Brick and mortar stores in the 21st century

A customer-centric approach to omni-channel in fashion retail

MASTER THESIS WITHIN: Business Administration
NUMBER OF CREDITS: 30 ECTS
PROGRAM OF STUDY: Civilekonom
AUTHORS: Carl Eliasson Sternås and Otto Kamne
TUTOR: Seleen Öztürkcan
JÖNKÖPING: May 2018
Master Thesis within Business Administration

Title: Brick and Mortar stores in the 21st century - A customer-centric approach to omni-channel in fashion retail
Authors: Carl Eliasson Sternås and Otto Kamne
Tutor: Selcen Öztürkcan
Date: 2018-05-20
Keywords: Independent brick and mortar stores, Omni-channel, Competitive Advantage

Abstract

Background: The retail industry is highly affected by the changes in the world. With the disruptive force of digitalization, more and more of the transactions within retail is moved online as the e-commerce has expanded making the retail industry more competitive. This change has and is forcing many offline retailers to close business around the world but in this change, has new trends emerged. Both online and offline retailers are starting to see the value of having physical stores as well as having an online presence. Doing so creates opportunities for both e-commerce companies and physical retail stores to create value using multiple channels.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to find out how an independent fashion brick and mortar store can create value for consumers through multiple channels to gain a competitive advantage against pure online retailers and larger retail companies.

Method: This topic will be studied with a qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews with customers in demographic 18-30 years old with the goal of understanding how customers purchase clothes in different channels to create insights for independent brick and mortar stores. The data were analyzed with the seven steps of Grounded Theory.

Conclusion: The results of the research show that independent brick and mortar store have competitive advantages regarding personal service, products, and product assessment. However, many customers want to search for information and inspiration about products online before they shop, even if the actual purchase is made in a store which means that independent brick and mortar stores need to have their products online for that. It was also found that customers want more flexibility between channels. For example, purchase online and pick-up in store. The authors believe that with this changes, independent brick and mortar stores can compete in the 21st century while still maintaining their current advantages.
Acknowledgments

Upon completing this first and possibly last attempt on academic research, the authors do have some grateful thoughts to share with the vast number of potential readers.

The authors would like to thank our opposing groups from the seminars and our tutor Selcen Öztürkcan. Your guidance and feedback have been much appreciated during the seminars.

Additionally, we would like to thank the participants of this study who took of their valuable time to help us out, thank you.

Carl Eliasson Sternås and Otto Kamne
# Table of Contents

## 1 Introduction

1.1 Background ........................................................................................................... 1
  1.1.1 The Retail Industry ....................................................................................... 1
  1.1.2 Digitalization and retail ............................................................................... 2
  1.1.3 Toward Omni-channel .................................................................................. 2
  1.1.4 Omni-channel to Competitive advantage .................................................... 3

1.2 Problem definition ................................................................................................. 4

1.3 Purpose and Research Questions ........................................................................ 5

1.4 Delimitations ........................................................................................................ 6

1.5 Definitions ............................................................................................................. 7

## 2 Literature Review

2.1 Channels in Retailing ............................................................................................ 9
  2.1.1 Brick and mortar store ............................................................................... 9
  2.1.2 E-commerce .................................................................................................. 10
  2.1.3 Multi-channel retail ..................................................................................... 11

2.2 The consumer perspective ..................................................................................... 12
  2.2.1 Brick and Mortar retail ............................................................................ 12
  2.2.2 E-commerce .................................................................................................. 13
  2.2.3 Multi-channel retail ..................................................................................... 14
  2.2.4 Channel selection ......................................................................................... 15

## 3 Method

3.1 Research Perspective ............................................................................................. 17

3.2 Research Approach ............................................................................................... 18

3.3 Research Strategy - Grounded Theory .................................................................. 19

3.4 Data Collection ..................................................................................................... 20
  3.4.1 Semi-structured interviews ...................................................................... 20
  3.4.2 Sampling ....................................................................................................... 21

3.5 Data Analysis ......................................................................................................... 21

3.6 Pilot Testing ........................................................................................................... 23

3.7 Quality of research ............................................................................................... 24
  3.7.1 Trustworthiness ............................................................................................ 24
  3.7.2 Reflexivity ...................................................................................................... 24

3.8 Ethics ...................................................................................................................... 25

3.9 Implementation ...................................................................................................... 26
1 Introduction

This chapter serves as an introduction to the topic at hand, with background information to explain the relevance of this study. Next, comes the problem definition, purpose and research questions followed by delimitations of the study and a list of key definitions.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The Retail Industry

With the increase of online shopping, e-commerce, and opportunities to reach customers through other channels than before, retail is highly affected by the changes in the world (Hagberg, Sundstrom, & Egels-, 2016). However, even though retail was one of the first movers in the digitization process (Prashant, Somesh, & Sree, 2016) a study among executives shows that retail is one of the sectors that is most affected by this trend (Digital Pulse, 2015).

Retailing is defined as the “commercial transaction in which buyers intends to consume the good or service through personal, family, or household use” (Diamond, Diamond, & Litt, 2015; Levy, Weitz, & Skinner Beitelspacher, 2012). Jefferys (2011) discusses the history of retailing, were in the middle of the 19th century there were four different kinds of retailing. First, the general dealers were buying from manufacturers and selling in shops, second, the service providers that sold partly own and partly manufactured material, third were farmers markets where farmers sold their goods and last were the traveling salespeople. Most shops were independent retailers. Retail chains did not exist. Earlier in history, stores were in fixed locations, only selling one product. This product did not differentiate from other retailers’ products either in price or quality. Instead, service was the selling point.

“(…) we speculate that the differentiation in Magna Graecia was based on service, since the excavations indicate that the products were similar in terms of manufacturing, store size, raw materials, etc. For this reason, an efficient integration of technology would result in competitive advantage for modern retailers.” (Pantano & Dennis, 2017, p. 248).

Later on, the traditional merchants started to sell goods manufactured at larger scale. With this, the merchants’ role as the quality guarantee of the product started to diminish which also
affected the customer relationship (Jefferys, 2011). Instead, the product brand became more important for customers to ensure the quality of their goods (Hilton, 1998). Even further down the line, these small-scale retailers were hurt by larger stores with many specialized departments (Jefferys, 2011). This change has led to the state of today’s retail business, where small independent retailers and larger chains compete.

1.1.2 Digitalization and retail
The world is developing, and there are new trends in the retail market. One recent trend is digitalization that is transforming society (Hagberg, Jonsson, & Egels-Zandén, 2017). Digitalization is defined by Brennen and Kreiss (2016) as “the way many domains of social life are restructured around digital communication and media infrastructures.” Digitalization has a distinct effect on retailing in physical stores, and since digitalization is here to stay, the traditional retailing will be hurt by e-commerce (Agnihotri, 2015; Hagberg et al., 2017).

However, this is not the first time traditional retail is put under pressure by competition in other formats (Steven, 1994). During the early 20th-century mail order business was on the rise. A famous Swedish fashion retailer, Ellos, started with mail order catalogs already in 1947 (Ellos, 2018). However, mail order has been shrinking during the later decades due to digitalization and the expansion of e-commerce (Ward, 2001). In reality, e-commerce is a digitized way of mail order.

Finally, the fashion retailing industry is in different stages. Firms are operating in different ways. There are firms only focused on traditional retail in stores, only on e-commerce and some firms that have started to integrate e-commerce into their traditional retailing business. Also, mail-order firms have started to add stores to their distance-shopping experience in some cases. With these integrations between distance and non-distance stores, the lines started to blur which made sales channels more integrated (Hagberg et al., 2016; Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014).

1.1.3 Toward Omni-channel
More integrated channels and digitalization can imply many different things for a retail firm. The digitalization of retailing industry is often synonymous with e-commerce. However,
digitalization leads to almost endless possibilities. Not only for e-commerce but also different things that are meant to make the shopping experience more accessible and enjoyable while visiting a physical retail store (Hagberg et al., 2017). Various things could be integrated into an ordinary shopping routine. For example, electronic shelf labels to make it easier for stores (Soutjis, Cochoy, & Hagberg, 2017) or ways to navigate through the store with a smartphone (Fuentes, Bäckström, & Svingstedt, 2017). Smartphones are more common these days than before. In 2011 only 10 percent of world population used a smartphone compared to projected 36 percent in 2018 (Statista, 2018). Many of these people use their smartphones during their shopping (Fuentes et al., 2017). However, customers’ motives for this differ. One reason could be to get more information about a product before the buying decision. Another reason could be to communicate about the shopping experience with someone else for confirmation about desired items (Fuentes et al., 2017).

1.1.4 Omni-channel to Competitive advantage
The omni-channel trend in the retail industry might be interesting in some aspects. In contrast to other industries, for example, the media industry, the retail industry already has much of the solutions at hand. Where the media industry faces challenges that might completely change the way that they can do business. The retail industry is more about finding the right mix of solutions and integrating them in the right way. Doing so would go in line with Penrose (1959) who argue that it is not about specific resources of a firm that create a competitive advantage, but instead how they are combined or bundled. A way to do this is to understand the customers, especially what drives them. This understanding will have positive effects on an organization's customer service (Bajaj & Srivastava, 2005). However, one must regard the difference between competitive advantage and sustained competitive advantage. Competitive advantage is simply where a firm is implementing a value creating strategy that none other in the market is implementing at the same time. In contrast, a sustained competitive advantage is where the firm is implementing a strategy that is not on the market yet, but also hard for competitors to duplicate (Barney, 1991).
1.2 Problem definition

The e-commerce share globally in 2016 was 8.6%, and that number is expected to rise to 14.6% in 2020 (Statista, 2018). Despite this increase, the majority of shopping will be done in physical stores for years to come. The trend is not towards all physical stores disappearing, and all purchases being made online. Instead, online and physical channels will merge (Agnihotri, 2015; Hagberg et al., 2017; Herhausen, Binder, Schoegel, & Herrmann, 2015; Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014).

As Andy Dunn, CEO of Bonobos told Harvard Business Review (Rigby, 2014); “We (Bonobos) were wrong at the beginning. In 2007 we started the company, and we said, ‘The whole world is going online only. All we're going to do is be online.’ But what we’ve learned recently is that the offline experience of touching and feeling clothes isn’t going away.”

Retail consumers want to have the ability to move between channels easily. However, the need for them to also be able to see, touch, feel and try out products have been underestimated in the last couple of years. The future role of a store is not clear though and can be different depending on what products or segments a store serves. It is likely that the store function will be something like a showroom or hub in the future (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014). For example, the Swedish watch brand Daniel Wellington has decided to go from a pure e-commerce retailer to opening 300 stores (Pechter, 2017) while some larger retailers are closing theirs (Fickenscher, 2018). Pure online retailers have their advantage in some product categories like Daniel Wellington with watches and Tom Hope for bracelets, and multi-channel retailers are struggling to find a way to create a competitive advantage from multiple channels (Neslin & Shankar, 2009).

Despite this, large retail stores like Walmart and Macy’s have begun to see their physical stores as an advantage over their online competitors (Herhausen et al., 2015). They are starting to effectively create an omni-channel approach that helps customers buy more by offering online bought/in-store pickup, efficient home deliveries and integrating and showing product availability between stores for customers (Google, 2016). These both create a better experience for customers as well as boosting sales. The modern consumer is connected and mobile. They can access and buy anything, anywhere at any time (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014). This flexibility means that the retail industry has to adapt to these new shopping behaviors to
survive. However, how this should be done is less evident. Many agree that omni-channel approaches will play a more significant role in the future of retailing, but integrating these channels is seen as a considerable challenge. The reasons for this is mainly because of uncertainty or lack of unified understanding what the future is for digital channels and absence of unity of how customer across channels will look like (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014). Large retail chains and e-commerce retailers are the ones that lead the way in integrating channels. With the seamless experience that comes from a well-implemented omni-channel, can independent retailers find competitive advantage through the use of multiple channels and in that create an advantage over their larger competitors? Is there room for independent brick and mortar stores in the 21st century?

1.3 Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to find out how an independent fashion brick and mortar store can create value for consumers through multiple channels to gain a competitive advantage against pure online retailers and larger retail companies. As mentioned earlier, there are plenty of technologies and possible channels a retailer can use to compete both online and offline. Usually, the discussion around these subjects is how to combine these channels successfully. Not necessarily what a consumer may want from a local retailer and who these consumers will be. Most of the research on the subject of future retailing is focused on the industry as a whole (Hagberg et al., 2017). Or research on larger companies about what technologies that exist and how these could be implemented into multiple channel approaches (Beck & Rygl, 2015; Bell, Gallino, & Moreno, 2014; Brown, Atherton, & Burnet, 2012; Herhausen et al., 2015; Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014; Verhoef, Kannan, & Inman, 2015). Less research has focused on independently owned fashion brick and mortar stores and what they could do to compete in the future. There is also a lack of research on how consumers perceive these new ways to shop seamlessly and what expectations they have (Blázquez, 2014).

The retail environment has become increasingly competitive due to new technologies emerging. To keep up, fashion retailers need to find new ways to connect with customers and create relevant offerings. Technology has opened up for integration between channels which has created opportunities for physical stores. What is important is that the technology remains a mean to create customer value, not the end (Bell et al., 2014; Blázquez, 2014). The new
technologies and innovations widely expand on what is possible. However, the focus is not always on the right issues. Ries (2011) discuss innovation and how to validate new ideas. The theory is to ask the customers what they want, and how they want it. In other words, to take a customer perspective. Blank (2012) suggest a similar technique, phrases as “getting out of the building” to validate ideas are essential. Regarding this particular research, most of the previous literature has focused on either the future or advantages with omni-channel retail or the troubles brick and mortar stores will face with the coming change. Seldom is the customer perspective, what the customers seek, discussed. Therefore, this study will focus on a consumer perspective of omni-channel retailing and address the following questions:

What do customers expect from an independent brick and mortar store today?

What do customers expect from an independent brick and mortar store in the future?

How can these insights be leveraged into a successful and sustainable competitive advantage for the independent brick and mortar stores?

1.4 Delimitations

Limitations have been set to investigate the role omni-channel retail has on consumers. The authors believe the most interesting age group to examine is consumers between the ages of 18 to 30 years. Since the focus of this thesis is based on the use of omni-channel retailing, consumers between ages of 18-30 are a favorable choice. Additionally, this age group will gain a higher purchasing power in the coming years, considering a majority is still in school and soon will enter the workforce. Other age groups, such as below 18 years also have high adoption rates of new technology, however the time until they will experience higher purchasing power is still distant. Older age groups, 30 and above already possess high purchasing power but may lack the technology adoption which is why they are not considered for this research. Therefore, the authors believe that ages from 18 to 30 are the preferable group to investigate. However, there are no limitations on gender or other similar constraints.

Additionally, as mentioned, the thesis focus will be on fashion retail specifically. Although the findings or theories might be useful for other sectors as well, the reason behind this focus on
fashion is since most people in the considered age group can relate to fashion. Also, fashion is easily accessible and something that exists in most cities which might make the data collection more convenient.

1.5 Definitions

Brick and mortar store (B&M)
A brick and mortar store is a store, practicing retail from a fixed physical location (Levy et al., 2012).

Channel
“Channel” is defined as any medium or contact point where a retailer and customer can interact (Beck & Rygl, 2015).

Digitalization
Digitalization is defined by Brennen and Kreiss (2016) as “the way many domains of social life are restructured around digital communication and media infrastructures.” Thus, digitalization is the process where the channel is transformed, from traditional to digital.

Independent brick and mortar store
Small stores with single location (Sadun, 2014) or a small number of locations, often owned by an individual or a family.

Multi-channel retail:

Cross-channel
Cross-channel is a mix between multi-channel and omni-channel (Beck & Rygl, 2015).

Multi-channel
In this thesis, “channel” is defined as any medium or contact point where a retailer and customer can interact (Beck & Rygl, 2015). Thus, multi-channel is if two or more channels are used but the interaction between channels is low, and the offering may differ between channels.
Omni-channel

Omni-channel is where all data is shared among and between channels, the customer can buy in one channel and return in another one. The offering and service are consistent through all channels (Beck & Rygl, 2015).

Physical store

See Brick and mortar store (B&M).
2 Literature Review

It is essential for the readers of this thesis to receive an introduction to the relevant theoretical base in the field. Therefore, a literature review has been conducted to familiarize the reader with the topic, essential aspects, and previous findings.

To seek answers to the research questions, one should thoroughly investigate the retail industry throughout a literature review with the purpose to describe, evaluate and clarify what is known about the given sector (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2015), especially the structural changes and development that this particular industry faces. Since the focus of this thesis is on the consumer perspective of the retail industry, the literature review was done with that in mind.

2.1 Channels in Retailing

2.1.1 Brick and mortar store

The brick and mortar store is a store with a fixed location, practicing retailing from a property (Levy et al., 2012). There are several different formats for a brick and mortar store. For example, department store, niche store, discount store and factory outlet to mention a few (Levy et al., 2012). Every one of which has different advantages and disadvantages.

A department store is a single store with several sections selling different products, all under one roof (Diamond et al., 2015; Levy et al., 2012). The department stores selling point is service and a broad product range, including most desired items a shopper could need in the same store (Levy et al., 2012). The department store market is divided into three different segments, upscale department store, middle/upscale and value (Levy et al., 2012). Swedish retail chain Åhlens selling point is providing a good mix of brands, all in one store, for the customer looking for quality but limited on time (Åhlén, 2018). Thus, Åhlens is an example of a department store.

A niche store or specialty store is a “small retail outlet that focuses on selling a particular product range” (Diamond et al., 2015; Levy et al., 2012). Specialty stores usually have a depth in product sections and have a selling point on higher service and knowledge and focus on a
specific market segment to offer a “deep but narrow assortments and sales associate expertise” (Levy et al., 2012, p. 49). The women’s’ underwear store Victoria Secret has a deep and narrow focus on their specific niche and is thus an example of a specialty store.

A discount store is a store selling items at a discount compared to other retailers (Diamond et al., 2015; Levy et al., 2012). This is usually due to larger quantities and limited supply. Discount stores usually have a broad selection of merchandise but limited service (Levy et al., 2012). Another type of discount store is factory outlets, where quality clothes are sold with significant discounts (Levy et al., 2012). Swedish retailer Lager 157 sells both own produced cloths, and factory sales of famous brands (Lager157, 2018), and is thus a mix of both discount store and factory outlet. The simple Catalog non-store retailers are a retail format where the customer interaction is made through a catalog, and products are shipped to customers (Levy et al., 2012). Catalog shop is usually not a brick and mortar store. However, sometimes they have a shop with minimized shelf space for customers, but with a large warehouse attached to the store. The result is a mix of self-service and service store. An example of this is the already mentioned Swedish catalog shop Ellos.

### 2.1.2 E-commerce

When e-commerce entered the retailing industry, futurists predicted a dark future for brick and mortar retailing. They saw store retailers being fully replaced by the internet-enabled retailers that would provide far better offerings to consumers through their digital channel than the physical stores (Zwass, 1996). E-commerce is retailing where communication, service offering and product selling are done over the internet (Levy et al., 2012). Online retail has grown, but will not replace traditional retail. Instead, it is a way for traditional retail to complement their brick and mortar stores with another channel, and provide more value for customers (Levy et al., 2012). Online stores span the variety of different brick and mortar stores, such as specialty or discount. Even though online shopping will not entirely replace physical stores yet, and probably will not, e-commerce has had a significant effect on physical stores during the last years. As mentioned in the introduction, the share for online retail is 8.6% (Statista, 2018) so there has definitely been an impact on the retail industry.
2.1.3 Multi-channel retail

“We are super good when it comes to stores. We have a good website. But we haven’t integrated it. We haven’t moved the knowledge from the stores online” (Breakit.se, 2018).

Because of digitalization and changes in the retail mix, firms have had to broaden their perspective on what channels they can and should reach customers through (Verhoef et al., 2015). The result of this means that channels are both physical (store, catalog) as well as digital (website, mobile, augmented reality, virtual reality, internet of things). From the review of the literature, three levels of multi-channel retail were found:

2.1.3.1 Multi-channel

Multi-channel is according to Verhoef et al. (2015) about adding more channels to reach customers through. Both brick and mortar stores, as well as pure e-commerce retailers, have the same decision. The focus here is about adding channels, not how they interact. Beck and Rygl, (2015) state that multi-channel does not have interaction between the channels. Examples of this are that the service and offering are inconsistent between channels, coupons are specific for each channel and data is not shared. Multi-channel also focuses on the actual type of channel (website, store, app) and the objectives (sales, experience) for each channel.

2.1.3.2 Omni-channel

Omni-channel is an entirely seamless experience for the customer. All data is shared between channels, the customer can buy in one channel and return in another one, and the offering and service are consistent through all channels (Beck & Rygl, 2015). It is a way to take a broader perspective when looking at how, when and where customers can be approached and how the customers move through different channels in their search and buying process (Verhoef et al., 2015). Piotrowicz and Cuthbertson (2014) define the concept of omni-channel retailing as an evolution of multi-channel where customers move more seamlessly between computers, mobile phones, and physical stores. All, under a single transaction process. This moves the focus from the actual channel to the brand of the retailer.
2.1.3.3 Cross-channel

Cross-channel is something in between multi- and omni-channel. An overlap between the channels exists partially. Data are shared across at least two channels, and location services can be used to find the closest store and to push out deals when customers are close, service and offering are consistent between channels except for physical store (Beck & Rygl, 2015).

2.2 The consumer perspective

2.2.1 Brick and Mortar retail

Retail has been viewed as a stable sector of business over an extended period (Lusch, Carver, & Dunne, 2011). This might be due to the established customer buying process, which has not changed notably and thus might be easy to anticipate. Levy et al., (2012) summarize the customer buying process as first need recognition, the second search for information. The third step is to evaluate channels, the fourth selecting and visiting the store (online or offline) to complete the transaction and lastly repeating the transaction if satisfied. However, today's retail is not as stable as before (Lusch et al., 2011), and it could be due to the broader choice of different channels available for the customers.

Previously most brick and mortar stores relied on the “walk-ins,” attracted to the store by a dress window (Diamond et al., 2015). However, as mentioned, the choice of channel is widely expanded, and the interest in this thesis is in the choice of channel. Even though e-commerce has grown over the last couple of years, the traditional brick and mortar store still has higher sales (Diamond et al., 2015). Moreover, the reasons behind why customers still might prefer the physical store are many (Diamond et al., 2015; Levy et al., 2012). One of the most significant is that browsing is easier in a physical store and it is possible to involve more senses in the shopping. Senses like touch and feel to check material or even tasting. Thus, it is more practical to try on a particular clothing item in a physical store. This sort of thing is not possible to duplicate in an online store. Especially the fashion industry has been slower to adapt to e-commerce than other sectors due to the difficulty to translate the in-store experience to an online channel (Blázquez, 2014). Additionally, physical stores have other essential benefits. For instance, the personal service which is not common online, safer payments, immediate gratification as the customer does not have to wait for shipping, risk reduction and not to
mention the social experience that is not possible with online shopping. Due to the benefits of brick and mortar, especially the touch and feel, the physical stores have just half as many returns as online stores (Levy et al., 2012). To conclude the consensus from the review is that online shopping will not replace traditional retailing today, or in the foreseeable future. Instead, it is a mix where customers choose the most suitable channel at the moment to satisfy their buying needs (Levy et al., 2012).

2.2.2 E-commerce

Zhang et al. (2010) also discuss how online channels give consumers almost unlimited information and in a timely matter, which is an advantage against the stores where information available to customers is limited to the store employees and signs. The low cost of searching for goods online makes it very easy to research a purchase (Lahuerta Otero, Muñoz Gallego, & Pratt, 2014). Information about price and products from the store, their competitors, and search engines let consumers compare different stores and products before making a decision (Lahuerta Otero et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2010). This creates better transparency from the consumer perspective compared to physical stores (Brown et al., 2012). A significant advantage that online channels have is its wider assortment of goods because of no physical limits to the store (Zhang et al., 2010). Online channels also let customers generate information themselves, which further increase the transparency in their search for products (Niemeier, Zocchi, & Catena, 2013). E-commerce platforms let the retailers collect data from customers, both from their behavior but also how they interact with the platform, and this lets them analyze the data to create personalized product selections and offerings for the customers (Brown et al., 2012). Convenience, meaning that consumers not having to be confined to a specific location, within a particular time to purchase goods is a major advantage that online channels create (Zhang et al., 2010). Brown et al. (2012) also found convenience to be a major advantage for online channels however they also found that speed is as well. A disadvantage for online channels is the lack of emotional experiences that are both immediate and interactive for the customers (Brown et al., 2012). Some consumers also seek some forms of bargaining as a ritual in their buying process, which also can be viewed as a form of emotional experience (Lahuerta Otero et al., 2014). There are also trust issues when it comes to purchasing goods online. In asymmetric markets, consumers rely more on store sales teams than a website (Pauwels, Leeflang, Teerling, & Huizingh, 2011).
2.2.3 Multi-channel retail

Multi-channel is getting more and more important. Much research has been done on the subject, both on its effects on the industry, as well as reasons and ways to implement it (Beck & Rygl, 2015; Bell et al., 2014; Brown et al., 2012; Herhausen et al., 2015; McCormick et al., 2014; Oh, Teo, & Sambamurthy, 2012; Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014; Verhoef et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2010). Previous research on the subject has mostly been focusing on market and business perspectives, not what this change means for customers and what they think about it. It is the customers that have pushed the development by the use of new and enabling technology (Kushwaha & Shankar, 2013) yet, surprisingly little research has the focus of the customer in the multi-channel ecosystem (Blázquez, 2014). According to Bell et al. (2014) retail fundamentally comes down to two ways that a retailer can serve its customers. Providing information about the products and delivering them means retailers can compete by with superior information and faster deliveries. The multi-channel lets the retailer create benefits for the consumer. By using multiple channels, the retailer can serve the customers with a broader product offering, which both increases the choices and convenience for them. Using multiple channels also lets the retailer keep information such as prices and inventory up to date so a customer can pre-check these types of information before going to a store (Levy et al., 2012). This offering has led customers to become multi-channel shoppers that want to alternate between channels for different parts of the shopping process (Lahuerta Otero et al., 2014). By opening up new channels for the customers, they tend to increase both their frequency of buying and number of products bought (Kushwaha & Shankar, 2013). Cao and Li (2015) have found that multi-channel offerings can increase the customer loyalty and trust that increase conversion and create better opportunities to cross-sell, which both leads to growth for the retailer.

From knowing the two ways of serving a retail customer as previously mentioned, Bell et al. (2014) created a model for sale strategies a retailer can use to serve customers in different channels. They classify one-channel retail as Traditional retail and Pure-play e-commerce. Traditional retail means that information is found offline and the customer fulfillment is done in store. Pure-play e-commerce has the information online, and fulfillment comes from the product being delivered home. Omni-channel strategies involve online retail plus showroom and Shopping and delivery hybrid. Online retail plus showroom lets the customer find information and possibly pay online while picking up the product from the store. Shopping and
delivery hybrid means having a brick and mortar store and presenting the products there, but fulfillment comes from delivery. However, regarding the motivation underlying a customer’s decision to purchase a particular product, Scarpi, Pizzi, and Visentin (2014) discusses two different types of motivation. First, the hedonistic shopping where the emphasis is on the shopping itself and second the utilitarianism which is need-based and rational. Knowing the underlying motivation of a customer is essential for a retailer since it affects the customers buying behavior. Scarpi et al. (2014) also found that hedonistic shoppers were more concerned about the experience while utilitarian shoppers were more concerned about the efficiency. They also found that customers are more price consciousness online than offline, no matter if the shopping was hedonistic or utilitarian.

2.2.4 Channel selection

How consumers decide on a purchase follows a process of six stages according to Berman and Evans (2013). It first starts with a stimulus and then awareness of a problem. It then continues with a search for information, evaluation of alternatives and finally a purchase of the product. The last step is the post-purchase experience which can influence the next purchase process depending on the experience (Berman & Evans, 2013). Niemeier et al., (2013) also look at the customer decision-making process, but they divide it into four stages instead of six. First of all, consideration of different brands depending on past influence of experience, advertising, and other people. Secondly, the consumer then searches for information both offline and online and evaluates the brands they find. Thirdly a brand is selected, and purchase is made. Finally, similarly to Berman and Evans (2013), they have the post-purchase experience. This experience influences the next purchase process for a customer and can create a loyalty loop making the customer skip the second step next time around. Development of new technology has changed how consumers behave on each of the stages in the purchasing decision process. However, new technology has not changed the actual buying process, which makes it applicable to multi-channel buying as well (Niemeier et al., 2013).

Preferences for channels are different between customer groups and evolve over time (Valentini, Montaguti, & Neslin, 2011). Every step in the purchasing process can be done using
one or multiple channels and what influences the selection of channels is the previous experience using it (Blattberg, Kim, & Neslin, 2008).

When a consumer has gotten a stimulus to buy something, the purchase decision process starts. The consumer can go online not only to shop but also to see what other people think about specific products (Berman & Evans, 2013). A stimulus can come before a visit as well as during a visit to a store. The purpose can be both hedonistic (going there for fun) or utilitarian (looking for something specific) (Scarpi et al., 2014). The information gathering step can be done online as well as offline. According to Bell et al. (2014), consumers use multiple channels for their information gathering. Historically, the store was the place where consumers were both given information about the products and being marketed to (Niemeier et al., 2013). However, today customers are well informed before going to the store which means that they are more immune to sales talk but also more open for intellectual dialogues with the salespeople to gather more information (Blattberg et al., 2008). The evaluation and selection step is closely connected to the information step and is sometimes done simultaneously. Opinions of others play a significant role in the decision process for consumers (Niemeier et al., 2013). According to Google (2018), consumers are doing more and more research before purchasing something, also how customers search has changed. The search has become more inspirational with searches for “best...”, “ideas for...” and “...to avoid” have been growing a lot. This means that in some cases, the information search, evaluation, and selection merges into one step.

The purchase is made either in the store or online. However, the move toward omni-channel is changing how this can be done (Beck & Rygl, 2015; Verhoef et al., 2015) with for example buy in store/send home or buy online/pick up in store. Consumers have become used to a vast selection of products online and can be therefore be disappointed by the limited selection some brick and mortar stores offer (Niemeier et al., 2013). How the customer perceives the post-purchase experience is very important since it will influence whether the customer will return and as previously mentioned it could even make them skip steps in the next decision process if they are satisfied (Blattberg et al., 2008).
3 Method

In this chapter, the choice of research perspective, approach and strategy will be presented as well as justification to these choices. Further, the process of data collection and analysis will be described followed by a section on how the authors have ensured the quality of the research.

3.1 Research Perspective

Understanding philosophical issues are essential to achieving the aims of a research thesis (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). In research philosophy, many different approaches exist, and it is important to implement one that fits the given topic (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). The most commonly discussed approaches in this type of literature are either positivism or social constructivism (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). There are some differences between the two approaches. Positivism takes the approach that only facts are relevant, the research has high structures and a static form (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). This type of research is especially suitable to test hypotheses or to answer a set of questions with prior established theoretical frameworks (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). At the other side of the spectrum, the social constructionist approach is more flexible in the views of the world (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). This approach is more appropriate to explore an area with little or none previous theoretical framework, and it is useful to provide insight or understand about specific topics, to generate new ideas (Malhotra & Birks, 2007).

Depending on the perspective chosen, a researcher decides between quantitative or qualitative research methods (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Where the quantitative research is mostly connected to the positivist viewpoint, and qualitative studies usually take a constructionist view (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). In short, one could argue that the quantitative approaches are more suitable for testing given truths, such as a hypothesis. On the other hand, qualitative studies are more exploratory, thus are more suitable for forming new ideas or generalizations about a particular topic (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Due to the nature of the chosen research topic, the authors have chosen a qualitative approach to this subject. For instance, there is lack of previous research, and thus there are some types of research philosophies that might be more suitable than others. Since the authors are interested in studying the beliefs, perceptions, and meaning, a qualitative study is most appropriate due to the flexibility (Kumar, 2011). Furthermore, since the aim is to explore less researched areas, the authors believe that the viewpoint of this thesis is constructionism, preferred over strong constructionism. The reasons behind this are that
constructionism enables generalization beyond the sample (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Since the sample might be limited, allowing generalizing about a larger population is especially important to achieve the research aims. Generalizing about a population with limited sample size is always a risk and should be avoided. However, generalizations could be used if there are limited variations in the entire population, or where the study acts as a pilot for future research (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). So, generalizing could be risky, but since the aim is to generate new ideas, this particular research perspective is suitable.

3.2 Research Approach

Induction looks at how researchers can take something or a combination of something and generalize broader than the actual research (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Inductive research starts with finding an area of interest without looking into theoretical frameworks because it is seen as an inhibitor to creativity. The chosen issues within the interest come from observations or people in different contexts. Research participants then describe their view and nature of a certain issue in a context. From the descriptions, broad themes are found and then examined more thoroughly through in-depth questions and discussions. A researcher then tries to find links and common themes from the participants to build a model or theory. This means that an interpretivist researcher never reaches a conclusion with complete evidence. Instead, the conclusion is built from an analysis of the participant answers (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Saunders et al., (2009) define inductive research as a way to gain an understanding of meanings that we as humans attach to certain events and where the context around the research is emphasized. It also let researchers have more flexibility to adapt and iterate the process along the way depending on what results that are found (Saunders et al., 2009). Deduction, on the other hand, looks at how a conclusion can be made from validating an already established theory or theoretical framework by setting some premises and testing them. If the premises are true then so is the conclusion (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). From the theoretical framework, hypotheses are set by identifying specific and relevant variables that need to be tested, and it is through these hypotheses and variables that a researcher can try to validate an existing theory on a subject (Malhotra & Birks, 2007).

Finding out how small fashion brick and mortar stores can create value for consumers through multiple channels requires a full understanding of how consumers perceive these channels, how
they are shopping clothes now and want to shop in the future. This issue is inductive since the aim is to figure out how consumers think and not validating already established thoughts on the matter. Instead, the research participants shall describe their view of fashion retail, their shopping process and what they think of independent fashion brick and mortar stores. From these descriptions, themes are constructed and linked to be able to build insights for the stores on how they can cater to consumers on several channels and create a competitive advantage over their competitors.

3.3 Research Strategy - Grounded Theory

The inductive nature of this thesis makes the grounded theory a good choice of method. Grounded Theory was published by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 and is a systematic way to collect and analyze data in contrast to some less structured qualitative approaches like the ethnographic method (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). The goal of Grounded Theory is to build a theory that is grounded in empirical data. It is a simultaneous process where data collection and data analysis are interlinked and where the new and old data is continuously compared for the researcher to immerse themselves in the data to be able to make a better understanding of it (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). A researcher using Grounded Theory from the Strauss perspective is active in the interrogation of the data, he or she also build the theory from both data and theory and gathers insights from many sources. If the researcher follows the Glaser approach then he or she will keep a distance and independence as a researcher, the data is believed to emerge from itself, and no insights are previously gathered (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015).

The authors believe that Grounded Theory more toward the Strauss perspective goes well in line with the research purpose and research questions since building insights for fashion brick and mortar retailers through customer understanding requires a collection of data in the form of views, processes, and thoughts from the participants and then create codes from it. The codes are then linked to create common categories which can then be linked to themes. Finally, a theory can be built from the themes which in this case ideally will be insights on how a small fashion brick and mortar store can create value for consumers to create a competitive advantage against online stores and larger retailers.
3.4 Data Collection

3.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

Qualitative research methods can be categorized into direct and indirect ways of getting the data (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Direct can then be divided into group interviews (focus groups) and in-depth interviews. Indirect research is divided into observations and projective techniques (Malhotra & Birks, 2007).

Choosing between direct and indirect methods depends on the context of the research. Since direct research means having a non-disguised focus group or interview, a researcher needs to understand what consequences that openness will have (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). For example, the richness of the data could be lost if the participants know what the researcher wants to accomplish with the research. Openness about the research may or may not close the minds of the participant. This also works opposite ways, not giving a participant enough information about the research could also hinder them from fully giving the richest data possible (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Hence, the research context is vital when choosing a data collection method.

For this thesis, in-depth interviews are chosen as the method for data collection. Malhotra and Birks (2007) define in-depth interviews as personal interviews that are both direct and unstructured where one participant is probed to find underlying beliefs, motivations, feelings, and attitudes on a specific topic. Easterby-Smith et al., (2015) define three types of structures on interviews. Highly structured market research interview, semi-structured guided open interview and unstructured ethnographic interview. The choice for structure in this thesis is semi-structured interviews because of the mix of following some structure while still having the freedom to ask follow-up questions and going deeper in specific topics (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015).

The authors have decided to use interviews for a number of reasons. Firstly, using interviews lets the researcher probe the participants to gain a deeper understanding and insights of the participants’ views and thoughts (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Which in this case is interesting since how customers decide and choose shopping channels might be an individual choice, hence understanding it in an individual setting makes sense. Secondly, focus groups require the participants to be quite homogenous to have a good group discussion (Malhotra & Birks, 2007).
Interviews let the authors potentially understand a broader group of customers. Thirdly, interviews let a participant speak freely without social pressure or groupthink (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Lastly, several interviews instead of just a couple of focus groups let the researcher reflect, experiment and learn along with the interviews (Malhotra & Birks, 2007).

3.4.2 Sampling

Many research projects aim to gather information about the characteristics of a population, and this could be done throughout a sample (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). As mentioned, the research will focus on the age group between 18-30 years old. The authors believe the most effective sampling procedure to achieve the research goal is to use a nonprobability sampling. The nonprobability sampling is relying on the researchers’ judgment rather than chance in the sample selection (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Nonprobability sampling does not allow an objective evaluation of sample results (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). However, the authors do not wish to prove any statistical truths. Rather study people's perspectives on fashion retail, to draw conclusions and generalizations that can be tested further. Therefore, the authors believe a nonprobability sampling is preferable over the probability sampling.

Furthermore, the authors have chosen to use convenience sampling, where the sampling selection is based on the researcher's choice Malholtra and Birks (2007) and selecting sample units on account of how easily accessible they are (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Convenience sampling might not be preferable for other research approaches, but it can be used to generate ideas, insights or hypotheses to test further (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Convenience sampling is good because it is less expensive and less time consuming than other sampling procedures (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Due to the time constraint and the access, the authors have to the chosen demographic (see delimitations), convenience sampling is deemed to be the most effective. However, one must regard that convenience sampling has drawbacks, for instance, it could be biased (Malhotra & Birks, 2007).

3.5 Data Analysis

The choice of data analysis method will be to use the seven steps of the grounded theory (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). The first step is familiarization where all the data is sifted through
to get a first understanding of the findings. Here, the authors first put all the transcriptions from the interviews together and read through the whole document to get a first grasp of the data. The second step is reflection, and this is the first time the researcher tries to make sense of the data. At this step, the authors read through the document again but this time with the research questions and previous research in mind. The third step is the initial coding where a word or a sentence is used to summarize parts of the data. Here the authors used short sentences to summarize larger chunks of data from the transcribed interviews. This process looks like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Chunk of data(Quote)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Living near stores increase offline shopping</td>
<td>I live right near to town, which makes me shop more often, if it had been longer it would have been more rare. If there were far to the stores I would have shopped more online</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1: Initial coding process**

Conceptualization is the fourth step, and at this stage, the researcher uses the initial codes to create and find common patterns in the data. Here the authors found some emerging trends within the codes which were used to create categories. During the fifth step, focused re-coding, the researcher goes over the data and re-codes it to a number of more focused codes. In this step, the authors took the initial codes and created more focused codes from similar initial codes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focused re-coding</th>
<th>Initial codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>Living near stores increase offline shopping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Easy pick-up from online shopping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Online shopping can be done at anytime</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2: Focused Re-coding process**

The sixth step is linking, and here the concepts and categories are linked to each other to see how they relate and how this can be turned into a theory. Here the authors take each of the categories found and sees how they relate to each other to create a theme that can be further
developed into a theory. Here the focused codes became our categories. We found several re-codes that for example discussed matters of convenience. Then Convenience became one of the categories. After going through the re-codes, the authors found three more categories in the same way: Product and Brand, Information and Channel flexibility. These categories were then analyzed conceptually, and it was found that all these categories were factors that affected how a consumer selects a channel for their shopping. Hence, factors for deciding channels became the theme of the thesis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factors that influence a customer’s channel decision</td>
<td>Experience and Convenience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Product and Brand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Channel Flexibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3: Theme and categories*

From these factors and theme, insights were found for the retail industry as a whole and more specifically towards independent brick and mortar stores. *The last step*, re-evaluation, is where the researcher iterates and adds more work in some areas when needed (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015).

### 3.6 Pilot Testing

To make sure the questions asked and overall interview structure was suitable for the research purpose, one pilot interview was conducted. Furthermore, the interview gave the authors a chance to practice the interview strategy. The pilot interview was with one participant matching the requested demographic, and the interview provided many useful insights and results. There were no significant changes to the questions or interview structure after the pilot interview. Therefore, the authors decided to incorporate this interview results into the research.
3.7 Quality of research

3.7.1 Trustworthiness

For any research to be useful, the research must be relevant and credible (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015), and researchers must be able to convince a research audience of the worthiness of the research (Saunders et al., 2009). In quantitative studies, reliability and validity have long been discussed as important factors to ensure quality in the research. However, quality makers are also relevant for qualitative studies (Golafshani, 2003). The general idea what is important to ensure quality research in a qualitative study is apparent since reliability and validity are important in any study (Golafshani, 2003). The primary factors considered in this study was to make sure the research was conducted in a relevant and trustworthy way. This was done by both collecting data that was valuable enough to contribute to existing research as analyzing it with a low level of bias as possible. Furthermore, the authors believe the method of choice to be compliant with the purpose as well as research questions. The authors are also clear about the research process, from research questions to method, result display and how the conclusions were drawn from the results to ensure replicability and transparency of the study.

3.7.2 Reflexivity

To further guarantee the quality of this research, researchers need to show a reflexive approach to the research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). The authors did this by trying to interfere as little as possible in the data collection and being aware of potential bias and leading questions during the interviews. This also meant being aware of how potential influence of the data throughout different stages of the research process. During the data collection and data analysis, the authors worked together to deal with the issues and made sure not to involve own thoughts or ideas in the results. Also, active work to avoid any premature conclusions and leading questions during the data collection and to be true to what data was collected, but also study what was missing (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015).
3.8 Ethics

While conducting research, the ethical aspect should be considered to verify the research and results. In fact, most research is bound by some ethical considerations (Kumar, 2011). These matters affect the whole research but are especially crucial during the data collection and analysis. In short, the ethical standards are implemented to protect the stakeholders in the research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015; Kumar, 2011). The stakeholders include the research subject or informants, the research community, and funding body. Ethical considerations are meant to protect the integrity of the stakeholders in a research project (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015; Kumar, 2011). The participants who are providing the data are often considered being the most important in this discussion. While conducting research, it is important to give information about the research and receive consent from the participants (Kumar, 2011). It is especially important to make sure no harm comes to the participants, either in physical form or social discomfort. Further give information about the research, what the data will be used for, and that participation is voluntary, to protect the integrity of the participants (Kumar, 2011).

Another aspect, briefly discussed in the sampling procedure is to ensure ethical standards for the researcher. It is important to avoid researcher bias or deliberate tampering of results (Kumar, 2011). Bias appear in different situations, for instance during the answer recording, questioning or most apparent in this research, during the sample selection (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Therefore, it is essential to take steps to avoid biased research. Especially during face to face interviews where the chance of bias is high (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Therefore, the aim was to conduct all interviews with both authors present, to stay clear from any personal probing that might occur otherwise. Furthermore, while working with the data, during processes such as transcribing the interviews and translation the authors worked together to make the correct judgments, mainly focus on translating subtle messages that might not be apparent from the text. Also, the coding of all the interviews was done with both authors present to get a coherent coding throughout all the data. Regarding this thesis, the authors firmly believe it is possible to conduct the data collection and analysis with the highest ethical integrity. The research questions are designed in such a manner that the utmost care will be taken to not mislead participants, or manipulate them during the data collection. The participants’ involvement in the study is entirely voluntary, and any questions that, for some reason, are considered too private or intruding will not have to be answered by the interviewees. These aspects are considered before, during and after the data collection.
3.9 Implementation

The research was conducted with a logical structure. The data collection, the interviews, was all done similarly. Both the authors and participants preferred to do the interviews in person. It was preferred to have both authors present during all the interviews. However, this was not possible at all times. During the interviews, one researcher was the designated interview leader and in charge of asking questions to the participant. The other researcher focused on the answers and was responsible for taking notes and detect body language, but the second researcher interposed with follow up questions were he so deemed necessary. All interviews were recorded after approval from the participants. The interviews were in a language preferred by the participants and all participants preferred Swedish. Before the interview, the participants were told that participation was completely voluntary and information about how the data would be used.

All in all, there were a total of 11 face to face interviews conducted. A clear majority of the interviews were conducted over a two day period with both of the authors present. However, some interviews were done with just a single interviewer. All interviews were done with just the authors and the interviewee present. The interviewees were well spread out within our chosen demographic, both regarding age and gender. Out of the eleven conducted interviews, the shortest was 28 minutes, and the longest was 69 minutes. The average interview time was 49 minutes with a median of 50 minutes. Neither the authors nor the interviewees had anything scheduled after the interview. Thus, none of the interviews were considered rushed or on time pressure. Therefore, the belief is that all the interviewees were able to expand their thinking without any time pressure. After the interview face, all the interviews were listened to and transcribed in Swedish. During the transcription, the focus was to get both what was said and the underlying meaning of the text. After that, the transcribed interviews were translated into English. The authors did this alone, but the other researcher then checked the translated transcripts to get a consistent translation style, and to make sure no essential data were missed. The transcribed interviews were coded. In the coding process, different quotes from the participants were coded with generic coding phrases. These codes were bundled together to create different categories. These categories are what seems to be the most important factors regarding customers shopping decisions and channel choice. These categories emerged from and were apparent in almost every interview in some way. The categories were then analyzed and created a theme.
4 Empirical Findings

In this chapter, the results and findings from the study are presented. The results are presented with the most relevant quotes from participants, but also a background to the discussion. All of which under one of the four specific categories that were found from the coding process. The chapter starts with a table where the reader can get an overview of our participants (Table 4). Finally, a summary of the most relevant findings will be presented.

4.1 Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Time of interview (min)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Shopping channel preference</th>
<th>Price preference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Offline</td>
<td>Low price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Mid price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Mid price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Offline</td>
<td>Mid price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Offline</td>
<td>High price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>Mid to high price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Offline</td>
<td>More to higher price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Offline</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Offline</td>
<td>Mid to high price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P11</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Offline</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Interview Overview

An overview of the participants is seen in Table 4. From the interview codes, different patterns emerged and codes were bundled together creating categories. Four interesting categories that seem to affect the customers buying process were found, convenience/experience,
product/brands, information and channel flexibility. All categories are displayed in 4.2 with a selection of quotes from the participants representing the specific category.

4.2 Categories

4.2.1 Experience and convenience

During the interviews, the experience and convenience of shopping were discussed. Regarding the experience, there were both the in-store experience and the experience around the shopping that was mentioned by the participants.

For in-store experience participants expressed that both the layout in the store had to be good and also that the stores were in order, clean and pleasant overall. The experience, and especially the in-store experience, is of course only a factor in the offline channel. Participant 6 stated that “The most important thing in offline shopping is that the store is organized and tidy, so it’s a pleasant experience.” Participant 8 agreed and would not shop in an unorganized store at all “If the stores are messy and things everywhere I just leave.” Participant 2 was more interested in the experience around offline shopping. It is just not shopping it is the whole experience that is important “you get things right in hand and staff that help you, it's an experience.”

Another factor affecting the in-store experience mentioned by participants was the personal service. Some stated that this was not at all important, yet others thought that it was much appreciated. The consensus seemed to be that personal service was good, but not always usable. However, many participants agreed that independent brick and mortar stores usually had better service than other stores. Participant 6 said, “They have some unique stuff and better service.” Participant 7 added that the independent stores seemed to be more thought through than larger chains “These stores are usually better structured, have nice brands and it feels like someone has put in some effort in deciding what brands and items to sell and display. A good experience.” Furthermore, most participants would rather shop at the independent store if there were no difference to products or similar “The same item in two different stores I go for best service, but it's fun to support the small store if it's not worse” - Participant 2. Although most participants were positive towards the independent stores, there were some problems. For instance, participant 3 said the following about the experience in independent brick and mortar
stores “but usually too pushy salespeople, they have to sell. Also feel like they are less likely to make a change or buy-back because they need to sell. They will probably do more to try to prevent it.” and participant 11 were more price sensitive “It feels like the smaller stores have slightly higher prices for the same things.”

One factor discussed during the interviews was the location. There are two different types of locations. Either the importance of the right location for a store or location can also refer to the proximity to the stores for the customers. First of all, the store location in relation to other stores is important for the participants, especially for the independent stores. For example, participant 7 said when asked about the reasons to enter a particular store that “Most of them I have just happened to walk into.” Participant 1 agreed that most shopping was done opportunistically, thus shopping when given the opportunity “Proximity from home does not matter, but it's getting more in the moment, "Oh, I happen to be close to a store.” Participant 6 said a similar thing “It’s not always planned to go to stores, sometimes you just pass by and may be tempted to enter. That is usually smaller stores.”

The second important factor regarding location’s convenience was the proximity from the participant’s home to the stores. When asked about proximity and how far the participants were willing to travel to visit stores there were some differences. No general time frame or distance was too long, for example. It depends on the situation. However, most participants preferred to shop at convenient locations, for example, participant 4 wanted to visit a specific store, but could not due to lack of convenient public transport and not owning a car. Similar things were apparent during many interviews and were one major reason for online shopping since it was inconvenient to visit the specific stores. Participant 6 preferred the offline shopping channel at the moment, but claims that that is mainly due to the proximity to the stores "I live close to the shops now if I lived far from the shops, I’d probably shop more online. So the distance is important.” Other participants expressed similar views, either to shop more if living closer to the stores, or more online if it was further to the stores. Participant 9 claimed that “Being close to stores definitely make me buy more. Since both here and in my hometown I live close to the centers which make it easier to shop since the shops are just outside my door. If I would live far away from a city I would buy less I think.” Thus, the distance or time issues was sometimes the reason for the selected channel. Participant 4 claimed that there is not always time to visit the store, and sometimes there is a long travel time to do so “I like that it’s so smooth online,
Some participants saw convenience advantages with offline shopping while others saw the same shopping online. Most participants who enjoyed the online channel claimed that they liked it since it was shopping on their terms. They did not have to accustom to opening hours or smaller range of clothes. Participant 2 liked online channel since “You can do it whenever, I like to know that the store is there if I want it to be.” Participant 7 said a similar thing when asked about the convenience with online channel “That is easy to access. Shopping in stores turn shopping into a project while online is so easy to do.” Participant 1 had a similar viewpoint and added that there is no stress from the staff or any other circumstances that otherwise might affect the shopping experience in an offline store. Online was more convenient in some cases “(There is) no stress, keeps calm, make it at home, let it rest for a few hours and come back later to complete transaction. Also it is easy to compare different store.”

However, with online shopping comes other problems, for instance, there was an issue of the delivery method that was not always so convenient. According to our participants, the inconvenience of delivery from online stores was one reason for not using the offline channel. For example, participant 2 said that this was the primary reason for shopping offline “Yes offline, not online because I don’t want to deal with return shipping.” Furthermore, participant 2 claimed that it is a problem of having to wait for the products bought “You don’t get immediate gratification.” Participant 9, as many others interviewed, thought the whole process of online shopping was very inconvenient “To pick it up somewhere since it is not often delivered to one's home, and then sending it back. And then I'm a bit lazy and sending things back online feels like a whole process which I don't like.” To solve this issue, many participants wanted same day delivery and being able to return from home. This would increase their preference for the online channel as participant 11 “Yes! It would have been great, then I would have done almost all shopping online only. It's easier to sit at home and check out the entire range.” However, participant 9 express his concerns for the deliveries from online “Yes it could but it is still the hassle of being able to stay home at those times when they can deliver and so on. If I could return it from home and have it delivered to my home directly it would definitely make me buy more.”
4.2.2 Product and brand

One of the most important factors the participants in the research brought up, regarding what makes them shop in a specific store, was the importance of good products. The same was true for both online and offline channels. Many participants thought of the products as their primary focus in the shopping process. Thus, they could shop anywhere as long as the products were good. Participant 2 expressed his view as “Yes, the clothes are most important, so I can go wherever I want.” Participants 5 said that “The most important thing about shopping is that the clothes are good,” and participant 9 claimed that other people sometimes do not understand what is important while shopping clothes “People miss that the product is key sometimes and the experience around it.” Other participants had similar things to add, namely that good products are what makes them shop in a specific store. “Further the clothes have to be good, the things they have that make me shop there, most often the clothes.”- Participant 6

The only participants that did not express any regarded for the importance of products were participant 7 and 11. However, participant 8 had a similar but different view on his shopping behavior. The only reason for shopping according to participant 8 was to solve a problem, thus to get clothes. The experience around the shopping was not essential and only the products made any difference in the shopping decision. This was the only participant that pointed towards that the products were the only reason for shopping, rather than the most important one as many of the other participants suggested.

“If me, being in a store have no emotional connection for me which make don't really care that much how the store is or not are. I just go there to solve a problem (getting new clothes), and this happens to be the best way at the moment”– Participant 8

While discussing the importance of products, some participants discussed the importance of brands. Many participants argued the brands not being important in their shopping, instead just the quality of the products were important as discussed above. Other participants claimed that brands were important since it was the guarantee for good quality. For instance, participant 2 believed brands only were important while buying new jeans “Brands are not so important if it is not Jeans that is because I know levies is a good fit.” Participant 9 agreed that brands were important for more special items “Usually I just go straight to the brands I like if I'm in the
need of a dress or similar.” However, in these particular situations, most participants agreed that brands were not so important.

Another aspect regarding good products was discussed in relation to the smaller independent stores. Many participants had insight regarding why they liked these particular stores. Still, the products were important, but there was a different insight into why they were important in this particular case. When asked about why they shopped in independent stores and why the products were good most participants pointed at the uniqueness of the store and clothes they have. For example, participant 1 said that “The reason I decided to purchase there was the uniqueness of the product” on the question why he decided to buy a cap at a store in a tourist destination, and not just any cap at a larger retail chain. Participant 4 had another viewpoint, and wanted to buy clothes not everyone else had “The advantage is that they have things that not everyone else has, they are unique.” Furthermore, participants 5 and 6 also pointed towards the uniqueness of the products as their reason for shopping in the smaller stores “But it’s fun, cozier to shop there. They have some unique stuff and better service” - Participant 6

To summarize, the products seem to be the primary reason for the participants to shop at a specific store. In the research, the definition of what “good clothes” is was never discussed, and it is not farfetched to assume that the definition of “good clothes” will differentiate between consumers. However, the general truth seems to be that customers do not want to be deceived. Thus they do not want to pay too much for something in relation to the quality of the material and similar. Furthermore, they want to have unique clothes, but there was never a discussion regarding what was considered unique.

"Ultimately what it comes down to are the products. If I believe something fits me, then it doesn't matter if it a chain or independent store. Also, most don't go after a brand or anything. The product is key." – Participant 10

4.2.3 Information

From the interviews, it became evident that how customers find and have access to information affects many of their choices regarding shopping related activates, both offline and online. The use of the word information here has a broad meaning. This includes finding products, being
inspired as well as information about them. It also includes finding channels and related information. The researchers could also see that how the information was found and displayed also affected a customer’s decision of use of channels. The interviews showed that information affects how a customer find and choose channels. Participant 1 feels that not knowing whether a physical store is good or not highly affects the desire to enter or not enter a specific store “If I know it's a good store I will shop there. It's about getting across the first initial stage to shop there for the first time”. Participant 5 also see the problem of trying out a store without knowing about it “Trying out new such stores is not easy since I do not always know who they are for.”

This is especially true for brick and mortar stores because they lack the familiarity that a being part of a chain adds to the brand “Well, because you do not know what they offer because they are not a chain” – Participant 1. The lack of familiarity and brand require independent brick and mortar stores to seek new customers actively. Participant 4 points to physical locations of brick and mortar stores as a hinder since usually going to shopping malls “Unfortunately, I do not see them so often, because I’m usually in shopping malls.” Word-of-mouth comes up as a mean for customers to give new stores a try “Maybe word of mouth if a friend would have been there” - Participant 10. Participant 7 also points to word-of-mouth as well as social media marketing for finding out about brick and mortar stores “Word of mouth is important for me to find new stores. Maybe if I would see an ad on Facebook or Instagram. Those platforms make it possible for stores to add nice pictures of their inventory so if I would see an ad like that I would probably give it a chance”. Being influenced by social media is something that participant 9 also needs to be persuaded to try out a new brick and mortar store. It needs to be marketed in a good way in a customer’s daily feed or by people a customer follows “Good marketing. I want to see it in my daily feed or some influencer. Then I know it could be worth giving it a try”.

Finding items as well as inspiration and information about them turned out to be a significant factor for customers. What the authors could see from the interviews was that a strong reason for people choosing e-commerce was the ability online stores gave customers to compare and categorize items “But positive things about online is that it is easier to compare different items in different stores or the same store, so it's a bit easier to shop online” – Participant 2. Several participants saw this ability to sort and categorize items as a huge convenience for them in their purchase process. This make the shopping process more time efficient compared to browsing around a physical store to find what a customer is looking for “Because it's easier to categorize
things, there's so much to choose from which is very time-effective versus traditional shop” – Participant 3, “Online, it's easy to find exactly what I’m looking for, I just search” and “all options come up just like you want them” – Participant 4. Categorizing is also important for participant 5 who see the wide range together with fast and easy categorizations of items as important factors of buying online “it's easy to categorize and get a wide range online on dresses.”

Being able to compare before purchasing turned out be an important factor in making a purchase. These comparisons are not solely used on single variables but can instead be used on several factors. Participant 2 states the importance of comparing items but also stresses that this is not just about price but rather on the item as a whole like different colors, fits and models as well as price “Yes, much comparisons, even in traditional stores, may not price, but more if there are other models that have different attributes, type brands, fits or colors”. This is something that participant 7 also discusses when it comes to reasons for shopping online. Being able to set a number of criteria's that quickly sort items that could be interesting for a customer. This gave good overview when looking for clothes to purchase “Online I can firstly sort clothes depending on price, etc. and also at least on Asos you both have pictures, video, and information which give me a very good overview”. The interviews also showed that having this overview can mean different things to different people which mean it does provide value but in different ways for the customers. For participant 1, knowing that the item is bought through the best price possible is important “Actively by entering and checking the cheapest price on different sites, there are the same items in different places, so I choose the cheapest. If there are many similar items in different stores, I buy the cheapest”. Both participant 2 and 7 like how easy it is to get an overview online “easy to find stuff. Also, easy to check things instantly” – Participant 2 and “It is very easy to just go online and check what is there” – Participant 7. Physical stores make it problematic to get an overview since their product range is limited. Customers are required to look in many places to see different types of items in different price classes “But the problem with regular stores is that they do not have all types of clothing in their store, so you have to check different places” Participant 3. However, Participant 9 believes that mall can give easier overview than other physical stores “I actually like malls since it's easy to get an overview of what I can purchase.”
The need for an overview even in physical channels is shown as several of our participants go to online channels as e-commerce sites to find inspiration and information about items and then going to a physical store to make the actual purchase. Participant 9 checks different e-commerce sites for inspiration “I will look online, on different e-commerce sites. To see how it’s possible to wear it and what it fits with”. Participant 6 wants to buy more offline and sees that the ability to check available inventory in physical stores from online could increase the share of offline purchases “Had I been able to check inventory, etc. before I could have done more offline”. Participant 10 always go through online channels for information before going to a physical store to try the item on and see how it will fit and if the fit is good, makes a purchase “Yeah, I check everything online. I then go to a store to see how it fits and feels. If they then don’t have my size, I will order it online, but if the size is in I will buy it then and there”. The overview, however, is just a mean to an end, what it is about is to find an item that the customer is satisfied with. This means that the customer will choose the channel that best suits their need which participant 4 expresses “The channel is not important as long as you get what you want and find it easy”.

4.2.4 Channel flexibility

The interviews showed that no matter if someone preferred online or offline channels for shopping, many of the respondents saw that improvements could be made for them to experience better and more seamless shopping. These improvements were seen in forms of new and more flexible ways to order, pick up and have items delivered. Participant 2 want to be able to browse online, but it is also essential to being able to try the items on before a purchase. Hence, order online and come to the store and try it out before making the purchase rather than order the item home and trying it out there “I want to check online, but also try. Order at home so the stores can put it together so I can come and try it out. If I see that it's in store, I would rather go there than get it shipped home” – Participant 2. Participant 7 also see the value in order and paying online and then being able to go to the physical store and picking it up “If I could order and pay online and then just pick it up then that it would be interesting. This could have changed my channel preference”. Zara is used as a good example by participant 9 because of their well-developed omni-channel approach “If I go to Zara I like that I can pay and save the item online and then try it in the store and then decide if I want it. This is a good experience for me, and I would definitely use this option if it would exist more.”
This also goes the other way around. Several participants want to order items home and then to be able to return them to a store instead of sending them back. Zara is again lifted forward as a good example here for their “buy online/ return to store”-policy “For example, Zara I think was the first chain to let customer return online bought items to the store, this was really good. This made me buy from Zara actually, and I didn’t choose HM because of this reason” – Participant 7 and participant 11 “Yes, that sounds very good. I would like to order the right size from the store to home to try it and then return to the store.”. Participant 10 also thinks order online and return to the store could be a good complement to the shopping process “It could be a good thing to shop online and returning it to a store.” Participant 8 sees another approach that that could increase willingness to shop. By having couriers bringing items home and then trying them on and only paying for the ones that participant 8 want to keep. The courier can then return the rest “If someone could come home to me with clothes I ordered online and let me try them on, and I just pay directly in an app when I decided what items want. That would be very interesting for me. Especially if I wouldn’t have to send things back myself.” Another approach is order in store and sending to home. This is seen as an advantage by participant 6 who want to see faster and easier ways of getting sold out item between stores or home if they are not available at a certain time “What I had appreciated would have been if the clothes that were sold out in store would ship faster between stores or even home.”

As previously mentioned in the findings, customers like the sorting and categorization function that comes with shopping online. From the interviews, the authors could see that this type of sorting and finding also be an advantage in offline channels. Participant 4 discusses this as well pointing to the online store Junkyard. They let customers come to their warehouse and check their inventory on screens and order right then and there before bringing the item home with them “If I could sort like online in an offline setting, I would probably have been more likely to shop in a regular store. “Junkyard” in Trollhättan has a similar concept that I like.” Participant 5 would also buy more offline if sorting and categorizing was possible from home before going to the store “Online you can look at a lot very quickly and easily Had you been able to do it in the physical store I had bought more in store.” This is also true for participant 6 who sees the value of checking inventory before going to a store as very useful and could increase the share of offline purchases “Had I been able to check inventory, etc. before I could have done more offline.” A potential solution is mentioned by participant 3, using a kind of search engine to browse items available offline in a city could increase the share of offline
shopping “Yes, if there were a search engine for all the clothes in a city, I would use it and then shop at the store.” Participant 9 agrees that some kind of search engine would be beneficial for offline shopping channels “Hm that would actually be really smart. Then I could see exactly what stores have that I want and go there directly.” Letting customers access benefits from online shopping (sorting) with faster and easier delivery (offline), participant 7 argues for it to combine the best of two worlds “Being able to do this from home would be interesting since then I could have some of the benefits I mentioned previously with the overview and sorting while still buying offline.”

As previously mentioned, many of our respondents get info from online sources but make many of the purchases in physical stores “I'm still looking and searching for information online even though the purchase takes place in-store.” Participant 6. This combined with a spontaneous experience that customers sometimes feel when they shop in physical channels “And I don't go out shopping when I know what I want so it's more spontaneous shopping done in stores.” - Participant 7 create possibilities for location-based services like getting offers directly to the phone when being close to a store like participant 1 talk about “Yes, maybe offer directly to your mobile when you are near a store”.

4.3 Summary of findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience and Convenience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The orderliness and neatness of the stores is important for customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Personal service is good, but not always useful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Most shopping in independent B&amp;M was in an opportunistic fashion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Distance was important in channel selection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Shopping on own terms” is important for online channel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Many customers has problems with delivery methods.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Findings from category Experience and Convenience
| Product and Brand | ● The product is the most important factor while shopping.  
|                  | ● Brands were not important, unless it symbolizes good quality.  
|                  | ● Unique products are especially good. |

**Table 6:** Findings from category Product and Brand

| Information | ● Important for B&M's to inform the customer due to lack of brand  
|            | ● This can be both word-of-mouth as well as marketing  
|            | ● Being able to sort and categorize items is a huge advantage for online  
|            | ● Important for customers to get an overview of available items  
|            | ● Important for customers to make well-informed decisions |

**Table 7:** Findings from category Information

| Channel Flexibility | ● Customers want a more seamless experience between channels  
|                     | ● Trying items on is important no matter if online or offline channel  
|                     | ● Improvements mentioned were:  
|                     | ○ buy online/return to store  
|                     | ○ buy online/pick-up/try in store  
|                     | ○ trying in store and have item sent home  
|                     | ● Sorting and categorization for offline channels is something many participants want  
|                     | ● Location-based services can be good way to find new customers for B&M |

**Table 8:** Findings from category Channel Flexibility
5 Analysis

This chapter will compare and analyze the empirical findings in the light of existing literature. The authors will also expand the discussion to include additional aspects and insights, emerged from the data, that is relevant to the study. Each of the four categories from the empirical findings will be discussed on its own, with a summary on how this effect independent brick and mortar and an illustration of customers channel decision at the end.

5.1 How customers choose channels

The results show many interesting aspects to analyze. The aim was to investigate different competitive advantages independent brick and mortar stores in the fashion industry might have and could create using multiple channels. To comply with this, the channel selection of the customer is of high importance. From the results in chapter 4, it is apparent that there is no clear way the customers are choosing their channel of shopping. Instead, it seems that the customer selects the channel that gives them the most value at that specific moment based on the customer need, thus the first stage in the customer buying process (Berman & Evans, 2013; Niemeier et al., 2013). Furthermore, even if the customer usually only shops at one specific channel. They were not bound to that channel, and could easily switch if better served somewhere else.

From the results, it was evident that both Berman and Evans (2013) decision process and Niemeier et al., (2013) were represented, thus depending on the customers need at the moment. Furthermore, what was stated by Valentini et al., (2011) that preferences for channels evolve over time were true. Many participants had changed their preferred channel of shopping, both depending on items and convenience at the time. Thus, with the omni-channel approaches, the customers can choose the channel that meets their shopping needs at the moment.

The results in chapter 4 show four different factors that affect the customers buying and channel decision to some extent. These were convenience/experience, product/brand, information and channel flexibility. The importance of the different factors depended on what was essential for that specific shopping purpose. These four factors generated the theme for this thesis which is factors that affect the customers buying and decision process (5.2) with specific focus to the independent brick and mortar stores in (5.3).
5.2 Factors that affect a customer's channel decision

5.2.1 Convenience and experience

In the literature review, Zhang et al. (2010) and Brown et al. (2012) discussed the convenience of online shopping since the customer was not bound by any opening hours. From the result, it is evident that this is true, the participants mentioned this as “shopping on their terms.” On the other hand, according to the results, offline shopping was sometimes more convenient than online shopping in some specific situations. Moreover, even though some customers exclusively shopped at either one of the two different channels, when asked about changes to their shopping situation such as living closer or further from the stores, they claim they would completely abandon their preferred channel to explore the new one. From this, one can conclude that there are no strong ties for the customers to stick to any channel. It is easy to switch from one channel to the other, especially for specific purchases. Levy et al., (2012) stated that the customers choose the most suitable shopping channel at the moment to satisfy their needs, and thus this seems to be true.

Furthermore, the results show that participants were willing to switch channels both ways and it is important to state that this was not a one-way street. Therefore, one might conclude that there will not be an entire shift towards one single channel. Instead, the omni-channel will emerge from the multi-channel to offer the most convenient channel to shop at a given moment. Another reason for the coexistence of multiple channels is the immediate gratification customers get from shopping in physical stores (Levy et al., 2012). Immediate gratification is something that is difficult to provide to the same extent with online channels. Even if it might be possible to get items bought online delivered the same day, some participants rejected the idea. Waiting was not an option no matter how fast the deliveries would be. They believed any waiting time was too long, and they wanted the immediate gratification. Furthermore, Diamond et al. (2015) stated that most brick and mortar stores relied on “walk-ins” attracted from dress windows, which is still relevant for some independent stores. Even if participants had no previous information about a store, they could enter, after studying the store from the outside. However, it seems to be an information hurdle that keeps participants from entering. Hence, the dress window is not as effective as previous information about the store. Furthermore, as seen in chapter 4, most of this shopping seems to be in an opportunistic fashion which means that customers have not planned the shopping and happen to pass by the store. Therefore, the
location of the store is important. Customers usually do not have any information about independent brick and mortar stores beforehand, which make the location for them even more critical than for larger chains. To summarize, what is considered to be convenient is up to every customer. Some participants thought online was more convenient while others preferred offline. From this, one can suggest that there is no general approach to this. Living closer to a store makes that store more convenient to visit versus having to travel further. However, a better shipping service from online channels would make that channel more convenient which will be discussed further in factor four, channel flexibility. From the interviews, it was clear that some participants were hedonistic shoppers and others, utilitarian shoppers, as discussed by Scarpi et al., (2014). Some of the participants in this study pointed towards the importance of the experience while shopping in offline channels. This was essential since hedonistic shoppers used this as their primary reason for shopping in physical stores. Also, many participants agreed with Blázquez (2014) that it is difficult to translate the experience from the store to the online channel. Participants thought both the in-store experience such as layout and “nice” stores was important but also the experience around the actual shopping was a factor for this customer group.

The in-store experience was discussed during the interviews, and many of the participants wanted clear and tidy stores. In this case, physical stores have a disadvantage from online stores. It is unavoidable that a physical store with customers at one point or another will become messy, something that does not happen in an online store. The online channels are more about the experience and usability of the website or app the retailer is using which can be just as important as an in-store experience. Furthermore, some participants also pointed to offline stores sometimes being unstructured and difficult to find items in. However, this was also apparent in some online stores. Participants pointed towards some specific online stores that were user-friendly and some that were not. One participant, for example, only shops at the same online store since she is familiar with the layout, which indicates that familiarization between the customer and store is essential.

Furthermore, the experience around the shopping, such as personal service, was also important for customers. Brown et al. (2012) mentioned the disadvantages for online stores due to lack of emotional experience or connection to the shopping, and many participants agreed. When the experience was the main reason behind the shopping, participants seldom had a clear goal for what they wanted to buy. In these situations, participants preferred the smaller independent
stores over large retail chains since they already knew what type of products the chain provides. With the independent brick and mortar stores, there is as “surprise factor” which gives a better shopping experience. The personal service was also perceived as better in the independent stores. However, this factor did not seem to be important for most of the participants in this study. There were only a few that thought the sellers in the stores provide any extra value to the shopping experience. Participants visit independent stores to a greater extent when they want something extra, either better service or experience as a whole as well as a unique selection of clothes.

5.2.2 Products and brand

The second factor was the importance of products and brands. Hilton (1998) discussed the importance of brands, and from our research, none of the other factors seemed to have the same influence on the customers as the products. The importance of products was not further discussed during the literature review. From the customer’s perspective, the products are often what determine the purchase or channel selection. In a sense, the importance of products is related to the “need recognition” in the customer buying process discussed by Levy et al., (2012) where the customer need for “good clothes” is linked together with the need recognition.

From analyzing the interviews, there is no clear answer to what a good product is since it is up to every individual to determine that. Thus, it is difficult to draw any conclusions about how a competitive advantage from products could be attained. On the other hand, what the participants in this research mostly identified as being the common ground on products were the quality of the clothes. Participants often referred to the quality of the products when questioned about what a good product was. However, it is not as easy as to state that low-quality products are disregarded entirely. Instead, the customer’s expectation of the quality was the vital issue. Cheaper clothing is expected to have a lower quality but can still be right for that specific price category. Therefore, there is no conclusion of what the quality of a product represents. The quality aspect was one of the reasons for choosing the offline channel, as mentioned by both Diamond et al. (2015) and Levy et al., (2012) customers wanted to feel the clothing material before they buy to make sure it is good quality.
Another factor discussed was the uniqueness of products, were the independent brick and mortar stores seemed to have an advantage over chain stores. Many customers pointed to this as the reason why they shop at these types of stores. What is considered unique clothes are almost as abstract as “quality”. However, what participants pointed at in the independent stores was their collection of clothes. It felt like someone had thought through the collection of brands and clothes he or she were selling. The independent store could create a unique feeling in the store since it was just not all the usual clothes the customers could find in larger chains anywhere. Because of the smaller size of the store, independent stores could have the advantage to be more flexible in their business and logistical process.

The products affect the channel decision for the customer to a further extent than other factors. Customers seem to build a relationship with specific brands and stores which for them represent good clothes. This relationship can be built with stores in both offline and online channels since good products are undependable of the channel. The branded clothes are always the same no matter which channel the customer chooses. Instead, for the customers, it is more important to have a mix of different clothes. Participants thought that the clothes in larger chain stores were “less exciting”, thus only visited these types of stores if having an idea of what they were looking for. Furthermore, according to Zhang et al., (2010), the advantage for online was the wide assortment which participants enjoyed. However, the independent store's products seemed to be more interesting to the participants since it was a surprise factor involved as mentioned earlier. The shopping was casual, and it was perceived as a better choice to find new exciting products.

What this factor comes down to is that as long as the independent brick and mortar stores sell clothes that match the type of store, a unique feeling can be built which can create a competitive advantage. It is about the customers’ reasons for shopping and what they are looking for at the moment which means that there is a place for both larger chains and smaller independent stores. The independent stores have to continue building on their strong reputation of selling unique and special clothes where they already possess a competitive advantage.
5.2.3 Information

The underlying motivation that influences a customer’s decision about a product can be divided into hedonistic, which is shopping for fun, and utilitarianism, which is shopping for a rational need (Scarpi et al., 2014). Which group a participant in this study belonged to did affect their shopping. As Scarpi et al. (2014) also mentions, hedonistic shoppers care more about the experience in the store while utilitarian shoppers want efficiency. The authors could see that the participants mentioning that they shop for fun were more concerned with the structure and layout of the store as well as the surrounding experience. Participants mentioning shopping for things they specifically needed were more concerned about effectively finding what they were looking for. However, whether a participant was mainly a hedonistic or utilitarian shopper did not seem to affect their willingness to be well educated about their choices and what alternatives there are to a specific item both style and price wise. An example of this was participants both saw shopping as a hobby but also thought that the search function online would be useful.

Customers of the 21st century are well educated when going shopping (Blattberg et al., 2008). This means that the store as an information hub is no longer true. Previously, the store was the place where customers could get informed about deals and information about items (Niemeier et al., 2013). After analyzing the behavior of the participants, the authors could see that this information need to be available for customers well before they enter the store. Previously, a brick and mortar store could count on people just walking in from how the store looked from the outside (Diamond et al., 2015). The results of our study indicate that many of the participants are picky about store selections when shopping. Walking into a new store that they do not know has a high barrier connected to it. This means that for brick and mortar stores to reach customers that are not regulars, they need to educate their prospective customers before they go out shopping. To some extent, this is already happening with more and more stores having an online presence, both website, and social media. This is evident when looking at both participant 1 and 5’s view of finding and trying new stores. They both want to know what kind of store it is before trying them out. Participant 7 and 9 discusses that they want to be reached in their daily feed on social media, both through influencers as well as ads.

The gathering of information prior a purchase mainly focuses on the product. Our research has shown that the product is one of the most important factors when deciding channels. Searching
for information is a vital step in both the customer buying process (Levy et al., 2012) as well as customer decision processes mentioned in the literature review (Berman & Evans, 2013; Niemeier et al., 2013). From the interviews, the authors could also see that the need for an overview and comparison of items is essential for customers. According to Niemeier et al., (2013), the gathering of information is very closely connected to evaluation and selection which was true for many of our participants. As the authors mentioned in the literature review, the search for information, evaluation of alternatives and selection are merging. This makes information and the access to it an important step for customers in their shopping process.

This need for comparing and categorizing items was very evident in the results of this study. Participants that mainly did their shopping in offline channels still often searched for inspiration and information before going to physical stores. The participants that mainly did their shopping online had access to information and ability to sort and categorize items and information as their number one reason for doing so. This access to information given the online channel a substantial advantage over offline channels (Zhang et al., 2010). As mentioned in the literature review, the access to information let consumers compare items and stores before making a decision (Lahuerta Otero et al., 2014). This ability is something that customers appreciate when looking at the answers that the authors got from the participants. Previous research has seen that online channels are a good way for consumers to also see what other people think about specific items as well as generating information of their own (Berman & Evans, 2013; Niemeier et al., 2013). This does not seem to be of the highest importance for the participants in this thesis. What other people think about products as well as leaving reviews did not come up during the interviews. The emphasis is on being able to find similar items and comparing prices. Also, being able to get an overview of varieties of items like different colors, fits, brands as well as quickly finding out what items are available and what fits with what. Searching for information on online channels is very easy and do not require much involvement from the consumer. This is due to the low cost involved with searching (Lahuerta Otero et al., 2014).

Something that the authors found in the interviews as previously mentioned was the willingness to search for information no matter if the preference was for online or offline. This phenomenon was not evident in previous research from what the authors could see. The transfer of search ability from purely online into also covering offline channels is something that the authors have not seen in previous research. This opens up an exciting opportunity for offline channels to
digitally enable their inventory for potential customers to find while searching and evaluating alternatives online. Helpa (2018) is a type of initiative that tries to utilize the benefits of letting consumer search independent brick and mortar stores inventory as well as adding home delivery within the city of Jönköping. By doing this, stores can reach customers early in their purchase and decision-making process. This can let them compete with online stores. Many of our participants stated that the value of getting online purchases delivered home was not the primary cause of buying online. Many even thought that the delivery process is complicated. Letting customer buy from independent brick and mortar stores online and then choosing to get it delivered to home or picking it up utilizes what customer like with different channels combines them in an omni-channel approach.

5.2.4 Channel Flexibility

As discussed in the literature review, Bell et al., (2014) state that retail comes down to two ways on how to serve customers. First is about providing information about products. The second way is delivering the product to the customer by fulfilling the purchase. This can be done either in store or online. To compete against other retailers, better access to information, easier and faster deliveries or both is necessary. This way of thinking fits well with the findings of this study. Many of the participants mentioned values within these aspects as either reason for choosing a specific channel or lack of these as a potential improvement that could be done for a customer to choose a channel over another. Participant 2 and 7 both say they would buy more from offline channels if they could look at items and pay online and then go to the store to try it out and eventually pick it up. This is also mentioned by participant 9 who uses Zara as an example of a company already using the omni-channel approach in a good way.

Also discussed in the literature review, Bell et al., (2014) created a model for how retailers can compete by using multiple channels. There are the one-channel approaches, traditional retail, and pure-play e-commerce. In this case, information for the traditional retail comes from the store and delivery is done in store. Pure-play e-commerce has their information online, and delivery sent home to the customer. The omni-channel approaches are Online retail plus showroom where customers find info and pay online and then pick up the item in store as well as Shopping and delivery hybrid which mean that the store presents their products in-store and then delivers the product home to a customer. The authors have found these approaches to be
useful for customers in their shopping process. Most of our participants were most familiar with the one-channel approaches. These approaches all had their pros and cons which indeed shows that there are rooms for improvements. The need for reading about and comparing items online together with the reoccurring complaints on e-commerce that participants want to try on clothes before purchases show that online retail with showroom has much potential for the participants of this study. Brown et al., (2012) also discusses the disadvantage for online channels by lacking in the emotional and immediate gratification that comes with feeling the item as well as taking it home straight away. There were also many complaints on the often complicated process associated with shopping in online channels, especially handling returns but also pick-up places being almost as far away as the actual stores. This speaks for the Shopping and delivery hybrid approach. With local stores handling the delivery, the logistics of being able to send items fast and easy can become easier.

Levy et al., (2012) argue for retailers serving customers in multiple channels increases both number of choices a customer can make as well as making the purchase process more convenient. They also discuss the possibilities that multiple channels give the retailer which lets them be transparent and up to date on inventory and prices. This is something the authors found to be an important aspect for customers. For example, the ability to check inventory status online would make participant 6 buy more clothes in offline channels. As mentioned in the previous section, price comparisons also turned out to be essential for some of the participants in the gathering of information.

Even though new technology becomes available for retailers, Niemeier et al., (2013) argue that how customers behave on each step in the purchase process may change but that actual process remain unchanged. This is something the authors could see from the interviews. No matter what the preferences were and how they shopped (online or offline channels), the participants all followed a purchasing process in some way. What is different is their expectations for each step. According to Beck and Rygl (2015), the omni-channel trend is changing the way retail is done as previously mentioned. Examples of this are buy-in-store/ send home and buy online/ pickup in store. These combinations were also mentioned by the participants of this study as well as buy online/ return to store. Some of the participants even stated that they could change the preferred channel if more flexible experience between channels were possible.
5.3 Effects for independent brick and mortar stores

Already established competitive advantages for independent brick and mortar stores that the authors could find from the interviews were the uniqueness of the product assortment, better service in store and a more thought through the layout of the stores. Our analysis shows that independent brick and mortar stores do many things well, and have success factors to build on. First, what many participants mentioned was the products in an independent store. Some of the participants mentioned this as the primary factor for a visit. Participants enjoyed the relatively small range since they felt that there was more thought behind the selection of the store's inventory and collection when compared to stores in larger chains. Secondly, the experience in the independent store is considered better than in other stores. What participants usually refer to is the more personal feeling and service in the independent store. Many participants think it is because the independent store is more genuine in their service, they do it because they want and not must while larger chain employees are perceived as more indifferent and just “doing their job”. Salespeople in independent brick and mortar stores are also perceived as more knowledgeable. Lastly, the layout and experience in-store often came up as an important factor for participants to choose to shop in an independent brick and mortar store instead of a larger chain. The interior was often seen as well-structured and good looking in contrast to many larger chains where the layout and lack of order in the store made several of the participants even leave the store. This is something that these types of stores can and should develop to stand out.

From the interviews, the authors could see that how independent brick and mortar stores rely on customers finding information and inspiration about them has changed. Customers use the online channels to a great extent to educate themselves about what items to purchase as well where they should purchase it. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, independent brick and mortar stores still, to a large extent, rely on information gathering in-store and walk-ins from customers while many customers want to be informed before they visit the store, no matter if offline or online channels will be used for the actual purchase. However, some participants mentioned negative factors about different problems with the independent stores. First of all, the access to information, or lack of it, is apparent. Since there is no chain or brand, the customers without previous knowledge of the store will face different problems. Matters mentioned in the interviews was the uncertainty about what type of store it was, related to age group and target customers. Some participants even avoided stores that they did not know for sure was for their
age group and gender. Other customers watched more closely at the dress windows and what type of customers entered the store before deciding whether to shop or not. Participants want more information about stores and product range before a visit. Independent brick and mortar stores must reach out in more channels to keep or expand its customer base.

As discussed previously in this chapter, the information search and gathering is an essential step for a customer in the purchasing process (Berman & Evans, 2013; Niemeier et al., 2013). The participants wanted to search, categorize and compare items online before purchasing. This was evident no matter the preference for shopping in online or offline channels. As also mentioned earlier, Niemeier et al., (2013) states that searching for information is closely connected to the evaluating and selecting step in a customers purchasing process. It is therefore important for a store to be considered at the moment of search to compete. This means that many independent brick and mortar stores are left out since they do not have their inventory searchable online when customers are looking around for both inspiration and information. The value of online channels for many of the participants of this study was the easy way to search, find and compare items in a very convenient way. The actual delivery part of e-commerce was not the primary factor and could even be a negative factor for some of the participants. The inability to try on and feel items was also mentioned many times in the interviews. Independent brick and mortar stores are perceived as having good products, but they need to make customers aware of them by increasing their online presence on for example search engines and e-commerce stores. This is a vital step to serving customers in more channels, hence moving toward an omni-channel approach.

Many participants were positive to expand their shopping to more channels than today. Stores must offer better service in multiple channels to create and fulfill a more seamless experience. Participants mentioned matters like order online/ pick-up in store, order in-store/ send home and order online/return-to-store for example. Coming back to Bell et al., (2014), retailers compete by informing the customer about the products and delivering items either in-store or by sending it to the customer. For these stores to compete in multiple channels, they first need to open up their information in online channels as we mentioned above. Second, as we could see in the interviews was a willingness from customers to try and feel clothing before purchasing but still reserving or buying it online. This shows that customers like the initial part of e-commerce where search and categorization, as well as easy payment from home, can be done but they also like the feeling of going to a store and trying the clothes and feeling the fit.
and material. This behavior opens up possibilities for offline stores in general and independent brick and mortar stores more specifically to move their process for purchases into several channels and give customers choices that match their shopping preferences before, during and after a purchase.

![Diagram of online and offline store advantages]

**Figure 1:** How independent brick and mortar stores can compete using omni-channel
6 Conclusions and Discussion

The ambition of the following chapter is to answer the research questions provided at the beginning of this thesis followed by a discussion revolving the topic. Further, the relevance of this study will be reviewed, and the chapter will conclude with a presentation of research implications and future research opportunities.

6.1 Conclusion

What do customers expect from an independent brick and mortar store today?

The purpose with this thesis was to investigate how independent brick, and mortar stores in the fashion industry can compete against e-commerce companies as well as larger chains in both the online and offline channel by using an omni-channel approach. To do this, the authors wanted to look at omni-channel retailing from a previously less researched subject, by using a customer centric approach to how customers perceive channels and the way they can interact with them through technology. To do this, the authors wanted first to understand how customers shop today and what they believe are pains and positive things with shopping clothes in both online and offline channels. This to understand the purchasing behavior of today's consumers and in that way, find areas where the interaction of channels can solve problems for customers.

What was found from the interviews is that first, customers focus on products rather than brands. They want a specific product and the best way to get it. The participants interviewed for this thesis were quite divided when it comes to channel preference. Second, the group that enjoyed offline shopping saw independent brick and mortar stores as having a more unique product offering than larger chains and e-commerce stores. Third, many of the participants also perceived the independent brick and mortar stores as having a thought through in-store experience with better layout and structure. However, what this study has shown is also that the lack of store brand can hinder potential customers to access and try out an independent brick and mortar store. Customers want to do research online before they purchase fashion. This puts pressure on independent brick and mortar to both showcase themselves as well as their inventory online since there is where potential customers are looking for new items first.
What do customers expect from an independent brick and mortar store in the future?

The need from customers to find information quick and easy as well as comparing items online, make any item in any channel having to become more accessible. This can be in search engines, their website or other e-commerce stores since these are the places where customers go to sort and categorize to be inspired and informed about items before purchasing. From the research, the authors could also see that both online and offline channels had positive and negative aspects. What many participants liked from shopping online was as just mentioned the easy way to get an overview of products as well as information about similar items and prices. The easy way to order and pay was also mentioned as a positive factor. However, the participants were not excited about the actual delivery of product from online. Many mentioned lack of trying the items and feeling the quality and sometimes tricky delivery and returns as reasons why online shopping was not perfect. On the other side, offline channels were said to be a very inefficient way to shop. Not being able to get an overview of items in and between physical stores gave a bad experience for many of the participants. There were however many participants that enjoyed the feeling of trying on clothes before buying which make this a strong argument for physical stores.

How can these insights be leveraged into a successful and sustainable competitive advantage for independent brick and mortar stores?

The problems mentioned above and throughout this thesis create opportunities for retailers to serve customers using different channels along the purchasing and decision-making process. Since both online and offline channels have their advantages, an omni-channel approach can be the right way for a retailer to differentiate themselves in this fast-moving environment. By giving a customer the opportunity to be more flexible on the process towards a purchase the store can capture a larger customers base and provide relief to many of the pain points customer sees when having to shop in only a single channel, either offline or online. Many independent brick and mortar stores already have a unique product offering and in-store experience. By digitalizing this offering to allow for potential customers to find the store and their products already in the information search part of their process, independent brick and mortar stores can compete on better terms. To implement or improve online presence like e-commerce and sell their products through other channels online. By also allowing customers to move more
seamlessly between channels in their purchase process, independent brick and mortars can serve customers in more ways and hence improve the shopping experience across channels.

6.2 Discussion

There is no secret that the retail industry is changing. Companies, experts, and researchers all agree on the change aspect. However, how this change will occur is less clear. What will the role of a physical store be in the coming years? The literature review of this thesis shows that the boundaries between offline and online are getting blurred out and that retailers in all channels are working toward the change but is that enough for customers to value stores even when same day deliveries are available from e-commerce giants like Amazon? A possible role of stores could be pop-up stores or showrooms where customers can do the fulfillment part of shopping online and use the physical locations as a place for inspiration emotional attachment. Independent brick and mortar stores seem to have a better position than fashion retailers such as HM or Lindex. When online actors like Amazon and Asos becomes better, this broad value proposition becomes difficult to defend. Being narrow and supplying unique products could be a right way of maintaining growth. Independent brick and mortar stores could also be better equipped to handle a seamless shopping experience in several channels because of less logistical issues of for example supplying same-day delivery in a specific city. The independent brick and mortars might be able to create a competitive advantage in this segment due to their relation to the customer and the ability for fast and convenient deliveries due to proximity to the customer.

6.3 Further research

This research should be regarded as an elementary introduction to the sources of competitive advantage for independent brick and mortar stores using multiple channels in the retail process. The focus of previous research has been on the industry, and retailer perspective of omni-channel retail and not enough research has been done with a focus on the customer perspective. The empirical findings have confirmed previous research about how customers perceive the online and offline channels. To confirm the result of this study and to gain a deeper insight, more studies are needed in the specific categories. Each of the factors found in the results would require more research on its own to understand to what extent each of the factors influences a
customer’s channels selection. There is also interesting topics from the retail perspective. For instance, how and to what cost these findings can be implemented and if it is feasible to implement for an independent brick and mortar store. Furthermore, it would be interesting to investigate how initiatives like Helpa mentioned earlier could affect independent brick and mortar stores. Also, if different stores can collaborate with each other and what effects of that could do to create a better experience for consumers of the future. This thesis was done with a focus on fashion retailing. Research on how these findings would translate into other product categories in retail, for example, hardware or electronics can add interesting insights into the retail industry as a whole.

6.4 Implications

This research structure and chosen methods are bound by criticism and other drawbacks as discussed in chapter 3. The evidence is not enough to draw any conclusions about a larger population. Hence, this was not the research focus, instead to generate new insights about the customer perspective of omni-channels for independent stores. Also, even though this thesis was conducted with the highest possible integrity and devotion, there is impossible to rule out different shortcomings. Firstly, the sample is enough to cover a qualitative study of this sort. However, the sample was based on a convenience basis due to the limited time that was allowed for this study. The participants in the study were only based on availability, thus a “right place at the right time” fashion. With another sampling approach, the result might have been different. On the contrary, the authors are pleased with the sampling outcome since the participants were well divided regarding age, gender, and online/offline channel preference. Secondly, the study was only done in Sweden with participant’s residence in the Jönköping region. There is nothing that suggests the findings will apply in other regions. However, many participants represented different regions in Sweden and mentioned independent brick and mortar stores in other cities in Sweden as well. Lastly, it is not farfetched to assume that the authors have affected the outcome in the results in some ways. Even though high integrity and truthfulness to the results have been established, there is always a risk of bias that might affect the results in different ways. For example, how the data was collected. There is as mentioned in the method, a risk that the authors affected the participants in the way the questions were asked and framed. Especially during the later interviews the presumptions about answers, due to previous interviews could have affected the questions and conclusions drawn.
6.5 Managerial Implications

Even though generalization beyond the sample is not applicable for the result of this thesis, it can still provide insights for brick and mortar store owners about their customers. For instance, how and why customers shop the way they do as well as make their decisions regarding the selection of channels is essential to understand what the customer values with a brick and mortar store. Knowing this can help store owners understand what they do right at the moment and what they need to improve when it comes to adapting to the new retail industry. This thesis has also shown what customers like and dislike with e-commerce and physical stores which can let managers design their shopping experience with the better of two worlds in mind. Because the findings show that customers like parts of both online and offline channels processes, combining these insights can build a foundation for how and in what stages to implement omni-channel retailing for independent brick and mortar stores.

6.6 Societal and Ethical Effects of This Study

Future research on disruptive forces of new technology benefits from being consumer-oriented since the choices of consumers primarily drive the retail industry. Therefore, this thesis makes an important contribution to the subject. Furthermore, it is essential for decision-makers in city and governmental institutions to understand the future of the retail industry. Retail is a large part of people's daily life and decisions implemented should be adapted to the sector. Both are working for and with this industry regarding regulations and other policies. The retail industry also employs a significant share of the working population which makes it an important industry to understand and cover changes in since disruption in this sector affects people in both cities as well as more rural areas. Independent brick and mortar stores are also necessary to establish and retain a wide variety of stores, especially in smaller cities which can have both economic and geopolitical consequences. Understanding sources of competitive advantage for these types of stores could be one factor to counteract monopoly situations and compete against chains or giants like Amazon, which uses automation as an important factor of their business model.
References


Appendix

Appendix 1

Interview guide

Intro
How old are you?
How often do you shop clothes?
  • How many of these purchases are done online?
  • How many are done in a store?
What price range?
Is there a certain item you find particularly interesting?

Purchase behavior and perception:
What is your preference channel for buying clothes? Why?
  • If offline, why not online?
  • If online, why not offline?
  • What could make you change?
Are most of your fashion purchases planned or impulsive?
Do you look for information (price, reviews, etc) prior a fashion purchase?
  • If yes, how?
Would you call yourself price sensitive?
Would you like to have personal service during a purchase?
  • If yes, in which circumstances?

Online
Describe your last online fashion shopping experience?
Why do you purchase fashion online?
What is the most important factor when buying clothes online?
What is the most positive factor regarding online stores?
What is the most negative factor regarding online stores?

Offline
Describe your last offline fashion shopping experience?
Why do you purchase fashion in stores?
How important is proximity to stores?
What is the most important factor when buying clothes offline?
What is the most negative factor regarding physical stores?
What is the most positive factor regarding physical stores?

Multi-channel
Do you know about multi-channel retailing?
  • If yes, what is your definition of it and what do you think about it?
Many online stores are now using offline channels and many large retail chains are combining their online and offline channels to create value for consumers, what is your opinion of this?
Is there any combination of channels that is interesting to you?
  • Apps
  • Store
  • Website
  • VR/AR
• GPS/ Location based service
• Instore purchase/ home delivery, getting app deals when close to store, etc
Describe your perfect shopping experience? (No limits to reality)
• How would you order?
• Where would you be?
• How would you pay?
• How would you return your item?
• What kind of service did you receive?

Perception of small brick and mortar stores
Have you ever bought fashion in small brick and mortar store?
• Why?
• Why not?
How was this experience?
What items did you buy?
What is your perception of small brick and mortar fashion stores?
What could make you choose a small fashion brick and mortar store instead of a larger chain?
What could make you choose a small fashion brick and mortar store instead of an online store?