know the store through	Comparable experiences	Type of experience
Interview 1	2021, December 17th	Male	Italian	20/29	Degree	Student	Friend	Yes	Youtube	No	XP
Interview 2		Male	Italian	30/39	Middle School diploma	Bartender	Father	Yes	Word of mouth	No	XP
Interview 3		Male	Italian	70/79	Middle School diploma	Retired	Son	No	Walking around and advertising	No	OC
Interview 4		Male	Italian	20/29	Diploma	Employee		Yes	Driving	No	XP
Interview 5		Female	Italian	40/49	Degree	Employee	Children (2)	Yes	Walking around	No	XE
Interview 6		Female	Italian	60/69	Degree	Freelance		Yes	Walking around	No	XP
Interview 7		Female	Italian	50/59	Diploma	Housewife	Daughter	Yes	Proximity from home	No	XE
Interview 8	2021, December 18th	Male	Italian	20/29	Degree	Employee (developer)	Couple	Yes	Youtube	No	XP
Interview 9		Male	Italian	40/49	Diploma	Commercial Director		Yes	Proximity from home, word of mouth	No	XP
Interview 10		Male	Italian	50/59	Degree	Business consultant	Friends (2)	Yes	Newspaper	No	XP
Interview 11		Female	Italian	40/49	Diploma	Bank employee	Couple + children (2)	Yes	Walking around	No	XP
Interview 12		Female	Italian	30/39	PhD	Freelance	Couple	Yes	Walking around	No	XP
Interview 13		Male	Italian	30/39	Degree	Entrepreneur	Couple	Yes	Word of mouth	No	XP
Interview 14		Male	Italian	60/69	Degree	Doctor	Couple	No	Proximity from home	No	XE
Interview 15		Female	Italian	30/39	Degree	Employee	Couple	Yes	Word of mouth	No	XE
Interview 16		Male	Italian	30/39	Degree	Manager	Couple	Yes	Walking around	No	XE
Interview 17		Male	Italian	60/69	Degree	Business agent	Couple	Yes	Walking around	No	OH
Interview 18		Female	Italian	60/69	Degree	Self-manager in a chemical company	Couple	Yes	Walking around	No	OC

Interview 19		Female	Italian	40/49	Diploma	Tertiary sector employee	Couple	Yes	Walking around	No	XE
Interview 20		Female	Italian	40/49	PhD	Lawyer	Couple	Yes	Word of mouth	No	XE
Interview 21		Male	Italian	50/59	Degree	Entrepreneur	Couple	Yes	Walking around	No	OC
Interview 22		Male	Italian	60/69	Diploma	Retired	Couple	Yes	Walking around	No	OH
Interview 23		Male	Italian	30/39	Degree	Entrepreneur	Couple	Yes	Walking around	No	XE
Interview 24		Female	Italian	Under 20	Middle School diploma	Student	Friend	Yes	Stopped by a promoter	No	XP
Interview 25		Female	Italian	40/49	Degree	Employee	Couple and children (2)	Yes	Stopped by a promoter	No	XE
Interview 26		Male	Italian	40/49	Degree	Doctor	Son	Yes	Walking around	No	OD
Interview 27		Female	Italian	50/59	Diploma	Freelance	Friend	Yes	Walking around	No	XE
Interview 28		Male	Italian	20/29	Degree	Student	Friends (3)	Yes	Stopped by a promoter	No	XP
Interview 29		Female	Italian	40/49	Degree	Financial advisor		No	Webidoo investor	No	XP
Interview 30		Female	Italian	70/79	Degree	Teacher	Grandchildren + grandchildren's friends (5)	No	Word of mouth	No	XE
Interview 31		Male	Italian	50/59	Degree	Trader	Son	Yes	Walking around	No	XP
Interview 32	2021, December 19th	Female	Italian	70/79	Degree	Lawyer in a law firm	Couple	Yes	Driving	No	XP
Interview 33		Male	Italian	30/39	Degree	Asset protection manager		Yes	Proximity from home	No	XP
Interview 34		Female	Italian	40/49	Degree	Communication consultant		Yes	Walking around	No	XP
Interview 35		Female	Romanian	30/39	Degree	Social health worker in a hospital		Yes	Walking around	No	XP
Interview 36		Female	Italian	20/29	Degree	Consultant	Couple	Yes	Youtube	No	XE
Interview 37		Male	Italian	20/29	Degree	Biometric engineer	Couple	Yes	Youtube	No	XP
Interview 38		Female	Italian	20/29	Diploma	Communication expert	Couple	Yes	Word of mouth	No	XE
Interview 39		Female	Italian	Under 20	Middle School diploma	Student	Friends (2)	Yes	Walking around	No	XP

Interview	Date	Gender	Nationality	Age	Education	Occupation					
Interview 40		Male	Italian	Under 20	Middle School diploma	Student	Friends (2)	Yes	Walking around	No	XP
Interview 41		Male	Italian	Under 20	Middle School diploma	Student	Friends (2)	Yes	Walking around	No	XP
Interview 42		Male	Italian	50/59	Degree	Lawyer in an international law firm	Couple	Yes	Street advertising	No	XE
Interview 43		Female	Italian	40/49	Master	Lawyer in an international law firm	Couple	Yes	Street advertising	No	XE
Interview 44		Female	Italian	50/59	Degree	Lawyer		Yes	Walking around	No	OD
Interview 45		Male	Italian	70/79	Degree	Journalist		Yes	Walking around	No	OH
Interview 46		Male	Italian	50/59	Diploma	Retired	Couple	Yes	Walking around	No	XP
Interview 47		Female	Italian	50/59	Diploma	Employee in administrative and accounting services company	Friend	No	Word of mouth	No	XE
Interview 48		Female	Ukrainian	40/49	Degree	Employee in administrative and accounting services company	Friend	No	Online through research on particular products	No	XE
Interview 49		Male	Spanish	60/69	Degree	Economist		Yes	Walking around	No	XE
Interview 50		Male	Italian	40/49	Degree	Entrepreneur		Yes	Word of mouth	No	OD
Interview 51		Male	Italian	50/59	Degree	Physiotherapist	Friend	Yes	Proximity from home	No	XE
Interview 52		Male	Italian	50/59	Diploma	Employee	Friend	Yes	Proximity from home	No	XP
Interview 53	2021, December 20th	Male	Brazilian	20/29	Diploma	Warehouse manager		Yes	Youtube	No	XP
Interview 54		Male	Italian	20/29	Diploma	Warehouseman		Yes	Youtube	No	XP

Source: own elaboration

Legend: O: Ordinary; X: Extraodinary; H: Hostile; C: Controversial; D: Disappointing; P: Passionate; E: Explorative

App. 2: Summary of data (firm)

Source	Interview Date	Position	Interview time span (minutes)
Interview A	2021, January 25th	Retail manager	56'39''
Interview B	2021, January 27th	Co-founder, Chairman & CEO	56'16''
Interview C	2021, January 31st	HR Manager	35'28''
Interview D	2021, February 1st	Channel Business Manager	58'06''
Interview E	2021, February 1st	Executive Assistant	75'46''
Interview F	2021, February 2nd	Jr. Project Manager	58'11''
Interview G	2021, February 3rd	General Manager	42'33''
Interview H	2021, February 5th	Specialist Recruitment Manager	61'37''

Source: own elaboration

Context cluster	Theoretical framework	Consumers' representative quotations	Meaning
Ordinary experience	Hostile experience: adverse attitude to the novelty of the phygital experience	"I didn't ask the employees because the employees mostly don't come to you ... they are there ... they look at the cell phone like all young people, and therefore it doesn't seem to me either that they try to stimulate awareness of the purchase" (Interview 17) "I am basically curious, and therefore, I wanted to see if there could be something of my interest among all these "things" [i.e., the phygital techologies] that will tend to be numerous. I must say that I could not even find one of my interest. Nothing, I have not found anything that interests me and can satisfy me [...]" (Interview 22)	The phygital CX is not understood; it is seen as an experience without utility.
	Controversial experience: "constructively critical" linked to the physical and digital store correlation improvement	"I find it very nice [being autonomous]. I would have still appreciated having three lines, no more anyway, explaining the usefulness and what it is. Then maybe one wants to deepen and ... I see a lot of products. There are some writings in English ... I did not understand what it was, and I had no time or desire to see straight scanning the QR codes. If next to the QR codes, three lines had explained the usefulness of the product [it would have been better] … maybe this is just my opinion, a young person will find it differently" (Interview 18)	Consumers are critical regarding the lived experience. For instance, the QR code formula confuses those who cannot go beyond the experience without an additional explanation in written form. They also view the experience as a dangerous threat to non-phygital commercial realities.
	Disappointing experience: disillusionment between expectations and reality concerning the phygital CX within the Store	"Yes, I mean, it's nice. I have not found anything new that I did not already know […] I enjoy traveling to the US and Japan, where phygital technologies are widespread. However, I noticed in the last couple of years that many stores are slowly introducing phygital elements in Milan. For me, this is really anything new […] " (Interview 26)	Consumers have such advanced technological knowledge that they do not see any added value in the experience.
Extraordinary experience	Passionate experience: advanced knowledge of the phygital CX	"[I think it is] very very nice [being autonomous]. I'm fine with both a shop with and without clerks. Autonomy is convenient for me so I can have a look more freely without being interrupted during my visit" (Interview 1) "[...] [Being autonomous with QR codes makes me] freer. At Media World, if you go to Viale Certosa, you need to wait an hour to be served by someone, and here you see it [the product], scan [the QR codes], see product details, prices, and everything" (Interview 53)	These consumers are accustomed to phygital consumption experiences and have a "sapiens level" linked to technology and digitalization.
	Explorative experience: curiosity and enthusiasm aroused by the novelties of the phygital experience	"Yes, of course, [I would repeat the experience] I like novelty, and I think it is time for me to start being more technological too" (Interview 48) "I have already recommended it. Many guys like me have the same passion or desire to discover new things. I told it to a friend of mine, and he told me he had never seen a place like this. He will go there when he can and wants to see something because he also likes technology" (Interview 19)	Curiosity and enthusiasm drive these consumers to enter the Store, positively surprised by its attractive reality. Leaving their comfort zone sometimes gives them new reflections on the need to look out for technology.

Source: own elaboration

Context cluster	Theoretical framework	Employees' and Managers' representative quotations	Meaning
Ordinary experience	Decompressing users via close in-store assistance	"[...] What we need to work on is what I call *the cat theory*. When a cat enters a new environment, it is super hostile and scared, then slowly approaches, starts to eat, gets caressed, purrs, and becomes your friend [...] You need to be in the user's field of vision and not immediately go to him and ask: "How can I help you?" […] It's useless because he did not look for you [...] "(Interview A) "[…] Consumers see many colors, shapes, and images. It can feel confusing. It will be his instinct to guide him to go to the car, to go to the hydroponic greenhouse, to go towards gaming. However, at some point, in a state of confusion and disorientation, as soon as it finds some reference points, it creates a path and then understands where the smart mobility is, where the strange things of new craftsmanship are. It go ahead, and then he independently recognizes that logical path. So today a phygital shop, a phygital activity must be recognizable, and that's what happens in that shop [,,,]" (Interview A)	The salespeople offer advice, support, and guidance to customers who have lived a hostile CX to help them in their learning process in a phygital context.
	Educating users through digital training	"[...] The QR Code is a double-edged sword because, on the one hand, it allows you to ride the trending topic of the moment - the digital part in expressing prices and exposing the KSP (key selling point_punti sales key/product characteristics) of a product. On the other hand, the less aware user is disoriented, and out of shame, it does not ask and is a customer that you could also lose [...] In a country for old people like Italy, these are things that need time and also require constructive criticism to better shape an outstanding customer journey [...]" (Interview A) "[…] before there was also a problem that being an online QR code, there is not much line in here, and many customers could not enter the platform, so you can also give them WiFi and help them if they want to enter the platform using our pc or our tablet […]" (Interview D) "[…] We try to adapt to everyone a little. We started only with the QR code, but then, seeing that we also had many people, even young people, who had a dead cell phone or they were doing something else with the cell phone […] we believe that the physical part will never go away […] for example, in a restaurant we still ask for the paper menu […]" (Interview H)	To address controversial CXs, the company aims to take the phygital CX to the next level, implementing "along the way" learning moments in the customer journey.
	Spurring user-pulled improvements via real-time feedbacks	"[...] They can be computer science students, retired people who have been engineers, technicians, people who work in large-scale distribution who want to show their technical background [...] I call them opportunity users because they allow us to talk and exchange ideas [...]" (Interview A) "There are consumers who come to the Store and think they know every product but always find something they might not have seen before […] It can happen they enter and are not amazed […] digital runs, so we have to keep up […]" (Interview H)	Managers deal with customers who have had a disappointing experience sustaining meaningful dialogue and exchanging ideas. Furthermore, they aim to communicate the possibility of verifying products' effective functioning through the Try & Buy.
Extraordinary experience	Leveraging fun to entertain users	"[…] I think that the future is not having a warehouse, I think that the future is not just leaving the shop with the product in hand. Maybe try the product and order it online, and it will be delivered the next day, the same day, 5 days later, it doesn't matter. I mean, I don't think they run around with 70 bags; maybe it's even more convenient to do so […]" (Interview B) "[…] you immerse yourself in the technology. Some enter and have fun like children, and sometimes for some, it's a playground for adults, a technological playground. So it creates those emotions of fun, the emotion of learning, of seeing new things […]" (Interview B) "[…] you see how the future is going to look like because what you can find here now at the Webidoo Store is likely to be part of our lives in maybe 100 years! […]" (Interview H)	Managers guide consumers with a passionate, evocative, reflective, and explorative experience toward the latest innovations in the field of technology and digital. They aim to show them how the world will change in the "phygital era", astonishing them.

Source: own elaboration