

## The Dial Protocol: Qualitative Retail Research in Post-Cartesian Retail

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to develop a new qualitative research methodology fitting the 21st-century retail environment—an environment in which mobile communication technologies are constantly woven into the fabric of the brick-and-mortar servicescape. The presented protocol differs from traditional ones by not making assumptions about what constitutes a retail space. Instead, it adopts a perspective based on phenomenologist Henri Lefebvre’s seminal work, which posits that space is not a three-dimensional container commonly referred to as “servicescape” but is actively produced through shoppers’ spatial practices. The designed protocol was tested with nine participants during several day-long field trips, immersing the researcher into the shopper’s lived experience by combining multiple data collection methods—participant observation, videography, photography, and both pre-fieldwork and post-fieldwork interviews. By giving equal importance, during the fieldwork, to locations and connections, this new protocol allowed for the unpacking of new types of spatial practices enacted by shoppers. The adoption of this non-Cartesian approach to shopper observation is relevant at a time when non-retail and retail activities are increasingly interwoven, as reflected in the development of cross-channel, multi-channel, and omni-channel marketing strategies.

**Keywords:** shopper behavior; mobile telecommunication technologies; qualitative research; servicescape

### INTRODUCTION

In the past three decades, retail researchers have advocated the use of qualitative research techniques to apprehend the service encounter in its entirety and capture the gestalt of the shopper’s experience. The success of a qualitative approach to study what has been called the “servicescape” (Bitner, 1992) has been significant and has led to a plethora of articles contributing to our understanding of various types of service encounters. The “scape-mania” that followed Bitner’s 1992 seminal article has endured to this day, with the initial concept being augmented via various theoretical constructions. Despite the various “scapes” developed over the years (e.g., *experienscape*, *sportscape*, *winescape*, *performancescape*, *designscape*, *festivalscape*—see Pizam and Tasci, 2019, for an exhaustive list), there still is a sentiment that the whole customer experience isn’t fully captured yet through the approaches that have been developed thus far. For instance, researchers have recently called “for the need to incorporate technology as one of the key experience components in the *experienscape* concept” (Kandampully, Bilgihan, and Amer, 2022). The present article advances that these different approaches to the retail experience have been heavily skewed by their implicit philosophical conceptualization of space, which limits their full understanding of the space of retail as lived by shoppers.

Capturing, during the fieldwork, the shopper’s lived retail experience remains a challenge for researchers doomed to forever remain outsiders to the customer’s lived world. By immersing the observer into the servicescape, participant observation partially solves this issue of the communicability of experience. Even with participant observation, though, researchers cannot arbitrarily presuppose a correspondence between their perception of the servicescape and another individual’s: two persons can share the same physical settings and still develop totally different experiences.

Adding to the complexity is the fact that new technologies have challenged the very concepts of “presence” and “absence.” Even before mobile telecommunication technologies started pervading our daily lives, Hayles (1999) noted that, with new technologies, bodies “become patterns of information, flickering signifiers, characterized by their tendencies toward unexpected metamorphoses, attenuations, and dispersions.” Since then, various studies have demonstrated the impact of mobile telecommunication technologies on the user’s presence in a given physical context (e.g., Shankar *et al.*, 2021). Consequently, trying to pinpoint where the shopper “is” has lost its relevance, as the shopper’s experienced space is constantly shifting in a hard-to-predict (and hard-to-observe) manner: can we pretend that a shopper still fully “is” in a store when that shopper, even though physically on the premises, is surfing on TikTok while at the same time chatting on the phone with a friend about the opportunity to buy an item the shopper just spotted

in a store? Researchers are increasingly conscious that the digitalization of retailing has led to “digitally connected unseen journeys” (Hall, Towers, and Shaw, 2017) of shoppers who can cross, on a whim, a number of channels.

By presenting the informants with a visually rich recording of a recent shopping experience, the Day In A Life (DIAL) protocol introduced in this article allows them to develop, during post-fieldwork interviews, a reflexive view on the event. This instigated dialogue between the informants and the videorecording leads to some level of exteriorization of the informants’ lived retail experience, making that experience more accessible to the researcher. This protocol, encompassing an entire day (instead of a punctual observation at a retail place), also enables the researcher to take into account new shopping practices associated with mobile devices.

Because it is grounded in phenomenology, this new protocol is not making presuppositions regarding the nature of the context in which the observed situation takes place; that is, it does not presuppose what is and is not a space of retail. Rather, it follows Husserl’s (2014) phenomenological advice to capture the raw dimension of an experience, i.e., to go back “to the things themselves” without focusing on previous conceptualizations of the servicescape. It is advanced that, given the increasing interminglement between the so-called real, brick-and-mortar retail space and digital activities, the intuitive and commonsensical view on the notion of “space” is now insufficient to fully identify and unpack shoppers’ behaviors; consequently, the notion of “servicescape” and its three-dimensionality should be replaced with the notion of “servicespace”—a retail space produced by shoppers themselves.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers rarely question the paradigm they implicitly use as an epistemological background to interpret their findings. The most commonly used underlying paradigm is usually referred to as positivism. With positivism, the main epistemological objective is to incrementally discover “reality.” It is assumed that a transcendental reality does exist, independent from the subject, and that such reality can gradually be uncovered and represented through empirical work. Given its philosophical origins, the meta-assumption that serves as the foundation for positivism has often been referred to as “Cartesianism.” Because it appears commonsensical to both the scientific community and laypeople alike, Cartesianism is rarely questioned, even though the limitations of its explanatory power are being increasingly challenged by new technologies.

Our common conceptualization of space has not always been considered commonsensical, though: according to the Aristotelian tradition, space and time were not pre-existing concepts but rather mere categories facilitating the classification of sensory inputs. They were not *res extensa*, but rather *res cogitans*, i.e., there was no acknowledged evidence that they belonged to an order preceding the data supplied by the sensory organs. However, as Lefebvre (1991) explains, “With Descartes, space ‘entered the realm of the absolute’: as object opposed to subject, as *res extensa* opposed to *res cogitans*, space came to dominate, by containing them, all senses and all bodies.” Phenomenology originally emerged as a reaction to this subject-object dualism.

It is advanced in this paper that, given the ubiquitous presence of mobile communication technologies in shoppers’ lives, adopting a phenomenological perspective will help capture the consumer’s experience in a retail context. Phenomenology attempts to discover the inherent essence of appearances (i.e., “phenomena”), where an appearance is described as anything of which one is conscious. Instead of making intellectual speculations about the nature and very existence of reality, Edmund Husserl (the founder of phenomenology) turned to a pure description of what “is,” that is, the raw experiences brought to consciousness. This setting aside of the question of the reality of objects, space, and the outside world is what Husserl refers to as the “bracketing of existence” (Husserl, 2014). The aim of such bracketing is to reconnect to the world as we experience it, rather than as it is conceptualized through a dualistic approach that arbitrarily detaches the experiencer from the experienced. In achieving the phenomenological reduction, one withholds judgment concerning this world and one’s employment in it.

Husserl calls Cartesianism and its seemingly commonsensical worldview “the natural attitude.” According to Husserl, the natural attitude can be defined through the notions of containment and employment: for instance, from a Cartesianist standpoint, one is spatially contained within a store, itself contained within a shopping mall, itself contained within a city, within a given country, and so on, until we arrive at the outermost container, namely the universe.

Adopting a phenomenological approach leads to the refutation of various common assumptions concerning the servicescape. Firstly, with phenomenology, the piecemeal aspect of previous studies on retail loses its commonsensicality: if breaking up the servicescape into various sensory components in order to investigate each of them separately can lead to significant advances (e.g., Hultén, 2012, for the impact of touch; Gottschalk, 2018, for the impact of scent; Toldos, González, and Motyka, 2019, for the impact of music; Jang, Baek, and Choo, 2018, for the impact of visual elements), such an epistemological approach does not allow the researcher to capture the holistic experience of the servicescape. In addition, with phenomenology, we are very far from the notion of Bitner’s (1992) “perceived space,” i.e., a space that would be offered to shoppers like a stage play offered to passive spectators. The issue with this “natural attitude” approach is that the retail experience is not always physically contained in Bitner’s (1992) perceived servicescape. For instance, a shopper, back home after an afternoon at the mall, may still be ruminating about their disappointing

customer service experience at one of the visited stores. For that shopper, the service experience has not ended yet, and one cannot gainsay the fact that the retail experience has followed our shopper into their home. Secondly, with phenomenology, the directionality of perception is reversed: to the cognitivist notion of “stimulus” reaching the perceiver, Husserl and his followers prefer the notion of “intentionality,” according to which it is the perceiver who is reaching for the world. Once this notion is factored in, an experienced retail place is no longer a passively perceived servicescape: it is the very shopper who, in a way, produces the experienced retail space.

This viewpoint matches the one expressed by phenomenologist and situationist Henri Lefebvre in his seminal book, *The Production of Space* (1991), in which he admits that “to speak of ‘producing space’ sounds bizarre, so great is the sway still held by the idea that empty space is prior to whatever ends up filling it.” With phenomenology, stimuli do not unilaterally affect the organism in virtue of their innate physical properties. Instead, they become stimuli only insofar as the body constitutes for itself, within a space pregnant with possibilities, a set of intentionalities in which those stimuli can find a part to play. Pursuing further the notion of the “production of space,” Lefebvre identifies three different types of space: the “conceived space,” the one built by store owners (e.g., a clothing rack strategically placed or a checkout put in a store’s specific location); the “perceived space,” which is the space as experienced by shoppers through spatial practices through which they reappropriate the conceived space; and the “lived space,” fully reached when the shopper’s consciousness is directed toward self-expressive projects tapping into the imaginary. According to Lefebvre (1991), the experienced space is “fully lived” when the individual experiences rare, unalienated “moments of presence,” during which space seems unbound in its potentialities and knows no limits imposed by a predetermined three-dimensional space.

## **PHENOMENOLOGY AS A METHOD OF INQUIRY**

Phenomenology has been described not only as a philosophy but also as a method of inquiry (e.g., Potdar *et al.*, 2020; Crowther and Thomson, 2020). However, the concept of phenomenology is usually vaguely defined: as noted by Laverty (2003), “phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology are often referred to interchangeably, without questioning any distinction between them.” Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology, not Husserl’s phenomenology, has been used in a wide spectrum of disciplines, including consumer research. For instance, by developing a methodology based on hermeneutic phenomenology, Thompson, Locander, and Pollio (1989) revamped the interpretation of consumer narratives. However, by limiting the application of their methodology to the interpretation of texts, they advanced the application of hermeneutic phenomenology, not of phenomenology per se. Thus far, other attempts at using phenomenology to unpack consumer behaviors have also focused on the interpretation of narratives (e.g., Wilson, 2012), and a Husserlian interpretative phenomenological approach like the one defined by Frechette *et al.* (2020) has not been applied yet, neither in consumer behavior research nor in retail. Likewise, Lefebvre’s distinctive phenomenological view and its implications for the conceptualization of space have never been tapped into by retail researchers. This project attempts to fill this conceptual gap.

## **METHODOLOGY: THE DIAL PROTOCOL**

### *Description of the protocol*

The research that was conducted employed multiple data collection processes: participant observation, pre- and post-fieldwork depth interviews, auto-driving interviews (a.k.a. photo-elicitation interviews or photo-interviewing), and diaries. A pilot phase was conducted, during which two 90-minute-long focus groups were moderated. The pilot’s main objective was to identify preliminary, emergent themes linked to both the servicescape and mobile phone usage. During the main data collection phase, photography and videography were used extensively. Field notes were maintained, and there were continuous discussions between researchers as emergent themes were gradually unpacked.

The DIAL protocol shares with the Shopping-With-Consumers (SWC) protocol (Lowrey, Otnes, and McGrath, 2005) an interest in a total immersion of the researcher—through participant observation—in the observed phenomena. In addition, by combining field trips and follow-up interviews during which the previous trip is elaborated upon in detail, both protocols allow for the gathering and side-by-side comparison of an emic and an etic perspective on the observed behaviors. Both protocols also let the informants establish their own agenda for the field trip: informants are not asked to visit or shop in any specific locations but instead to conduct their daily activities the way they normally would. This approach allows for the observation of situations that are not forced upon the informants but are instead naturalistic in nature.

One of the main differences between the SWC and the DIAL protocols resides in the length and scope of the two methodologies: with the SWC, each field trip is limited to a short time period spent with the informant in a clearly delimited retail environment. The focus is on the informants’ behavior as they navigate through the retail settings, and the informants’ activities before and after the observed shopping excursion are considered irrelevant to the research being conducted. That is, instead of adopting an open, phenomenological approach to the observed events, with the SWC protocol, assumptions are made about what is and is not a space of retail. In addition, due to its limited duration, SWC may overlook factors that might influence the outcome of the observed field

trip. Even though SWC can be quite effective in various research situations (e.g., when studying secluded third places—Alexander, 2019), it becomes less relevant in a technology-infused environment where mobile devices are ubiquitous: nowadays, calls, SMS, and social media updates are sent, received, and missed throughout the day, including in retail settings, with the outcome of those mobile phone-mediated communications potentially influencing current and future shopper behaviors or altering the perception of past situations.

During the field trips, each of the nine informants was accompanied by the researcher from dawn to dusk for a total of five non-consecutive days. On the day fieldwork would take place, the informants would pick up the researcher at a public place (usually on campus) as soon as they left home for the first time of the day. At the end of the fieldwork (i.e., right before going home), the informants would drop the researcher at the same location. To preserve privacy, at no time during the fieldwork did a researcher enter any informant's home. This respect for privacy led to some potential gaps in the observation of retail-related behaviors (e.g., an informant buying online while at home); however, this was remedied by asking the informants to keep a diary during the entire length of the fieldwork, in which they reported any online buying activity they felt comfortable discussing with the researcher. In addition, any social media entry related to purchasing activities was also supposed to be detailed in the informants' diaries. During the fieldwork, as the informants went through their day, the researcher stayed a couple of feet behind them so that they could observe and record via photography and videography the informants' various activities. To make sure the informants would not regard the field trips as being out of the ordinary, they were told that they could bring on such trips any person who might normally accompany them. When an informant decided to be accompanied by another adult (e.g., a friend or relative), that person was quickly briefed by the researcher on the reason for their presence.

Gathering data in the field raises issues. For instance, the presence of a researcher can be intimidating and affect the informants' behaviors. In addition, mobile phone users may call a friend, tweet on X, or check their TikTok account, not for utilitarian reasons but to increase their level of arousal when experiencing a dull physical setting. During the fieldwork, this type of boredom could have been alleviated instead by initiating a conversation with the researcher. Consequently, the researcher made sure that casual conversations with the informants were kept to a minimum: the post-fieldwork interviews were a more appropriate venue to discuss any issue identified during the fieldwork.

Even though the informants were left free to choose on which days they would be accompanied by the researcher, they were provided with some guidelines to do so. More specifically, they were asked to avoid choosing a day during which (a) they would spend more than four hours outside working as an employee or as a student; (b) they would have a lunch or lengthy meeting requiring some level of privacy; (c) they would spend less than five hours outside their home on that day. The informants were invited instead to pick a day during which they planned to conduct at least two of the following activities: (a) shop, run errands, go sightseeing, or plan for any other type of activity in publicly accessible places; (b) plan to spend at least \$40 overall during that day; (c) attend a sporting event, a concert, or another social event (provided the researcher could gain access to the event). In line with the adopted phenomenological standpoint, no emphasis was put, in the recruitment or the subsequent briefing of the informants prior to the fieldwork, on predefined, specific retail places: it would be up to the informants to define retail and "produce" their own space of retail. Overall, 209 hours of fieldwork were conducted with the informants. Figure 1 provides an illustration of the DIAL protocol's flow process.

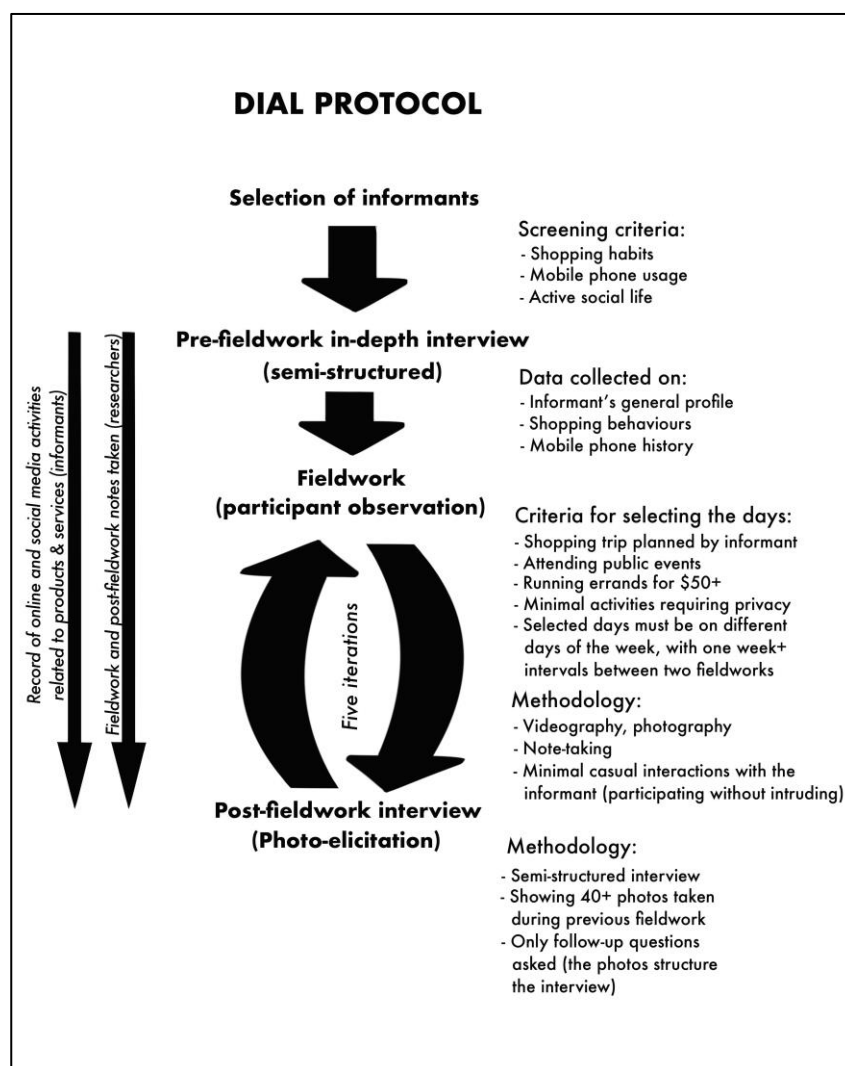


Figure 1

### Selection of informants

Any student interested in becoming an informant was asked to complete a screening questionnaire, available for pickup at the university's business school. In the questionnaire, applicants were asked about their shopping habits, their mobile phone usage, and their social life. Only applicants spending, on a monthly basis, at least 800 minutes on their mobile phone and at least eight hours at the mall were selected for the fieldwork. Selecting the informants based on their mobile internet usage was deemed too unreliable: knowing that a mobile phone owner consumes 80 gigabytes monthly does not tell us much about how this data is used (e.g., continuously browsing static news websites vs. punctually watching gigabyte-hungry streaming videos). Priority was also given to students who had a rich and diverse social life, as it increased the likelihood that mobile phone behaviors would be observed in unusual places of purchase or consumption. As a result of this approach, in addition to shopping malls and strip malls, the fieldwork encompassed a broad area of research sites (e.g., a car wash, movie theaters, a gun show, a horse ride, a cruise on a lake).

Gender-based differences in shopping behaviors have been reported by various marketing studies. For instance, Prendergast and Ching Lam (2013) confirmed in their study the general belief according to which shopping is more of a "pleasurable experience" for female than male shoppers. Consequently, it was decided that all informants for this project would be female mobile phone users. The only exception to the gender-based selection was Mike, a 33-year-old student in chemical engineering. Mike was the boyfriend of another informant, Jessica. Preliminary interviews with Jessica indicated that, given her very strict family, her mobile phone had become an integral part of her relationship with Mike and was often used to "escape" her overwhelmingly controlling environment. Jessica's phone enabled her to coordinate no-notice, "hit-and-run" meetings with her boyfriend with minimal parental control. For this reason, the decision was made to also include Mike in the fieldwork.



Nine informants participated in this exploratory study and received \$100 for each day of fieldwork. Various scholars (e.g., Rosado-Serrano, Longobardi, and Paul, 2019; Yrjölä, Saarijärvi, and Nummela, 2018; Haug and Münster, 2015) showed that compelling findings can result from studies involving limited units of observation (ten in Rosado-Serrano, Longobardi, and Paul, 2019; eight in Yrjölä, Saarijärvi, and Nummela, 2018; six in Haug and Münster, 2015). The informants' demographics have been summarized in Table 1.

Name *	Emily	Olivia	Cheryl	Britney	Jessica	Audrey	Maria	Mike	Caroline
Age	19	21	22	26	22	20	21	28	21
Sex	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	M	F
Marital status	Single	Single	Single	Single	Single	Single	Single	Single	Single
Current living situation	Lives with two roommates	Lives with one roommate	Lives with two roommates	Lives alone	Lives with her parents	Lives with one roommate	Lives with parents	Lives with one roommate	Lives alone
Occupation	Undergraduate student in business, works part-time in a restaurant	Undergraduate student in business, intern at Deloitte Touche	Undergraduate student in business, intern at Neiman Marcus	Graduate student in chemistry	Undergraduate student in chemical engineering, works part-time for an insurance company	Graduate student in business, works as a graduate assistant	Undergraduate student in anthropology	Graduate student in chemical engineering	Undergraduate student in business
Years/months since first smartphone	20 months	7 years	6 years	2 years	3 years	2 years	5 years	7 years	5 years
Total number of phones owned since started having one	2	7	5	3	2	3	4	9	4
Ethnicity	Caucasian	Hispanic	Caucasian	Caucasian	Asian	Hispanic	Caucasian	Caucasian	Hispanic

\* Pseudonyms are used for all of the informants

### *Post-fieldwork interviews*

Within a week following each day of fieldwork, a formal post-fieldwork interview with the informant would take place. The format of these semi-structured interviews was inspired by the auto-driving protocol (Heisley and Levy, 1991), in which depth interviews are driven by the informants themselves, as they are asked to elaborate upon or clarify behaviors that have been recorded during the fieldwork. During the post-fieldwork interviews, informants were shown, to prime their memory, a set of photographs taken during the fieldwork. An average of 42 still captions were presented to the informants during each of the depth interviews.

One of the recognized strengths of auto-driving is that it gives the informants opportunities to comment upon details of the fieldwork that might have gone unnoticed without a visual record. In addition, the auto-driving protocol allows the informants to “interview themselves” (Heisley and Levy, 1991) and reach a deeper level of understanding of their own experience. The photographs taken during the fieldwork also helped the informants relive the “lived experience,” that is, from a phenomenological perspective, to go back “to the things themselves” that had been experienced, instead of relying on memories and constructed narratives about them. The experience was not relived from exactly the same angle, though: in the still captions taken during the fieldwork, the site was recorded from the researcher’s own perspective, not the informants’. At first sight, this issue of shifting perspective seems to be a methodological point of minor importance. However, the shift in question is not only at the visual but also at the ontological level: for the informants, there is something of an out-of-body experience in the auto-driving process, especially when the fieldwork and its recording last an entire day of their life. Through recorded photography, informants re-experience the various events that punctuated the day of the fieldwork; however, they are not at the center of that experience anymore: they become instead active spectators whose main task is to find correspondences between what they see in the photographs and what they remember from the firsthand, lived experience.

### *Data analysis*

As the fieldwork progressed, notes were taken, and trends were noticed and investigated further in subsequent fieldwork. As the collected data were gradually analyzed, the goal became to devise a conceptual framework that would unite various emergent themes in a holistic fashion. With this goal in mind, any text in the collected data that related to the informants’ attitudes toward and use of mobile phones was identified. The entire text was then searched for patterns of usage across informants, and those emergent patterns were combined into broader categories of produced “spatial practices” (as defined by Lefebvre). Gradually, the main objective became clearer: to replace, by focusing on the informants’ raw retail experience, the notion of “servicescape” with a more phenomenologically aligned notion of “servicespace”: by resorting to mobile phone-mediated spatial practices (spatial practices through which they produce the space they experience), shoppers can escape the seclusion of the retailers’ conceived retail space and produce a truly customized servicespace (i.e., what Lefebvre would have called a “fully lived” space of retail).

### *Example of interpretative results*

Given the nature of this paper, the objective here is not to report the detailed results of this research endeavor (this is the focus of a different paper) but rather to describe the new methodology and its potentials. However, to demonstrate the usefulness of the new protocol, a few examples of the data collected—and how they helped identify new spatial practices and their impact on the retail experience—will be mentioned. In what follows, the expression “mobile spatial practices” (MSPs) refers to the mobile phone-mediated creation of spatial practices, that is, the production of space by shoppers via mobile communication technologies, and “non-mobile spatial practices” (non-MSPs) to those spatial practices allowing the shopper to produce space without resorting to mobile communication technologies (e.g., collaborative co-production, cooperative co-creation, and subversive co-creation—Torres *et al.*, 2018).

#### *- Impact of a shopper's lived servicespace on the conceived and the perceived servicespace*

Besides verbal exchanges, social interactions can take place via facial expressions (e.g., a smile), body language (e.g., hand-waving), or object manipulation and transfer (e.g., handing out a flyer to a prospect). This adaptability of the channels of communication to the situation corresponds to what Goffman (2009) called “frame attunement.” In a retail setting, forced frame attunement takes place when a shop's preferred in-store communication channels (an important dimension of the conceived servicespace) have to be altered due to a new and uncontrollable context. For instance, a planned verbal exchange with an incoming shopper may have to be replaced with a mere hand-waving if that shopper is busy calling when entering the store. Fieldwork observation and interviews with informants showed that shopper-vendor interactions are impacted by MSPs, as shoppers create during their shopping experience a lived servicespace that may totally exclude any interaction with store employees. As an example, one of the informants, Cheryl, has developed the habit of faking phone calls every time she spots salespeople at the entrance of a store she intends to visit.

#### Notes from fieldwork with Cheryl:

We leave Nordstrom and take the elevator to the second floor of the mall. Cheryl gets her phone out of her purse and heads for the Victoria's Secret store, a few feet from the elevator. She puts the phone to her ear, as she was receiving a call, but does not seem to answer—and the phone hasn't rung. At the store's entrance, an employee, bottle in hand, invites incoming shoppers to sample a perfume. Seemingly busy on her phone, Cheryl avoids eye contact and proceeds directly to the back of the store. Once inside, she puts back her phone in her purse.

A shopper's lived servicespace can also have a direct impact on other shoppers' own store experience by impacting how they navigate a store. In the following example, by resorting to MSPs and monopolizing a store area for a rather long time, Britney—another informant—impacts other shoppers' own spatial practices and, as a direct result, alters their perceived servicescape. Interestingly, Britney, conscious that her lived servicespace may have a negative impact on other shoppers' experience, alleviates the resulting guilt by making a purchase before leaving the store.

#### Notes from fieldwork with Britney:

While in the 99¢ store, Britney proceeds to place phone calls to find a shop where she can get an oil change for her car. She has with her about half a dozen paper coupons offering various types of deals for this type of service. For all the calls she will give from the 99¢ store, Britney will stay in the very same spot. That spot becomes, in a way, her little “phone booth” for the occasion. Britney is standing in front of shelves with medicinal products, and, as she is on the phone, a few customers stop hesitantly to grab some items, but Britney will not move from her location. She calls five different stores before eventually finding one (Brake Masters) that does not require an appointment. Overall, she has monopolized the same spot for more than ten minutes.

#### Follow-up post-fieldwork interview with Britney:

Britney: I could have felt a little bit weird [calling from the store], but that day was hot. I usually would sit in the car and do all that, but I was walking around, and by the time I was almost done [in the store], I thought, “Wait a minute, I don't want to do that in the car!” So I just stayed in there, and I thought that people could just go around, so I was not blocking.

Researcher: Would you have felt bad if you had not purchased something in that store? Because eventually you purchased a laundry bag.

Britney: I probably would, yeah. I would have felt a little weirder.

*- Fully lived retail space and vicarious consumption as a MSP*

By combining non-MSPs and MSPs at their own discretion, shoppers can create a fully lived servicescape customized to their wants and needs. Through this meaning creation process, even Augé's (2020) "non-places" (e.g., a dull donut shop) can become sites of placeness. Consistent with Lefebvre's opinion on lived spaces, which he sees as the result of "projects tapping into the imaginary," the production of a lived servicespace may include vicarious consumption, like in the following case involving one of our informants, Mike, and his mother.

Post-fieldwork interview with Mike:

Mike: So I video called my mom because I was in my favorite donut shop waiting for you [to start the fieldwork], and I said, "Hey, what kind of donut do you want?" and she wanted the lemon one. So I was like, "OK!" and I got a lemon donut. And I ate it for her! (...) I could do the same thing from home, I guess, but it's nicer to go out. We do it about once a week. It's like having breakfast with my mom, you know. Something we would do if she were there, if we both were there. So it's an event we are sharing together; it's something we do regularly, probably once a week unless something else pops up.

Can we say that, during their weekly shared moments, Mike's mother is brought to the donut shop by the magic of mobile communication technologies? Not quite so, as the seat in front of Mike's, sadly, stays empty. However, the lived space of consumption produced by Mike is much richer than the ordinary servicescape where the donuts (both Mike's and his mom's) are consumed: in this lived servicespace, "eating a donut" takes on a new definition, as the physical aspect of consumption is trumped by its social and affective dimensions.

## CONCLUSION

At a time when non-retail and retail activities are increasingly interwoven, the notion of a three-dimensional "servicescape" is losing some of its relevance, and our commonly accepted conceptualization of space has shown, with new mobile telecommunication technologies, the limits of its explanatory and exploratory power. Grounded in a phenomenological view on space, the new methodology developed in this research, the DIAL protocol, borrows from previous methodologies but extends the duration of each observation to a full day and considers that even the most mundane spatial practice enacted by shoppers can, at any moment, become part of their produced space of retail. In essence, the DIAL protocol gives equal importance, during the fieldwork, to locations and connections—i.e., to all the Lefebvrian spatial practices through which shoppers can now produce their own lived servicespace.

The physical retail space has been replaced with a "phygital" servicespace where new types of spatial practices can be enacted. This paradigm shift begs for new methods of inquiry. It is our belief that this exploratory retail study, the first one to borrow from Henri Lefebvre's seminal work on space, can contribute to this quest for new retail research methodologies.

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