

# The Future of Luxury Retail

Anatomy of an ultra-connected  
consumer.



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**Technology is reshaping the world of luxury retail. As part of our Future of Luxury Retail series, we spoke to futurist Howard Saunders, fashion psychologist Shakaila Forbes-Bell and Retail CTO for Verizon Business EMEA, James Hughes, to learn how consumer demand is driving this change.**

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# The ultra-connected consumer, explained.

**The big picture:** Consumers today are empowered by connectivity, and this has changed their appetites – and expectations. Integrating technology into luxury retail answers this shift.

**Ultra-connected together:** James Hughes says that the ultra-connected consumer is not an isolated tribe of shoppers. Rather, we've all become ultra-connected, and this change in lifestyle cannot be easily understated. We're used to accessing limitless information and frictionless efficiency in a few taps. For retailers – especially luxury retailers – these expectations need to be met in-store.

The kinds of immersive technology we're now so used to were previously available predominantly in the home, and less so in public spaces.

“**The advent of phone and AR technology means consumers can now engage with that connectivity while outside – or from anywhere.**”

according to James. “Advanced technology ecosystems can deliver retail transformation. The kind of transformation we bring can enable everything from enhanced operations to supply chain visibility, and even immersive engagement changing the in-store experiences.”

**Key takeaway:** Consumers aren't visiting stores merely to buy things, which can be done from anywhere. Instead, they want to be dazzled, and to have unique experiences.



# Stop thinking shop.

**The big picture:** Luxury fashion storefronts are no longer places solely devoted to moving products. Retailers now have to think bigger than the products they sell. Why? It's about much more than just buying things. Consumers are seeking meaningful experiences.

**The expert consult:** Howard Saunders is an author and futurist, and formerly a creative director at Fitch, where he spent decades designing luxury retail storefronts.

**Case(s) in point:** Aimé Leon Dore is a luxury retailer based in New York City, which cultivates the ambiance and cosiness of a coffee shop (and sells coffee in its café). This example demonstrates that there is something else happening in luxury clothing stores today than merely selling clothes. The same is true at other stores too, and Howard confirms this.

“Stand at the entrance of the Apple store and just wander around as I do and watch people. They've already got an iPhone. You know, they're clearly not running in there to buy one urgently.”

**The big question:** If consumers aren't visiting stores to shop, then what are they there for?

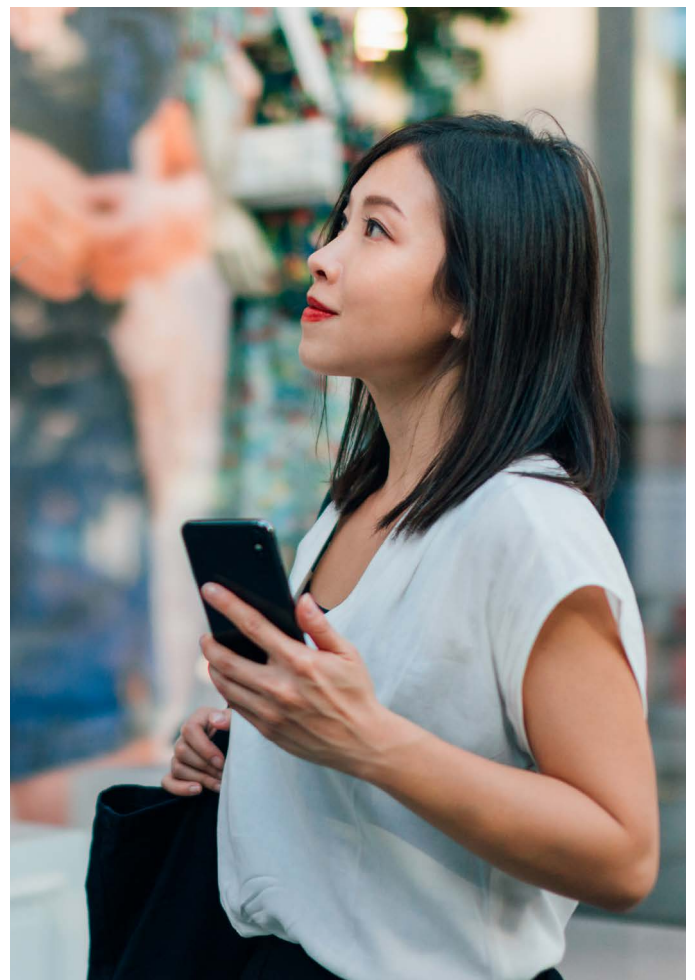
**The answer, according to Howard:** Stores are no longer stores in the traditional sense. They're not 'storing' things. Rather, he argues, the purpose of retail stores is now to create a new sort of space altogether. Some of these, he states, are as much a chill-out space as anything else, or have as much in common with an art gallery. But there are a lot of things happening in these multi-dimensional spaces beyond buying stuff.

In Howard's view, people visit retail storefronts to foster a sense of community, and for a moment of brand veneration.

“They've come back to the mothership to pay homage to that brand and that kind of religious experience,” he says.

“Look at their design. The store is white, it's open, it's symmetrical. There are clear vistas. There are products on podiums... you know, it's kind of a sanctuary.”

**Key takeaway:** The ultra-connected consumer still wants to experience shopping in real life. But the reason they visit flagship stores is not for the shopping – it's for a range of other experiences, foremost connecting with the brand in question.



“ They've come back to the mothership to pay homage to that brand and that kind of religious experience.



# Main character energy.

**The big picture:** Technology enables people to be treated like VIPs. This expectation was once the preserve of celebrities, but technology democratizes this service and enables everyone to be treated like a 'main character.' Everyone wants to be a protagonist, as written in *The New Yorker*<sup>1</sup>

**The expert consult:** Shakaila Forbes-Bell is a fashion psychologist whose work has been published in *Vogue*, *Marie Claire UK*, *i-D*, *The Times*, and *The Sunday Times: Style*, among others.

Technology has empowered consumers like never before.

"In the mindset of today, people want technology at every touchpoint. It takes the consumer more on a journey and it gives them more opportunity to speak to people within the community," says Shakaila.

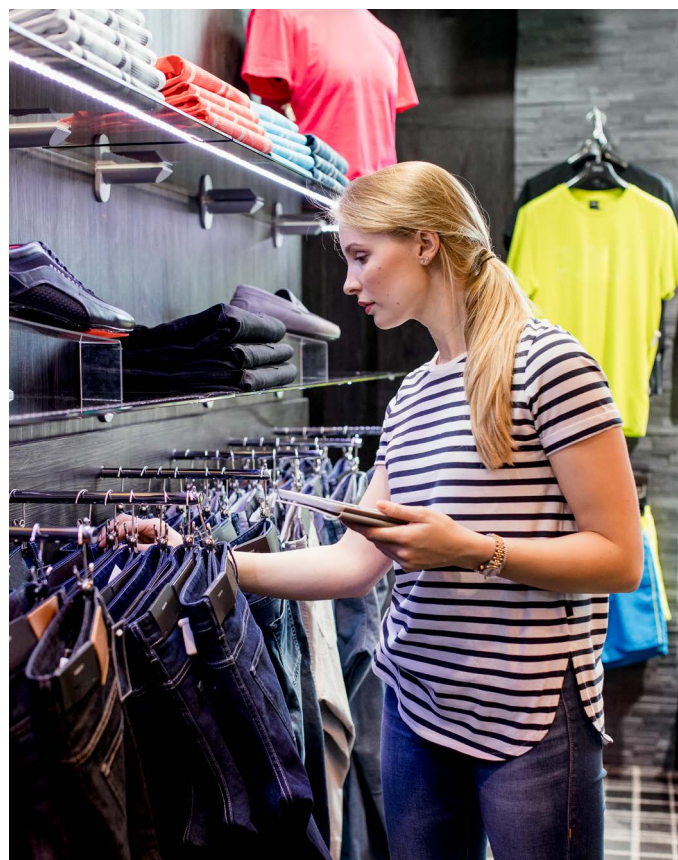
Imbued with new creative powers, people can now make mini movies to share online. To really connect with modern shoppers like these, Shakaila says luxury fashion retailers should play into this penchant for storytelling.

"People want to showcase themselves and create a story for them to talk about. And that's just another level of creating that experience rather than just them walking into the store."

For the story to be good, Shakaila says there needs to be enrichment via technology.

"They'll have magic mirrors. They'll have more touch screens. They'll have ability to take selfies and interact with your audience. And it won't just be about buying something and going off. It's about creating a moment."

These moments, in the eyes of consumers, form stories worthy of sharing with everyone.



**A word of caution:** Consumers today are also empowered to voice negative experiences, so retailers need to consider that positive stories are not the only ones that can resonate on social media.

**Key takeaway:** Most of us today have what can be considered 'main character energy,' or the sense that we are the centre of our story. And many of us feel we need to tell this story online. Luxury retail storefronts should be geared to cater to this mindset, giving consumers experiences to share and stories to tell.

**Impress your friends:** There's a word for 'main character energy' in Italian – protagonismo. Rolls off the tongue.

<sup>1</sup>Chayka, K. (2021, June 23). We all have "Main-Character energy" now. *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/infinite-scroll/we-all-have-main-character-energy-now>

As James tells us, technology can do much more than meet the status quo.

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**“ From smart fitting rooms – with touchscreen mirrors – to virtual catwalk shows, these technologies can be dazzling.” Therefore it’s only right to expect that – “they’ll surprise us, delight us and enrich our shopping experience.”**

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Learn more about how Verizon can help you explore and adopt the technology that's reinventing retail at [verizon.com/gb/retail](https://www.verizon.com/gb/retail)

