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# Information-based power

## **A balancing act between retail strategies and consumer movement patterns**

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## Abstract

**Title:** Information based power – A balancing act between retail strategies and consumer movement patterns

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**Problem background:** The barrier between physical stores and online stores is blurred, which is paving the way for multi- and omni-channel retailing. Consumers of today are having a great access to information, due to their increased use of digital devices. Thus, the power among consumers is increasing, which is creating a thought of whether the consumer, or the retailer, is the party in charge.

**Aim of the study and research questions:** The aim of this study is to attain an understanding of the views of retailers on multi- and omni-channel strategies, and their perceptions and handling of consumer movement patterns. Thereby, we are also striving for an understanding of the division of information-based power between retailers and consumers in a multi- and omni-channel retailing context. The research questions below will be directing the work process of this study.

- How do retailers, offering high involvement products, discuss multi- and omni-channel strategies?
- How do retailers, offering high involvement products, handle consumer movement patterns between various retail channels?
- Based on the answers to the former questions, how can the division of information-based power between retailers and consumers be interpreted?

**Method:** This study has been conducted through a qualitative research method, with an inductive approach. The primary data has been collected through ten semi-structured interviews, and the respondents have been strategically selected. The collected material has been interpreted through a hermeneutic approach.

**Conclusions:** The decision of working either according to a multi- or an omni-channel strategy may have an impact on the opportunities and challenges from working with various channels. It may also affect the handling of consumer movement patterns and the direction of consumers to certain channels. Lastly, the division of information-based power between retailers and consumers, in a multi- and omni-channel retailing context, may be a continuous and complex balancing act between these two parties.

**Keywords:** *Multi-channel retailing; omni-channel retailing; consumer movement patterns; high involvement products; information; information-based power.*

## Preface

We would like to express our gratitude to those people, who have been involved in this study. First of all, we would like to thank each other for a good cooperation. There have been times of pressure and irritation, but we have handled it together. We would also like to thank our supervisor, Elin Bommenel, who has been a great support throughout the entire process. She has been giving us good advice and new insights, which we will bring into the future. We would also like to thank all of the ten respondents, who kindly agreed to participate in this study. We are very thankful that they wanted to share their expertise and experiences with us. Lastly, we would like to thank our families and friends, who have put up with our mood irregularities and our times of being unreachable.

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Enjoy the reading.

My Lindersson and Malin Nilsson  
*Helsingborg, May 2015*

*The work on this Bachelor Thesis has been equally divided between the two authors.*

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# 1. The meaning of using various channels

*Have you ever been reflecting on your movement pattern towards a purchase of a product? If you are the one to make active decisions of where to become aware of a product and where to purchase it, or if you are being directed by the retailers? If you are the party in charge, or if the retailer is the party in charge and directing you? Perhaps you have received a newsletter or a text message, which offers you discount on a product if you are purchasing it online instead of in-store? Perhaps you have decided to purchase that product online instead of in-store, due to the offer? Perhaps you have received a newsletter offering you discount on a product in all channels of the firm? Perhaps you then have decided to purchase that concessionary product in-store? Reflect on this for a minute, in which situation would you perceive yourself as the party in charge?*

## 1.1. Problem background

In 2014, the sales online, including transactions via computers and mobile devices, represented 6.4 percent of the total retail sales in Sweden (PostNord 2015). At present, nearly 50 percent of the Swedish consumers are using their smartphones to search for information before conducting a purchase, both online and in-store (Andersson 2014). As a result of a maturity among both consumers and retailers, created by the technological development, the Swedish consumers are adapting more digitalized consumption-habits (PostNord 2015: 11).

During the recent years, the growth of e-commerce worldwide has been rapid (Fredriksson 2013). At present, there is an ongoing growth of the phenomenon m-commerce, since mobile devices offer the consumers opportunities to be informed about products and prices, regardless of time and location (Fulgoni 2015: 377). The growth of m-commerce is described to be due to the need for flexibility among consumers of today (Benou, Vassilakis & Vrechopoulos 2012: 94). Consumers of today have a great access to information and a nearly constant access to the Internet (PostNord 2015: 30). In 2014, the average Swedish consumer was searching information among approximately ten sources, before conducting a purchase (Söderlund 2014: 13).

Today, there is an ongoing discussion about omni-channel retailing, which could be viewed as an extension of the multi-channel retailing concept (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson 2014: 6 ) Multi- and omni-channel are two concepts describing different levels of the same phenomenon. The phenomenon in itself regards the exchange of information, services and products between retail firms and consumers, through various

channels (Söderlund 2014: 28). The meaning of various channels is, in this study, multiple channels with different characteristics.

When applying omni-channel solutions, a consumer focus is described as vital (Fulgoni 2015: 379). Eliminating organizational channel silos is described as important, since consumers are expecting seamless experiences (ibid.). Due to the digital devices, the control among consumers is increasing (Murphy 2015). The digital development, the need to offer seamless experiences, and the increasing control among consumers may be perceived as important aspects to take into account by retailers that are using various channels. A thought created by the situation of today is whether the consumer, or the retailer, is the party in charge.

## 1.2. Problem discussion

At present, research is addressing the phenomena multi- and omni-channel retailing from both consumer and business perspectives. Such research emphasizes, for instance, the phenomena of multi- and omni-channel, the opportunities and challenges of these phenomena (Wagner, Schramm-Klein & Steinmann 2013; Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson 2014), and the requirements for seamless integrations (Griffiths & Howard 2008; Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson 2014; Schramm-Klein, Wagner, Steinmann and Morschett 2011; Zhang et al. 2010). Though, the phenomena of multi- and omni-channel, in connection to consumer purchase-decision processes and movement patterns, have only been examined from a consumer perspective. In such research, factors that may influence the purchase decisions of consumers and their choices of channels for purchases are being emphasized (Fulgoni 2014; Gupta, Su & Walter 2004).

We have discovered an absence of research where the phenomena multi-and omni-channel, and consumer movement patterns, are examined simultaneously from a business perspective. We have also discovered an absence of research emphasizing these aspects in connection to the power aspect. Thus, we experience a need to create a basis for such research. Since many retailers of today are using various channels in their businesses, we are considering it interesting to study the views of retailers on strategies for using various channels. We are also considering it interesting to study how these retailers are handling the consumer movement patterns between their various channels. Since technology and the Internet have created greater opportunities among consumers to be informed, and since there is a decreasing information asymmetry between consumers and firms, we believe that this may have impacts on the division of information-based power between these parties. It is not given which the party in charge is, and by studying views and work practices of retailers, regarding the consumer movement patterns, there may be a chance to attain a greater understanding of which the party in charge is.

### 1.3. The area of the study

To narrow this study to a more manageable area, retailers offering high involvement products will be emphasized. Hernant and Boström (2010: 121) describe high involvement products as products, for which the consumers actively are engaging in the purchase-decision. The scene for the purchase is important to the consumer, since the consumer needs to trust in, for instance, the quality of the product. Low involvement products are, in turn, considered as the opposite to high involvement products (ibid.). The choice of emphasizing high involvement products, is based on the complexity of such products. We believe that it may be challenging for retailers, offering high involvement products, to design strategies for their various channels. For retailers, offering low involvement products, it may be less challenging. We do also believe that offering sufficient information and customer support are vital when offering high involvement products. Thus, we consider it interesting to study how retailers, offering high involvement products, are discussing multi-and omni-channel strategies and the handling of consumer movement patterns. This study will emphasize high involvement products such as *outdoor equipment, tires, construction goods, household and leisure goods, furniture and cosmetics*.

### 1.4. The aim of the study

The aim of this study is to attain an understanding of the views of retailers on multi-and omni-channel strategies, and their perceptions and handling of consumer movement patterns. Thereby, we are also striving for an understanding of the division of information-based power between retailers and consumers in a multi- and omni-channel retailing context. The research questions below will be directing the work process of this study.

### 1.5. Research questions

- How do retailers, offering high involvement products, discuss multi- and omni-channel strategies?
- How do retailers, offering high involvement products, handle consumer movement patterns between various retail channels?
- Based on the answers to the former questions, how can the division of information-based power between retailers and consumers be interpreted?

### 1.6. Disposition

This study has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter, *The meaning of using various channels*, is functioning as the introduction to this thesis. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce and offer a pre-



understanding of the subject of this study. In this chapter the problem background, the problem discussion, the area of the study, the aim of the study, and the research questions are presented. Furthermore, this chapter contains a glossary, and the theoretical concepts of this study. In the second chapter, *Creating prerequisites for achieving the aim of the study*, the chosen methodological approach of the study, and the components of the strategy of the study are presented. For instance, the collection of primary and secondary data is described. In the third chapter, *Connecting retailer strategies and consumer movement patterns*, the analysis of the study is being conducted. The theoretical concepts are applied to the collected material, and the theoretical concepts are being complemented with further theories and research within the field of the study. This constitutes the basis for the analysis. The purpose of this chapter is to answer the first two research questions. The fourth chapter, *Retail strategies, consumer movement patterns and information-based power*, the findings of the analysis are presented initially. Thereafter, the chapter is continued with a discussion. The purpose of the discussion is to answer the third research question, which requires a discussion of the first two question in order to be answered. The discussion is being concluded by a summary, which is leading forth to suggestions for future research.

## 1.7. Glossary

*Below follows a list of concepts frequently used in this thesis. For further definitions of the concepts, see section 1.8. Theoretical concepts.*

By *channel* “a contact point, or a medium, through which a firm and a customer interact” (Wagner, Schramm-Klein and Steinmann 2013: 572) is regarded.

By *physical store* a physically located channel for sales, and for face-to-face interactions, between retailers and consumers is regarded. This definition is based on our own perceptions of a physical store.

By *e-commerce* commercial transactions, including transmissions of information through the Internet, conducted through stationary computers or laptops (Jakimoski 2014: 17) are regarded.

By *m-commerce* activities related to commercial transactions, conducted through mobile devices (Benou, Vassilakis & Vrechopoulos 2012: 91) are regarded.

By *multi-channel retailing* sales of merchandise, or services, through more than one channel (Wagner, Schramm-Klein & Steinmann 2013: 572) is regarded.

By *omni-channel retailing* an extension of multi-channel retailing is regarded. Omni-channel retailing is involving a greater emphasis on the interaction between consumers and the brands of retailers, and a less emphasis on the channel used (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson 2014: 13).

By *high involvement products*, products for which the consumers are actively engaging in the purchase-decision (Hernant and Boström 2010: 195) are regarded.

By *power*, a socially constructed and hierarchal appearance, in which one party has got more control over a valued resource than the other party (Rucker, Miao & Galinsky 2014: 382), is regarded.

## 1.8. Theoretical concepts

*This section will address the phenomena multi-channel retailing and its extension omni-channel retailing, and the concepts inbound in these phenomena. This section will also address research regarding consumer purchase-decisions and consumer movement patterns. Therefore, this section will function as a description of concepts, which will be developed by additional theories in chapter 3. Connecting retailer strategies and consumer movement patterns. The purpose of this division is to create visibility of the applicability of the different concepts and theories.*

### 1.8.1. The use of various retail channels

*In this part of the section, the concepts of multi- and omni-channel retailing will be described. The understanding of these concepts is of great importance, when asking the respondents questions concerning multi- and omni-channel strategies. First, the concepts inbound in multi- and omni-channel retailing will be described. These concepts are constituted by the main digital channels used for sales and marketing within multi- and omni-channel retail firms. Other potential channels, and a further description of the physical channel, will be excluded. Thereafter, the phenomena of multi- and omni-channel retailing will be described as whole.*

According to Wagner, Schramm-Klein and Steinmann (2013: 572) a channel is “a contact point, or a medium, through which a firm and a customer interact”. E-commerce is described as “a universal expression for business- and commercial transactions, including transmissions of information, through the Internet” (Jakimoski 2014: 17). Simultaneously, m-commerce is described as “an activity related to a commercial transaction, which is conducted through wireless or mobile networks and is using wireless or mobile devices as user interface” (Benou, Vassilakis & Vrechopoulos 2012: 91). The wireless characteristics of m-commerce

enable the consumers to engage in e-commerce anytime, anywhere (Coursaris & Hassanein 2002: 248). Though, m-commerce and e-commerce are two different concepts. M-commerce may not offer the consumers the same convenience as e-commerce may, due to its limitations (Maity & Dass 2014: 43). Thus, there may be a need to reflect on the abilities of the channels used.

At present, the barrier between physical stores and online stores is blurred (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson 2014: 9). Today, devices such as smartphones and tablets may be used during visits in physical stores, which has led to an increased information symmetry between retailers and consumers. The challenge of today is to respond to these changed conditions (ibid.).

The concept of multi-channel retailing involves retailers, operating in more than one channel (Wagner, Schramm-Klein & Steinmann 2013: 572). By this concept, retailers are managing their channels as individual channels, simultaneously as they manage the synergies and complementarity across their channels (ibid.). The concept of omni-channel retailing may be viewed as an extension of the multi-channel retailing concept (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson 2014: 6). While the concept of multi-channel retailing mainly involves a distinct division between different channels, the concept of omni-channel retailing involves free consumer movement within one single transaction process (ibid.). In contrast to the concept of multi-channel retailing, the omni-channel concept emphasizes the interaction between the consumers and the brand, rather than the channel used (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson 2014: 13). Thus, the firms may develop their operations either according to a multi-channel strategy, or an omni-channel strategy, when using various channels.

Consumers are described to be expecting consistency regarding services and experiences offered by firms, irrespective of what channel used (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson 2014: 8). Consumers are willing to move seamlessly between channels, on their own terms. Though, retailers are described as often unable to deliver integrated experiences, due to a mentality where the different channels are handled separately (ibid.). Thus, there may be a gap between the expectations of the consumers and the abilities of the retailers.

With an understanding of the meaning of these different concepts and their connections, the ability to understand the channel strategies may be enhanced as well. By this understanding, prerequisites for the ability to answer the first research question may be created. In order to answer the second research question, a description of further concepts is required.

### 1.8.2. Consumer purchase-decisions

*In this part of the section, concepts concerning the purchase-decisions of consumers will be described. We believe that the purchase-decision processes of consumers are of importance to the understanding of consumer movement patterns. Since this study is focusing on products, characterized by high consumer involvement, the concept of high involvement products will be defined and described as well. The understanding of these concepts are of great importance when asking the respondents questions concerning their handling of the consumer movement patterns.*

The consumer purchase-decision process is described as consisting of five stages: problem recognition, search for information, evaluation of product alternatives, purchase, and post-purchase evaluation (Gupta, Su & Walter 2004: 133; Hernant & Boström 2010: 107). The process is initiated when the consumer identifies a problem or a need. In the next stage, search for information, consumers of today are facilitated by the Internet, which enables easy access to product information. In the third stage, some products may aggravate the possibilities for consumers to use the Internet for product evaluations. These kinds of products may be referred to as feel and touch products (Gupta, Su & Walter 2004: 134). The third stage influences the consumer purchase-decisions occurring in the fourth stage (ibid.). The fifth stage of the process is the stage, in which the consumers evaluate their purchases. Thus, the perceived satisfaction in this stage is crucial for future purchase-decisions (Hernant & Boström 2010: 114).

According to Hernant and Boström (2010: 195), high- and low involvement products regard the level of consumer involvement in the various phases of the purchase process. When the consumer is highly involved in the purchase of a product, the product is considered as a high involvement product (ibid.). The degree of product involvement is described to be the strongest factor, influencing the appearance of the purchase process (ibid.). When the involvement of the consumer is high, the consumer is carefully processing and analyzing information in each step of the purchase process (Hernant & Boström 2010: 195-196). The degree of involvement is affected by, for instance, the degree of uncertainty perceived by the consumer before a purchase. The degree of involvement is also affected by the interest of the consumer, regarding the concerned product category. Also earlier experiences of the consumer are affecting the degree of consumer involvement. Insecurity, together with insufficient interests or experiences, are increasing the degree of consumer involvement in the purchase process (Hernant & Boström 2010: 196). As consumers are attaining more experience of purchasing and using a product, the more simplified the purchase process becomes (ibid.). Thus, retailers, offering high involvement products, may find it challenging to handle consumer movement patterns.

With an understanding of the meaning of these different concepts, and by connecting these concepts to the answers of the respondents, the ability to understand how retailers are handling the consumer movement patterns may be enhanced. Thus, it may be possible to answer the second research question.

### 1.8.3. Information-based power and purchase-decisions

*In this part of the section theories regarding the aspect of power in connection to consumer purchase-decisions will be presented, in order to create a pre-understanding required for the discussion of the division of information-based power in chapter 4. Retail strategies, consumer movement patterns and information-based power. The power aspect will be described from a consumer perspective and from an organizational perspective, since relevant theories from a retail perspective have not been found. Since the aspect of information has been described to increase the amount of informed consumers, and to decrease the information asymmetry between retailers and consumers, information-based power will be emphasized in this part of the section.*

Rucker, Miao and Galinsky (2014: 381-396) are describing *power* as a socially constructed and a hierarchal appearance, in which one party has got more control over a valued resource, than the other parties involved. Thus, the relation between the parties involved is characterized by a asymmetric control over the regarded resource (ibid.). In this study, the valued resource may be viewed as the aspect of information. Labrecque, vor dem Esche, Mathwick, Novack & Hofacker (2013: 261) are describing that the Internet has enabled an access to information among consumers that was not possible before. Consumers of today have a great access to, for instance, product reviews, product specifications, and product prices. Thus, the information asymmetry between firms and consumers may be viewed as reduced, simultaneously as the options among consumers are increasing. This is described to be leading to more demanding consumers, active in various channels, which are more difficult to influence than those which are only active in the offline channel. Therefore, the consumer power may be viewed as increased (ibid.). Labrecque et al. (2013: 261) are referring to this kind of power as *information-based power*.

Shirkhodae and Rezaee (2014: 593) are discussing the perceived risk of negative consequences, when using a product or service. In comparison to product involvement, perceived risk is regarding the negative aspect of a purchase. Product involvement is described to regard the positive consequences of a purchase (ibid.). Since consumers are described to generally be more motivated by the avoidance of mistakes, than by the maximization of the utility of a purchase, perceived risk may be viewed as a strong explanation of consumer behavior (Shirkhodae and Rezaee 2014: 594). In order to reduce negative consequences of a purchase, consumers are described to carefully evaluate products and search for additional information before the

purchase takes place (ibid.). The descriptions made by Shirkhodae and Rezaee (2014) may be connected to insecurity, which Clegg, Kornberger and Pitsis (2005: 172) are describing as a source of power.

#### 1.8.4. Creating a pre-understanding through the concepts

The purpose of describing these concepts has been to attain a pre-understanding, in order to enable suitable questions asked to the respondents, and to conduct the analysis of this study. This section should be viewed as a brief introduction of the described concepts of *multi- and omni-channel retailing*, and *consumer purchase-decisions*. In chapter 3. *Connecting retailer strategies and consumer movement patterns* these concepts will be connected to and further developed by additional research, as well as connected to the empirical material. Thereby, the concepts connections to retail strategies and consumer movement patterns will be made visible and thus, the first two research questions may be answered.

Furthermore, the understanding of the concepts presented in this section will be of importance to the ability to answer the third research question, since the answer to this question will be based on the answers to the former questions and on the analysis of the third chapter. Since the aspect of information may be viewed as a consequence of the digital channels and the Internet, and since the aspect of information may be a relevant part of consumer purchase-decisions, we believe that it will be possible to answer the question regarding information-based power when the other two questions have been answered. In order to be able to interpret the division of information-based power, the role of information must be understood.

## 2. Creating prerequisites for achieving the aim of the study

*In this chapter the approach of collecting material for a further analysis will be presented. The strategy and direction of the study, the practical approach of the study, and the collection of data will be presented when the process of creating prerequisites for achieving the aim of the study is presented. To demonstrate the relevance of the collected material, this chapter will contain critical reflections on chosen research methods and argumentations of the choices, which have been made. The purpose of this chapter is to function as a transparent description of the work process of this study.*

### 2.1. The strategy of the study

According to Bryman (2008: 167), there are two main directions a research can take. The first direction is quantitative research, which emphasizes measurability, causality, generalizations and replications (ibid.). The other direction is qualitative research, which emphasizes understanding, symbolic interaction and

phenomenology. By trying to view appearances through the eyes of the respondents, it is possible to attain a deeper knowledge (Bryman 2008: 361). Qualitative researchers are emphasizing contextual understanding, while quantitative researchers are emphasizing generalization (Bryman 2008: 364, 372).

By this study we aim to attain an understanding about the views of retailers on multi-and omni-channel strategies, the retailer perceptions and handling of consumer movement patterns, and the division of information-based power between retailers and consumers. To be able to achieve this aim, we considered the qualitative research method suitable. By this method, we will be able to attain a contextual understanding of the studied phenomena.

Qualitative methods can involve difficulties in generalizing the results of the research (Bryman 2008: 369). We are aware that it will not be possible to generalize the results of this study. Though, we consider it to be of greater importance to attain a deeper insight within the chosen field of multi- and omni-channel retailing, retailer perceptions and handling of consumer movement patterns, and the division of information-based power between retailers and consumers in a multi- and omni-channel retailing context. This would not be possible if a quantitative method was used.

## 2.2. The approach of the study

There are two possible approaches a researcher can use when he or she is relating theory and empirics to each other (Patel & Davidsson 2011: 23; Bryman 2008: 40). The first approach is deduction, which is based on conclusions regarding separate appearances, from general principles and existing theories (Patel & Davidsson: 2011: 23). The second approach is induction, in which the researcher formulates a theory from its collected information (Patel & Davidsson 2011: 24). The inductive approach was chosen as the approach of this study, since the chosen field for study, constituted by the views of retailers on multi- and omni-channel strategies and consumer movement patterns, has not been explored at a larger extent. As a basis for this study, theoretical concepts have been used, in order to be complemented by empirical material and further theories and research.

Induction involves the observations and reflections of a researcher regarding his or hers experiences of a social phenomenon (Johnson 1998: 28). The reflection is the basis for formulating explanations used to form guiding principles (ibid.). In the inductive approach, definitive explanations can specify *enough* conditions for a phenomenon to occur, but rarely the *necessary* (Bryman 2008: 512-513). When using an inductive approach there is a risk that the researcher does not know anything about the scope and the generality of

the study, since the study is based on an empirical ground, typical for the specific context (Patel & Davidsson 2011: 24).

We considered an inductive approach suitable for this study. Through an inductive approach of the study we did believe that preconditions for an understanding of the chosen field for the study would be created. Though, none of us had conducted an inductive study, before conducting this study. Therefore, in order to understand the meaning and the practical procedure of the inductive approach, we spent much time on reading books and discussing with our supervisor before commencing the study. We realized the importance of having a pre-understanding before collecting the primary data. To attain a pre-understanding, we searched for theories and research within the fields of omni-channel, seamless channel integrations, consumer purchase behavior, decision-making processes, and movement patterns.

To be able to conduct a proper analysis of the collected material, the material will be interpreted through a hermeneutic approach. According to Bryman (2008: 32) this approach is suitable when the researcher is aiming for an understanding of human behavior. Since the aim of this study is to create an understanding rather an explanation, we considered the hermeneutic approach suitable. This approach will be particularly essential in chapter 4. *Retail strategies, consumer movement patterns and information-based power*, when the analysis is brought a step further through further interpretations of the collected material.

### 2.3. Collection of data

*In this section we will give an account for the practical procedure of this study and the collection of data. First, we will describe how the primary data, consisting of in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews, has been collected. Thereafter, we will describe how the secondary data, constituted by theoretical concepts, theories and existing research, was collected.*

According to Bryman (2008: 517), the practical procedure of an inductive approach is initiated by a general research question, or a description of the problem, which in turn is leading to a theoretical selection. Thereafter, the researcher is collecting data, in order to encode this data and thereby to be able to form concepts out of it. The collected data is used for comparisons and as a basis for forming categories. The researcher is exploring the relations between the categories, in order to make hypotheses and assumptions. Thereafter, a new theoretical selection is made, and also a potential, new collection of data. The theory, which may arise, is not formal until there has been a collection and an analysis of data in other situations than the actual situation (Bryman 2008: 517-519). We are aware that our study cannot be viewed as an overall perspective on the phenomena multi- and omni-channel, and the perceptions of retailers regarding



consumer movement patterns. Thus, the aim of this study is not to generate formal theories. Instead, we are aiming to create a basis for future research and future theory generation.

### 2.3.1. Collection of primary data

This study has been based on qualitative in-depth interviews of the semi-structured kind, since we have been aiming for a deep empirical base. According to Bryman (2008: 413), a qualitative interview is based on the perceptions of the respondent. It is also possible to deviate from the interview-guide, constituting the basis of the interview, in order to generate more detailed answers (Bryman 2008: 413-414). We considered qualitative interviews as the most relevant alternative for this study. Thus, we decided to interview ten retailers, within firms offering high involvement products. We chose these retailers based on their experience and knowledge within the field of multi- and omni-channel retailing, in order to be able to attain a greater understanding of the field of this study.

An in-depth interview is enabling the respondent to answer the questions within its own frame of reference (May 2011: 136). This interview method is creating a risk that the respondent is moving in other directions than the desired, but it is also enabling the researcher to attain a greater understanding of the respondent (ibid.). According to Bryman (2008: 414-415), an in-depth interview of the semi-structured kind is designed to enable the respondents to formulate their answers in their own fashion. Semi-structured interviews are also enabling the researcher to ask questions, which are not included in the interview guide (ibid.). We decided to use a qualitative interview method, in order to be able to ensure relevant and deep answers to our questions. Since we already were familiar with conducting semi-structured interviews, we did not experience any need for practice before conducting the first semi-structured interview.

The motive of using qualitative, semi-structured interviews when collecting the material of this study, was to attain a profound understanding of the views of retailers on the phenomena multi- and omni-channel retailing, and an understanding of retailer perceptions and handling of consumer movement patterns. By using interviews with consultants as an out-set of the collection of material, we believed that a thorough understanding, enhancing the possibilities to ask further respondents relevant questions, would be created. Since these consultants have been working within retail for a long time, also in other positions than as consultants, we believed that they would be able to offer us the initial and deep understanding which we searched for.

Our purpose of interviewing retail consultants, was to map the most essential topics to examine further. During these interviews we used five main questions (Appendix 1), based on the main concepts of the study. Based on the answers to these questions, we were also using several spontaneous follow-up questions. From

these semi-structured interviews we were able to distinguish a pattern, based on the discussed topics. From this pattern we have been able to distinguish four main categories: *strategies and internal processes when using various channels, retailer perceptions and handling of consumer movement patterns, challenges from using various channels, and possibilities from using various channels*. By distinguishing patterns and categories in these interviews, our purpose was to enable findings of similarities and differences in the existent theory. From these categories and existent concepts we have been able to develop an interview-guide (*Appendix 1*) for further semi-structured interviews, which have been of more structured kind than the first three interviews.

According to Bryman (2008) the differences between responses during interviews via telephone, and responses during interviews in person, are marginal (Bryman 2008: 432). Thus, we did not consider it inappropriate to conduct three interviews via telephone, and to conduct one interview via Skype. We needed to conduct interviews through telephone and Skype, due to the geographical distance between us and these respondents. Since the interview questions were of general and professional kind, we had not expected any difficulties in conducting interviews in different contexts. To facilitate transliteration, to increase the credibility, and to limit the risk of personal interpretation, we have chosen to record the interviews after the approval of the respondents.

### 2.3.2 Critique of the primary data

The aim of this study is not to generate generalizable results, neither to develop new theories. Thus, we considered ten respondents to be sufficient. Since we are aware of the subjectivity qualitative research tend to contain, we have recorded the interviews. Thus, the transcriptions have been based on the exact words of the respondents. We have conducted the interviews in Swedish, which we believe may create questions of the accuracy of the English translations. Though, we have used as exact translations as possible and therefore, we do not consider the translation being a problem for the results of this study. The original, Swedish transcriptions have been kept and continuously compared to the translations.

### 2.3.3. Selection of respondents

*In this section our selection of respondents will be discussed and argued for. The respondents have been selected through a snowball sample.*

A snowball sample is considered to be a *convenience sample*, in which the researcher initially contacts a few respondents relevant to the study, and then uses these respondents to contact further respondents. A

snowball sample is not likely to be representative for an entire population (Bryman 2008: 196), but it is suitable to use this kind of sample if the researcher is aiming to focus the research on a certain field (Bryman 2008: 197). We considered this kind of sample suitable, since we aimed for interviewing retailers within firms offering high involvement products. Thus, we let a few respondents recommend other potential respondents, with relevant expertise and experience.

To achieve different perspectives on a certain subject, strategic selection may be useful (Trost 2005: 117-118). We have used a strategic selection for our interviews, since we have chosen respondents based on their experiences and knowledge. This has been made to attain an empirical material, suitable to the aim of the study. Since chance has not determined our selection, we have used what Bryman (2008: 194) is referring to as a *non-probability sample*. We considered this method of sampling suitable for this study, since we wanted to attain a specific understanding of the chosen field. We needed to interview competent people, with the ability to answer the questions in a reliable and explicit manner. The deep answers were also of importance for the understanding of the fashion, in which consumer movement patterns are being handled. For the first three interviews, respondents with a broader retail knowledge were considered desirable, since it would facilitate a proper basis for further interviews. During the selection for the rest of the interviews, we considered respondents with a narrower expertise more desirable. Thus, we believed that the possibilities of receiving deep answers would be enhanced. Since the questions of the two interview-guides used in this study were of general character, we have received different answers to the questions based on the perceptions and experiences of the respondents. In all interviews, we have used spontaneous follow-up questions to deepen the answers.

We recommend the reader to look into *Appendix 3* before continuing to chapter 3. *Connecting retailer strategies and consumer movement patterns*, since a list of the respondents is presented in this appendix. We believe that it will facilitate the reading, since we will refer to the respondents by mentioning them by their work positions in the following chapter.

#### 2.3.4. Collection of secondary data

To attain an increased understanding of the chosen field, we have searched for existent theories regarding this field. We have discovered an absence of a sheer business perspective on the chosen field, since the research and theories of today are interfusing the business and consumer perspectives. Based on this absence, we decided to conduct a qualitative study, in order to attain an understanding, which could complement existent theory and create a basis for future research. Regarding the phenomena of multi- and omni-channel, research and theories from a business perspective have been found. Though, these

phenomena are connected to a consumer perspective, when consumer purchase behaviors and consumer movement patterns are being emphasized as well. The purpose of the concepts presented in section 1.8. *Theoretical concepts*, has been to create a pre-understanding of the multi-and omni-channel phenomena, and consumer movement patterns. We believe that this pre-understanding has been vital when collecting empirical data and searching for further research and theories.

Our initial literature search through *LUB Search* was based on the following search words: *omni-channel, multi-channel, e-shopping, e-tailing, e-commerce, m-commerce, consumer purchase decisions, consumer movement patterns, high involvement products, experience goods, showrooming and webrooming*. During the search for existent research, we have found some researchers, which are well-cited by others. Articles and research by these well-cited researchers have been used as complement to the initial literature search. For instance, Xinyu Cao, Sendy Farag, Hanna Schramm-Klein, Tim Schwanen, and Gerhard Wagner are well-cited researchers.

From the initial search for theories and research, we have chosen particular theoretical concepts and research, which we consider are applicable to this study. The concepts has been presented in section 1.8. *Theoretical concepts* and will be further developed in chapter 3. *Connecting retailer strategies and consumer movement patterns*, in which the empirical data and complementing research are presented as well.

Concepts, which have not been used, but found during the initial search are: consumer perceptions of value concerning certain channels; consumer perceptions of insecurity when using certain channels; consumer perceptions of usefulness when using certain channels; consumer perceptions of self-efficiency when using various channels; goods and services with search, experience and credence attributes, and their affection on the purchase-decision process; consumer loyalty regarding various channels; and, showrooming behavior. We decided to exclude these concepts, since we realized that they required a broader study than we had prerequisites to conduct.

### 2.3.5. Critique of the secondary data

The secondary data of this study is consisting of theories and research regarding multi-channel, omni-channel, consumer movement patterns between channels, and consumer purchase decisions. Since all of the articles have been peer-reviewed, and the other literature has been found in the libraries of Lund University, the secondary data of this study should be considered as trustworthy. The fact that several researchers are mentioning one another, strengthens the trustworthiness of their research and our incentives of using it in this study. We have strived to avoid subjectivity and personal interpretation when citing and referring to the chosen researchers. Since the research, used in this study, has been explicit in its

fashion of describing the chosen field, there have not been any reasons for using interpretation or distortion regarding this research.

Since multi- and omni-channel retailing are global phenomena, we do not experience any disadvantages from combining literature from different countries with a Swedish business perspective. Regarding the purchase-decision process, both the Swedish researchers Hernant and Boström (2010) and the international researchers Gupta, Su and Walter (2004), are discussing this process in a correspondent fashion. Thus, we have chosen to combine their views, in order to strengthen their words.

To be able to attain a greater width in the analysis of chapter 3. *Connecting retailer strategies and consumer movement patterns*, a mixture of theoretical concepts, additional research, and applicable suggestions to retailers offered by researchers, are being activated. By presenting applicable suggestions to retailers, we believe that the similarities and differences between what retailers *should* do and what they are *doing* will be more visible in the analysis. Since we are aware that these applicable suggestions can generate *theoretical confusion*, we ensure that all applicable suggestions explicitly will be presented when they are being used. Thus, we believe that the differences between theoretical findings and findings consisting of applicable suggestions will be distinct.

## 2.4. Ethics

In order to ensure that a study is being conducted in an ethical fashion, Bryman (2008: 131) suggests four ethical principles which should be followed when Swedish research is being conducted. These four principles regard transparent information to the respondents concerning the study, voluntary participation of the respondents, confidentiality of information concerning the respondents, and guaranteeing usage of the material only in the actual study (Bryman 2008: 131-132). All of the respondents have been informed about the aim of the study, and also of the purpose of their interviews. We have made them understand that it has been their individual option, whether to participate or not. We have asked for their permission before recording the interviews. We have also offered all of the respondents to be anonymous in the study, both as a strategy to enable deeper answers and also to ensure the respondents that their words will not be deducible to them, which may be preferable for reasons of competition. Lastly, we have informed the respondents that we only have intentions of using the material collected from the interviews, in this particular study.

## 2.5. The trustworthiness of the study

*In order to attain trustworthiness of a study, four criteria should be considered (Bryman 2008: 354). These criteria will be described below, together with their means for this study.*

Bryman (2008: 354) is describing four criteria, which should be considered in order to attain trustworthiness of a study. *Credibility* is the first criteria, and in order to create credible results the researcher may need to report the results to the people who have been studied, in order for these people to confirm the correctness of the perceptions of the researcher (Bryman 2008: 354-355). We have let the respondents read through the transcripts of their interviews, before presenting the results in the study. This has been made in order to increase the credibility.

*Transferability* is the second criteria, which regards whether the results of the study are transferable to another context than the original, or not (Bryman 2008: 355). Since our study is conducted through an inductive approach based on ten interviews, the transferability may be insufficient. Thus, this study should mainly be viewed as a basis for future research within the chosen field.

*Dependability* is the third criteria, which requires an auditing point of view of the researcher in order for a study to be evaluated by this criteria. Thereby, the various phases of the research process must be transparent (Bryman 2008: 355). In order to attain dependability of this study, we have strived for transparency in our working processes.

*Confirmability* is the fourth criteria, which regards that the researcher is presupposing that he or she may not attain complete objectivity in social science. Though, this researcher is trying to ensure that he or she has been acting in good faith (Bryman 2008: 355). Qualitative interviews include a certain amount of subjectivity (Bryman 2008: 368-369), and thus, we are aware that it may be difficult to generally ratiocinate. Simultaneously, it would be difficult to generate the deepened knowledge we wished for, by using a quantitative study with lesser amount of subjectivity. We do realize that it is difficult to be objective within our chosen field, but since it is strategies and the results of these that we are emphasizing, we consider the subjectivity of this study to be limited.

## 2.6. Creating a further understanding through the method of the study

In this chapter we have presented the approach and the strategy of this study. Thus, this chapter should be considered as the core of the study. With this chapter our purpose has been to offer the reader an understanding of our work process, by describing the components of this procedure. In the following chapter

the analysis of the study will be conducted, and the first two research questions of this study will be answered.

### 3. Connecting retailer strategies and consumer movement patterns

*This chapter will be consisting of the collected material from the interviews and existent theories and research. Since the purpose of the section 1.8. Theoretical concepts was to create a pre-understanding of the main concepts of this study, also complementary research and theory will be presented in this chapter. By presenting complementary research and theory, the meaning of the main concepts will be developed, and a more distinct demonstration of differences and similarities in practical experiences and theoretical findings will be enabled.*

#### 3.1. Internal processes and strategies when using various channels

*In this section the discussions of retailers concerning internal processes and strategies, used when working with various channels, will be emphasized. This section should be considered as a description of the discussion by retailers regarding multi- and omni-channel strategies, and the views of retailers regarding the functions of the channels. Thus, it is the fashion in which these retailers are creating meaning that will be emphasized in this section.*

##### 3.1.1. Retailer ideas of being present in various channels

“It is good if the customer sees something in one place, but it is even better if it sees it in three or four places. Then the customer probably is caught and becomes interested.”

(E-commerce manager A)

In section 1.8 *Theoretical concepts*, the concepts of using various channels has been presented. For instance, opportunities for consumers to engage in e-commerce regardless of time and place was described (Coursaris & Hassanein 2002). Though, the presentation of the concepts has not consisted of descriptions of opportunities benefiting the retailers. According to the retail and e-commerce manager, the presence in various channels can broaden the businesses for retailers. The business consultant is, in turn, discussing presence in various channels as something that could strengthen the market position of a firm. E-commerce manager A is discussing the addition of an online-channel to the physical channel, as something that can blur

geographical boundaries and enable firms to reach new markets. The retail and e-commerce manager is agreeing: "I believe that the great strength is that you can find it in different places, depending on what is suitable". E-commerce manager B is describing the use of various channels as a fashion of reaching consumers where they are. Omni-channel manager A is discussing the importance of being present in the same channels as the target group, and to ask oneself the question: "Is our customer in this channel?". According to the discussions of these retailers, there may be opportunities of reaching new and greater markets, and also reaching the consumers where they are, when retailers are being present in various channels.

The presence in various channels may not bring opportunities per se. Following discussions are demonstrating some of the challenges from being present in various channels. E-commerce manager A is stating that "It takes much more time than you can imagine before you start to work with various channels". Similarly, the sales and marketing manager is considering to physically keep up with things, being the greatest challenge: "We are not that many, so for us the greatest thing is to physically keep up with everything". Omni-channel manager A is stating that there is a great challenge in resources in general, "to put resources into a specific area". Omni-channel manager A is instantiating that it is important to consider whether the target group is present in the particular channel or not. For instance, it is important to consider *how* the firm should be present, and in *what fashion* things should be done. E-commerce manager B is considering it important to be present in the channels of the firm with quality, and to grow with the channels, in order to be able to handle them. If the quality of a channel is insufficient, the overall impression of the firm may be damaged. Based on the discussions made by these retailers, prioritization of time and effort may be viewed as challenges for retailers using various channels. It is also likely that such prioritization has an impact on the quality of the various channels. The quality may, in turn, have an impact on the success of the channels.

"One thing is to be able to see what each part is giving, and the other  
thing is to be able to focus them all simultaneously.

These are two great challenges I can see."

(The chain manager)

Following quote demonstrates the view of omni-channel manager A: "There is no end to the online marketing" According to Omni-channel manager A, it is challenging to find limitations and to refrain from investments. Omni-channel manager B is, in turn, stating that it can be challenging to develop an IT-platform, and to convince the board of directors that such a large investment is necessary. In conclusion, prioritizations regarding investments may be as important as prioritizing time and effort. Investments may also be



connected to the quality aspect, since the quality may be insufficient when a firm is investing in more channels than it has prerequisites to handle.

### 3.1.2. Channels and the complementarity of various channels

“The online-store was supposed to direct people to the physical stores, and the physical stores were supposed to direct people to the online-store.

So, they were complementing each other.”

(E-commerce manager B)

It is apparent that the retailers of this study are experiencing both opportunities and challenges from their use of various channels. It is possible that these retailers have been basing their decisions of adding channels on the discussed aspects, but there may also be other aspects that are affecting the decisions. E-commerce manager B is describing how its firm initially added the online channel as a complement to the physical stores, since the customers wanted to view the products online. Therefore, the firm initially introduced a product catalogue online, and thereafter, the firm continued with sales online. Similarly, the business consultant, the management consultant, and the chain manager are discussing the addition of the online channel with the purpose of supporting the physical channel. The management consultant is describing the addition of the online channel as an opportunity to strengthening the brand of its firm.

“We introduced e-commerce two years ago and the primary purpose of the online store was to direct people to the physical stores. [...] This has made us treble the website traffic during the last two years.”

(The chain manager).

The business consultant is discussing the possibilities of increasing the overall sales and the turnover of the firm, by using complementing channels. Also the omni-channel consultant, e-commerce manager A, the sales and marketing manager, omni-channel manager B, and the retail and e-commerce manager are discussing the complementarity among the channels they are using. Omni-channel manager A is instantiating that the use of an online-store as a complement, did increase the sales in one specific, physical store with 10 to 15 percent. Kollman, Kuckertz and Kayser (2012: 192) are, in turn, discussing that physical stores may cannibalize consumers away from the online channels due to insufficient service online. To solve this problem, they are offering an applicable suggestion of increasing the online service. Such an approach may also enhance the synergic effects on all channels (ibid.). Since all of the retailers of this study are

discussing the complementarity of various channels, the risk of cannibalization has not been discussed. Though, some of the retailers are discussing the importance of offering service online, when the issue of creating uniformity in the image of the firm is discussed in the following part of this section. The uniformity, in turn, may be an important factor to enhance the complementarity of the channels and diminish the risk of cannibalization of certain channels.

Wagner, Schramm-Klein and Steinman (2013) are also discussing complementarity and are implying that it is important to work with synergies and complementarity, due to the affection these factors have on the consumer behavior. They are also arguing that synergies may enhance the possibilities of retailers to fulfill consumer needs (Wagner, Schramm-Klein & Steinmann 2013: 578). Schramm-Klein, Wagner, Steinmann, and Morschett (2011) are also discussing complementarity among channels. Channel integration may increase cross-channel synergies (Schramm-Klein et al. 2011: 509). According to Montoya-Weiss, Voss, and Grewal (2003), alternative channels may cause cross-channel effects such as a broader consumer exposure (Montoya-Weiss, Voss & Grewal 2003: 456). The findings of these researchers are strengthening the words of the retailers, regarding the complementarity among channels. Thus, adding channels with the purpose of complementing existent channels, may therefore be a common action. Complementarity is something that, by Wagner, Schramm-Klein and Steinmann (2013), has been described to be managed when a multi-channel strategy is being used. Since Piotrowicz and Cuthbertson (2014) have described omni-channel retailing as an extension of the multi-channel retailing concept, complementarity may also be managed when using an omni-channel strategy.

### 3.1.3. Retailer experiences of multi- and omni-channel retailing

“It is one brand, and sometimes you are online, sometimes you speak on the phone,  
sometimes you are chatting with someone who is in-store.

So, it is becoming more and more the same.”

(Omni-channel manager B)

Based on the discussions made by the retailers, there are both opportunities and challenges to take into account when using various channels. Complementarity among channels may, in turn, be a common purpose of adding new channels. Though, there may also be other aspects to take into account. For instance, omni-channel manager A is instantiating the importance of perceiving a firm as a unit. At a former firm of this retailer they decided to offer the customers the possibility to place products online into a *shopping list*. Though, omni-channel manager A rather wanted to see the products being put into the shopping cart, but

did soon realize the advantages of this function: “It was something we did not know would be used, but a connection was shown where the customer journey in somehow had started online but was completed in-store” Also Avery, Steenburgh, Deighton and Caravella (2012: 109) are discussing the view of firms as units. They are offering an applicable suggestion, by which they argue that retailers should manage their channels strategically and view them as a coalition, rather than as entities separated from each other (ibid.). Dholakia, Kahn, Reeves, Rindfleisch, Stewart and Taylor (2010: 93) are, in turn, discussing the integration of strategies for multiple channels as a specifically important challenge to handle. Thus, both the discussion by the retailer and the findings of the researchers are implying an importance in viewing the firm as a unit. In order to achieve such a view, strategies may be needed.

“We are imagining us *one customer* and *one firm*. Wherever the customer meets us, it should be the same treatment regardless of what channel it is present in.

If you are thinking *omni-channel*, you are thinking *one customer*.”

(E-commerce manager B)

According to E-commerce manager B, the willingness of consumers of moving between channels should be taken into account. For instance, they should be offered the opportunity to return products in any of the channels offered by the firm. Similarly, Griffiths and Howard (2008: 73) offer an applicable suggestion, by which they are meaning that, for instance, customers buying products online should be offered the opportunity to return the products in any of the channels offered by the retailer. They are also discussing the importance of seamless integrations for retailers operating in multi-channel environments (ibid.). Thus, strategies regarding the use of various channels may involve the aspect of customer treatment.

Concerning seamless integrations of the channels, e-commerce manager B is discussing the challenges of making it work systematically. Firms often have different systems for different channels. The management consultant is, in turn, describing the influence of the Internet: “Everything is becoming transparent! [...] So, the pricing is in somehow turning into a problem of multi-channel sales.”. Simultaneously, the management consultant is stating that it is generally difficult to have a unified pricing in-store and online, since it is not possible to work with daily prices in-store. Omni-channel manager B is, by following quote, extending the words of the management consultant.

“With the gradually increasing price transparency, it is a great challenge for us to explain, communicate and ensure that we have a service package that out-weights that we may not have lower prices on the product.”

(Omni-channel manager B)

According to omni-channel manager B, it is also important to ensure that the offer of the firm is coherent and available in every channel of the firm. Zhang, Farris, Irvin, Kushwaha, Steenburgh, and Weitz (2010: 179) are arguing that the profit of firms may be more favored when coordinated pricing strategies are being used across various channels, compared to when strategies for maximizing profits within specific channels are being used (ibid.). This is consistent with the discussion made by the management consultant, although this retailer is not discussing separate strategies for each channel. The management consultant is emphasizing consistency of the firm, similarly to omni-channel manager B. This, together with the argumentation by Zhang et al. (2010), is implying that the aspect of systems may be vital to take into account when developing strategies for various channels.

“It is important that the customer is offered the same experience when it is visiting the website of the firm, as when it is visiting the stores of the firm”

(Omni-channel manager A)

According to e-commerce manager A, the omni-channel consultant and omni-channel manager A, the consumer perception of meeting the same firm, regardless of channel used, is an important aspect to take into account. There are difficulties in mediating the same feeling as the customers are receiving when they visit the store, to a screen. Similarly, the retail and e-commerce manager is considering the consumer perceptions of the firm being *one firm* as a great challenge. Based on these discussions, delivering an overall consistent image of a firm using various channels may be considered as a challenge to take into account when designing channel strategies.

The omni-channel consultant is discussing the change of the corporate culture as a challenge. Similarly, e-commerce manager B is discussing the corporate values as vital in order to make the consumers perceive the firm as a unit. Omni-channel manager B is, in turn, discussing the importance of making the whole firm comfortable with adding new channels to the traditional sales channel, and is stating that: “We should not feel threatened by it, instead the firm should feel that it is the right path to walk and that the goals are aligned”. According to e-commerce manager B it is challenging for firms, which traditionally have been working with physical stores only, to make the staff understand that a successful online channel is beneficial to them as well. E-commerce manager B is stating that: “You have to be aware that it could be considered as a competitor, when you are supposed to make the staff of the physical stores function as ambassadors for the online-store”. E-commerce manager A is agreeing with e-commerce manager B, and is emphasizing the importance of considering the fashion, in which the sales performances are rewarded. When a transaction is preceded in-store and closed online, the salespeople have had an important role in closing the

deal. Based on the discussions of these retailers, strategies involving the entire firm, and including the perceptions of the staff, may be used for the various channels.

“Omni-channel seems more believable, since we are moving. Though, it requires a functioning store-chain.

You have physical stores and a proper solution online, and you have customer membership clubs,  
which are functioning across the channels.”

(The business consultant).

According to the business consultant, firms without prerequisites for proper omni-channel strategies may be more benefitted by multi-channel strategies. The management consultant is stating that there are not many retailers, which have succeeded to use omni-channel strategies properly. The omni-channel consultant is, in turn, stating that: “Successful firms, which have succeeded to get a digital mindset [...] are basing their decisions on real-time data and future trend data.”. Thus, in order to use the strategies for the various channels properly, retailers may first have to consider whether to work according to multi- or omni-channel strategies. In the next section the translation of retailer views and strategies into the handling of consumer movement patterns will be emphasized.

“There are not that many stores and chains that does it in a very good fashion and makes it work,  
but I guess there will be more and more of it. So, the knowledge about  
multi-channel sales, or omni-channel, is quite low in general.”

(The management consultant)

### 3.2. Retailer perceptions and handling of consumer movement patterns

*In this section the fashion, in which retailers are transforming their views and strategies into action, will be emphasized in connection to the handling of consumer movement patterns. Tools such as information and marketing, used to direct consumers will be emphasized as well. This section should be considered as an extension of the previous section, since this section is emphasizing the actions rather than the views of the retailers. Thus, this section will contain less quotations than the former.*

### 3.2.1. Retailer experiences of consumer movement patterns

“It does not matter and we do see that, if they are allowed to move between the channels, we receive a greater winning from it. Therefore, we do not want to restrain them, and keep them in one channel.”

(The retail and e-commerce manager)

The business consultant has experienced that many consumers initially are searching for information and products online, and thereafter are continuing with transactions in-store. E-commerce manager A is describing that consumers often are informed about more expensive products, due to individual search for information. The chain manager is stating that consumers of today often have more knowledge about specific products, than the salespeople in the stores. Thus, it is important that it is easy to both navigate and find information on the website. Based on these descriptions, availability of information may be a part of pleasing the consumers.

The chain manager is describing that approximately 70 percent of the customers of its firm are preparing their purchases online. Those customers who have prepared their purchases online also tend to purchase almost twice as much as other customers. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2010: 179) are describing that multi-channel retailers in general are likely to be more profitable than retailers using one, single channel. Simultaneously, also multi-channel consumers are described as more profitable than single-channel consumers (ibid.). What the retailers are describing, concerning informed consumers, are consistent with the findings of Frolick and Chen (2004). These researchers are describing a diminishing information asymmetry between retailers and consumers, due to more transparent information (Frolick and Chen 2004: 56). The description by the retailer, and the findings of the researchers, are implying that availability of information may facilitate for consumers when they are preparing their purchases. This may in turn have an impact on the profitability of the retailers. The description and the findings are also implying that consumers are moving between various channels to search for information and to make decisions regarding their purchases. Thus, the consumer movement patterns may be characterized by an initial search for information before conducting purchases.

The retailers are describing various movement patterns of the consumers. For instance, the omni-channel consultant, are implying that most consumers tend to move from the web to the physical store when the purchase is about to be conducted. On the contrary, e-commerce manager A is stating that consumers increasingly are beginning their path-to-purchase in-store, in order to purchase from the online-store. Zhang et al. (2010: 179) are describing the purchase behaviors among consumers as something that could be

considered as multi-channel in its nature. Simultaneously, Frambach, Roest, and Krishnan (2007) are describing the perceived need among consumers regarding social presence, which in turn may influence the consumer channel choices (Frambach, Roest & Krishnan 2007: 37). The descriptions made by these retailers and the findings of the researchers are implying that there may not be any given movement pattern among consumers. The movement patterns may be influenced by the perceived needs of the consumers.

Cao (2002: 1000) is discussing the channel, in which the consumer became aware of a product, searched for information, or tried the product, as the channel most likely for the purchase to take place (ibid.). Similarly, Dholakia, Zhao and Dholakia (2005: 69) are discussing the former channel choice of a consumer, as a probable future choice of channel. This has not been described by the retailers of this study. They rather emphasize the complementarity of the channels. Thus, the original channel used should not be of greater importance for the completion of the purchase. A majority of the retailers are describing the use of different channels for information search and for conducting purchases. This is partly consistent with the discussion by Chiu, Hsieh, Roan, Tseng, and Hsieh (2011). They are meaning that the most common channel switching behavior is to use the Internet for information search, and to conduct purchases in-store (Chiu et al. 2011: 268). Though, a few of the retailers are describing the possibility of these channels to be used in a reversed fashion: searching in-store and conducting purchases online.

### 3.2.2. Retailers targeting consumers through various channels

“In order to become big, you have to be present in various channels – to reach  
your target group in the best possible fashion.”

(The management consultant)

The information aspect and the availability of information are being described as important aspects, due to the fashion in which consumers may be searching for information before conducting the purchase. Since the retailers are describing various movement patterns of consumers, it may be challenging to follow the consumers during their paths-to-purchase and to direct them. Though, there may also be opportunities to follow the consumers when various channels are being used.

Omni-channel manager A is describing recognition and recurrence as the main opportunities from using multiple channels, since it is all about being where the consumers are. Similarly, the retail and e-commerce manager is describing that retailers using various channels are offering the consumer opportunities to find the product in different places, depending on what the consumer finds suitable. E-commerce manager A is describing various channels as a possibility to reach more customers, with different preferences. Attracting

a broader target group from the use of various channels is described by the chain manager as well, who is also meaning that the society constantly is changing, and thus, also the consumer behaviors. Therefore, it is important to use various channels to reach new customers. Thus, based on these descriptions, retailers may reach the consumers on the terms of the consumers when various channels are being used.

Having all customers in one database is, according to the retail and e-commerce manager, offering opportunities to analyze the customers. Thereby, it is possible to follow the customers during their paths-to-purchase, and the firm can keep track on how the customers actually are moving and behaving. Similarly, the management consultant is describing the importance of analyzing the consumers from a multi-channel perspective, and the strength in working with customer clubs due to the information access. These descriptions are implying that sufficient information of the customers and their movement patterns may enhance the possibilities of following the customers on their paths-to-purchase. This may be of great importance to retailers using various channels, since information about the customer journey may enhance the possibilities to completed transactions. By identifying the consumer movement patterns, the requirements of the consumers may be identified as well.

“Because that is how it is. The more you know  
about your customer, the better you can design your directed marketing.  
You can also see the shopping behaviors of people.”  
(The management consultant)

### 3.2.3. High involvement products influencing consumer purchase-decisions

“Of course, it will rather be a greater eligibility for the consumer.  
‘What information do I want them to receive and what do I want to attract?’  
[...] Then, I believe that you as a retailer, mainly for complex products,  
will be able to synchronize your businesses even more.”  
(The business consultant)

In order to follow the consumer movement patterns and to thereby, be able to meet the consumer requirements, information about the consumers may be needed. Furthermore, it has already been described that it may be important to offer availability of information to the consumers. This availability may have an impact, when high involvement products are offered. For instance, omni-channel manager B is describing the importance of offering the customers proper explanations regarding complex and expensive products.



This can, for instance, be achieved through interactions in-store and through closing the purchase at the check-out desk. The business consultant is suggesting that consumers, considering purchases of high involvement products, could be directed to physical channels such as telephone and store, to increase the possibilities of closed transactions and additional sales. Consumers purchasing low margin products could, in turn, be directed to conduct the transaction by themselves, for instance, through the online channel. Hernant and Boström (2010) are describing how the offer of high involvement products is rising different demands regarding personal and non-personal support (Hernant & Boström 2010: 196). Based on the descriptions of these retailers and the findings of the researchers, a larger availability of personal support may be a fashion of handling the complexity of high involvement products.

The business consultant is describing the importance of information, regarding the realization of purchases of complex, high involvement products. It may be suitable to offer more information on the website, and less printed information in-store. E-commerce manager B, the omni-channel consultant and the management consultant are agreeing. Though, the management consultant is describing that the requirements regarding product presentations are varying largely. For instance, construction goods may require more technical specifications, while outdoor equipment may require more pictures of the products. Thus, an overall availability of information is described to be vital, especially in those channels where there is less room for physical interactions. This may function as a complement to the personal support, which may be a fashion of handling the complexity of high involvement products.

The business consultant is considering it challenging to be able to see how the customer is changing, when various retail channels are being used. It is also important to understand how much the consumer behavior is influenced by the experiences of other people. Therefore, the retailer is considering reviews to be of great matter for firms. Omni-channel manager B is agreeing and do also mean that a negative review could be expensive to firm, offering high capital products. E-commerce manager B is describing reviews as a strategy, by which consumers can receive information from independent parties. According to omni-channel manager B reviews constitute a dialogue online and do thereby function as a channel. It is not a direct sales channel, but indirectly it is a great consequence influencing the sales. In other words, these retailers are describing the perceptions of other consumers as possible influencers when consumers are making purchase-decisions. Thus, using a strategy consisting of product reviews may facilitate the sales of firms, offering high involvement products, given that the reviews are of the positive kind. The words of the retailers may be connected to the description by Frambach, Roest and Krishnan (2007) concerning social presence, since consumers may view the reviews of other consumers as a kind of social presence. When there are no salespeople to turn to, consumers may instead turn to other consumers and their experiences.

### 3.2.4. Retailers directing and being directed by the consumers

“It means that you have to make several decisions in order to attain what you want. You might want to direct them to do it through their computer at home, or direct them to call and talk to somebody, in order to configure the best solution. Because, it is quite complicated with some of the products.”

(The management consultant)

With various channels offered by the retailers, various options are brought to the consumers. Some consumers may prefer the ability of choosing between channels, while other consumers may prefer to receive guidance from the retailers. There may be actions for retailers to take, regarding whether to guide the consumers or not. For instance, the retail and e-commerce manager is stating that the consumers should be able to do whatever they want, whenever they find it suitable. On the other hand, the management consultant is describing that directing consumers to a certain channel for conducting the purchase may be preferable, in order to configure the best solution for the consumer. The business consultant is suggesting that, except for marketing, offering channel options within a channel can be a fashion of directing consumers toward specific channels. Thus, the consumers may be offered the possibility to individually choose between the channels of a retailer, but they may still be recommended to choose particular channels for particular purposes.

The chain manager is describing how its firm actively is directing the customers to the stores of the firm, for instance, by presenting the locations of the physical stores on their website. E-commerce manager A is, on the other hand, stating that its firm does not actively try to direct the consumers to one specific channel, since it is viewing all channels as a unit. E-commerce manager B is agreeing, but is describing that the customer service of its firm sometimes has directed customers, with particular questions, to a certain store. Based on these descriptions, the incentives of actively directing consumers to certain channels may be viewed as varying.

Avery et al. (2012: 108) are offering an applicable suggestion, by which they are arguing that when a new channel is added, retailers need to structure the channel promotions based on the characteristics of the new channel. They are also arguing that promotions should be implemented in a fashion, which may encourage the consumers to shop across the various channels of the retailer (ibid.). Similarly, the sales and marketing manager is describing that firms can use their salespeople in-store to close the deals. Omni-channel manager B is, on the other hand, describing its experiences of directing customers to the online-channel, through so called *self-service*. By informing the consumers of the effectiveness and easiness of doing things themselves, the firm should be able to direct them to the online-channel. Thus, there may be fashions, in which

consumers can be directed to certain channels, in order to benefit the firm. Simultaneously, the consumers may also benefit from being directed, due to either enhanced service or more efficient purchases.

Piotrowicz and Cuthbertson (2014:11) are offering an applicable suggestion, by which they are implying that consumers should be offered the possibility to decide the terms on which to interact with the firm (ibid.). Simultaneously, they are suggesting that retailers should use their online and mobile solutions to direct the consumers to the stores, in order to provide an integrated offer (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson 2014: 9). Thus, they are implying that the retail firms should try to direct the consumers to a certain channel, simultaneously as the consumers should perceive that the channel of interaction are for them to decide.

Chiu et al. (2011) are arguing that the intentions of channel switching among consumers are increasing when the consumers are perceiving themselves as capable of using different channels (Chiu et al. 2011: 275). This could partly be connected to the words of omni-channel manager B, since this retailer is stating that the familiarity the consumer is perceiving, regarding products, is largely influencing the customer journey. Farag, Schwanen, Dijst, and Faber (2007: 138) are, in turn, describing experience as an influencing factor concerning search and purchases online. Furthermore, regarding high involvement products, Hernant and Boström (2010) have been discussing the affection experiences have on the degree of consumer involvement. These findings are implying that experienced consumers, who thereby are perceiving themselves as capable, are more likely to use various channels. Though, the description of familiarity, and its influence on the customer journey, may be an issue regarding high involvement products, since these kinds of products in general are purchased infrequently. Based on the discussion by Hernant and Boström (2010), the high degree of involvement during purchases of high involvement products may be due to low degrees of experience.

### 3.2.5. Retailers adjusting information content to certain channels

“How should we take the content we have and adjust it?”

(Omni-channel manager A)

Based on the descriptions by the retailers, information appears to be an important aspect to take into account, especially when high involvement products are offered. This implies that there may be a need to adjust the amount of information to the product offered, but it is likely that other adjustments of information are needed as well. According to Hernant and Boström (2010: 234) it has commercial impacts, whether a product is regarded as a high- or low involvement product. For instance, it has an impact on what amount of advertisement content that is suitable and to what extent the target audience should be activated through the advertisement message. High involvement products are making consumers spend much time

on evaluating these products before a purchase. Thus, for such products, a rich content of information from the retailer is considered as mainly be offering advantages (ibid.). This is consistent with the descriptions of the retailers.

According to the omni-channel consultant, the channels should be allowed to operate on their own terms. The business consultant is, in turn, meaning that it is important to, in the right moment, meet the customers with the *right* information. In order to do this, the content should be adjusted to the specific channel. Therefore, newsletters should be consisting of inspiration and information for a general interest, in order for the customers to explore more relevant products on the website. The retail and e-commerce manager is describing its usage of text messages as a fashion of informing the consumers about the offers. Newsletters, in turn, are used to inspire to purchase. The management consultant is describing text messages as limiting the communication, while newsletters are offering more room for visual communication. The omni-channel consultant is also describing the difference between text messages and newsletters. It is important to adjust the content to the channel, especially regarding high involvement, and high capital, products. Thus, the retailers are emphasizing adjustments of content to the particular channel.

The chain manager and omni-channel manager A are also implying that the information content needs to be adjusted to the particular channel. Omni-channel manager A is describing the importance of reflecting on the information content of the various channels, based on the particular target group. Regarding adjustments of information content, e-commerce manager B is describing adjustments to certain customer groups as well. Based on these descriptions, not only adjustments to certain channels may be of importance to retail firms, which are using various channels. Also designing a content suitable for the target group in the particular channel may be of importance. Furthermore, the descriptions by the retailers have demonstrated the importance of taking the information aspect into account, both information of certain products and the overall information in certain channels. The information aspect may have a part in directing the consumers, as well as in understanding their movement patterns.

“We will be in that channel, we will have the right message for that channel, and thereby, we will direct the customers.”

(The sales and marketing manager)

### 3.3. Conclusions

Two research questions have been guiding this analysis: “How do retailers, offering high involvement products, discuss multi- and omni-channel strategies?”, and “How do retailers, offering high involvement products, handle consumer movement patterns between various retail channels?”. Section 3.1 *Internal processes and strategies when using various channels* has been based on the first research question. The retailers of this study have been discussing the use of strategies when adding new channels to their operations. These retailers are considering the use of various channels as something, which is bringing both challenges and opportunities. In order to decrease the challenges and increase the opportunities, the fashion of designing strategies may have an impact. Since new channels may be added according to either a multi-channel strategy, or an omni-channel strategy, the retailers may have to decide which strategy to work according to before adding the new channel. In conclusion, it is apparent that the retailers of this study are thinking strategically of their various channels. Thus, these retailers have had a plan when deciding to operate in an environment characterized by various channels. This is, in turn, affecting the second research question of the study.

The strategies of the retailers may determine their approach when handling the consumer movement patterns. The second research question, regarding the handling of consumer movement patterns, may be affected by the strategies of the retailers. Thus, section 3.2. *Retailer perceptions and handling of consumer movement patterns* has been based on this research question. According to the descriptions of the retailers, there may not be any given movement pattern among consumers, other than that consumers may be preferring to search for information before conducting a purchase. Thus, the information aspect may be an important part of the operations of retailers. The information asymmetry between retailers and consumers are described to be influencing the information required by the consumers. This may, in turn, affect the information offered by the retailers, regarding high involvement products. Though, there may be a need to adjust the information content, both to the channel used and to the consumers receiving the information. In conclusion, the information aspect may be viewed as a tool for directing consumers, as well as a tool for handling the consumer movement patterns.

## 4. Retail strategies, consumer movement patterns and information-based power

*This chapter should be viewed as an extension of the preceding chapter 3. Connecting retailer strategies and consumer movement patterns. In this chapter the main conclusions of the study will be brought a step further through a discussion. In the end of the chapter a summary of the discussion will be presented, and certain aspects, potentially suitable for future research will briefly be discussed.*

### 4.1. Summary of findings

By this study we have aimed to attain an understanding about the views of retailers on multi- and omni-channel strategies, and their perceptions and handling of consumer movement patterns. We have also aimed to attain an understanding of the division of information-based power between retailers and consumers in a multi- and omni-channel retailing context. The division of information-based power will be discussed in this chapter. Following research questions have been guiding the work process of this study:

- How do retailers, offering high involvement products, discuss multi- and omni-channel strategies?
- How do retailers, offering high involvement products, handle consumer movement patterns between various retail channels?
- Based on the answers to the former questions, how can the division of information-based power between retailers and consumers be interpreted?

Since our idea has been that the third question, concerning the division of information-based power, needs a further discussion before it may be answered, this question will be answered in the end of this chapter. Though, by analyzing the empirical data and the existent research, we have reached conclusions regarding the first two questions. The retailers are considering the use of various channels as something, which is bringing both challenges and opportunities. In order to decrease the challenges and increase the opportunities, the fashion of designing strategies may have an impact. Retailers may be benefitted by deciding whether to work according to a multi- or an omni-channel strategy, before adding new channels. It is apparent that the retailers of this study are thinking strategically of their various channels.

The strategically thinking of the retailers is also evident when they are discussing their fashions of handling consumer movement patterns. There may not be any given movement pattern among consumers, but consumers may prefer to search for information before conducting purchases. Thus, the information aspect may be an important part of the operations of retailers. Researchers have been describing a decreasing

information asymmetry between retailers and consumers. This is also described by the retailers. Offering information to the consumers is described as required when offering high involvement products, and also adjusting information to the certain channel and to the target groups of the channels may be required. Simultaneously as the information aspect is making the consumers more informed and the operations of retailers more transparent, it may be used by retailers in order to direct consumers and attain a greater understanding of the consumer movement patterns. Thus, the information aspect may function as tool for both directing consumers and handling the consumer movement patterns.

## 4.2. Discussion of the findings

*In this section, the findings of this study will be further discussed. By discussing the first two questions further, an answer to the third question will be enabled. This discussion will also lead forth to speculations and topics, suitable for further research.*

### 4.2.1. The retailer views on adding channels

The retailers of this study have all been discussing various opportunities and challenges from the use of various channels. They have also been discussing the complementarity of the channels, which may be viewed as a purpose of adding new channels. In most of the discussions it has been apparent that one channel is considered as the main channel, which is supposed to be complemented by the other channels. This is implying that there may be a strategy of complementarity behind the decision of adding new channels. When discussing the actions of complementing the existent channels with new channels, the retailers have emphasized various aspects. For instance, aspects of ensuring that the image of the firm is consistent, regardless of channels used by the consumers. Also aspects such as ensuring that the firm is aligned and working according to the same goals, and that the salespeople in the original channel are not considering the new channels as competitors, have been emphasized.

The retailers have not been discussing cannibalization of channels when adding new channels, which has been described by researchers. The views of the retailers, regarding complementarity rather than cannibalization of channels, may be a result of their purposes of using various channels. If the purpose of adding a new channel is to complement existent channels, then the fashion of viewing the channel as a complement may be influenced by this initial purpose. In other words, cannibalization may be occurring among the various channels of the retailers, but they may instead perceive it as an effect of the complementarity among the channels. Simultaneously, the striving of retailers for a consistent image, regardless of the channel used by the consumer, may also reduce the perceptions of cannibalization. It is

likely that retailers, aiming to meet their customers in every channel, rather are reflecting on the fact that their channels are being used than on the particular channel *being* used.

The discussions described above may, in turn, have an implication on the overall strategy which is being used. If the retailer initially has decided to work according to an omni-channel strategy, work practices and other strategies may be designed according to this strategy in an early stage. Some of the retailers have been discussing the importance of having prerequisites for using a certain strategy. For instance, a firm working according to an omni-channel strategy, without the prerequisites for doing this properly, may find the use of various channels challenging. This firm may not have the prerequisites of integrating the channels properly. Thus, this firm would perhaps be more benefitted by using a multi-channel strategy, and thereby, work with more separated channels. The initially chosen strategy may have impacts on whether the retailer is successful in its use of various channels, or not. Based on the discussions made by the retailers, choosing the proper strategy before adding new channels may influence the success of the channels. It may also have a certain impact on the complementarity of the added channel, since a poorly functioning strategy may decrease the complementarity of the channels.

#### 4.2.2. Early consumer interactions of retailers is increasing probabilities of conducted purchases

Based on the descriptions of the retailers of this study, there may not be any given consumer movement pattern. Though, the descriptions reveal that there is a consumer pattern of searching for information before conducting purchases. Thus, availability of information may be required by the consumers. Consumers, which are beginning their paths-to-purchase online, may be difficult for retailers to handle, since these consumers may start their journey anywhere. It may be difficult to attain a complete understanding of where these consumers initially are perceiving their need for the purchase, or their need to purchase from a specific firm. Though, it is likely that retailers, which are present in various channels, are able to target more consumers at an earlier stage than retailers that are using fewer, or single channels. It is also likely that early interactions, between a retail firm and the consumer, will enhance the possibilities of the consumer conducting its purchase at that particular firm.

In the matter of targeting consumers in an early stage, and to early interact with the consumers, the information aspect may have a part to play. If the descriptions of consumers wanting to search for information before conducting purchases are correct, it is likely that retailers, offering information in early stages, are those with the greatest opportunities of attracting the consumers. Thus, the requirements of



consumers regarding availability of information may be perceived as a fashion for consumers to exercise power over the retailers. Though, the retailers, which are offering available information, may use this as a fashion of being the party in charge in comparison to retailers, offering less availability of information.

#### 4.2.3. Understanding the consumer movement patterns when following the consumers

Since the descriptions of the retailers of this study do not imply that there is a certain consumer movement pattern, the use of various channels may be beneficial in itself. Since the use of various channels may enhance the possibilities of retail firms to reach the consumers, on the terms of the consumers, the use of various channels may be beneficial. By viewing the use of various channels from the perspective of meeting the consumers on their terms, the consumers may be viewed as the party in charge. Simultaneously, the retailers may benefit from being present where the consumers are. By such presence, both existent customers and potential, future customers may be reached. This does not necessarily imply that also the retailers are in charge, since they may still be present to please the consumers. Though, the retailers may at least benefit from their channel presence.

Based on the descriptions of these retailers, it appears to be vital to have sufficient and accurate information of the customers and their movement patterns, in order to understand how they are moving between channels. When the retail firms are understanding how the consumers are moving, the possibilities of completed transactions may be enhanced. Furthermore, the retailers may be able to meet the consumers in an earlier stage when they have this understanding. Sufficient information regarding consumer movement patterns may also be beneficial when high involvement products are being offered. In order to handle the insecurity and complexity of such products, directing consumers to channels with a higher availability of personal support has been described as necessary. Thus, understanding the consumer movement and where the consumer should be met in order to be directed, together with the offer of information, may be beneficial to retailers. Furthermore, when retailers have prerequisites to direct the consumers, their possibilities of being the party in charge may also increase. Simultaneously, the availability of information and the decreasing information asymmetry may also enhance the possibilities for the consumers to be in charge. This is consistent with the descriptions made by Labrecque et al. (2013), concerning information-based power. When both retailers and consumers have got information, and when the information asymmetry is being reduced, the division of information-based power between these parties may be a balancing act. Though, when the retailers have access to information about the consumers, the retailers may have more power over the purchase-decisions and movement patterns of the consumers, than the consumers may perceive or understand. Thus, the retailers may use consumer information to their advantage without the consumers knowing.

#### 4.2.4. Retailers handling product uncertainty and directing consumers

Based on the descriptions of the retailers of this study, offering functions for product reviews in the online channel may be a strategy for decreasing the perceptions of uncertainty among consumers. This may be especially efficient when high involvement products are being offered. By offering product reviews, the consumers may receive an independent opinion on the product they are considering to purchase. Negative reviews is described to be a risk for retailers, since such reviews may affect the purchase-decision process of the potential customer. Furthermore, the use of product reviews may be viewed as a fashion of letting the consumers be in charge. With such a view, the review itself may be considered as a channel beyond control of the retailers. Labrecque et al. (2013) are discussing product reviews as a fashion for consumers of today to be informed. Since these researchers are discussing information as a source of power for consumers, the argument of consumers being in charge due to product reviews is strengthened. Though, it may be possible for retailers to delete disadvantageous reviews and thereby, only keep the positive reviews. Thus, it is difficult to state whether the consumers, or the retailers are in charge in this matter.

A majority of the retailers of this study have been describing their actions of directing the consumers to certain channels. This may also have an impact on the division of information-based power between the retailers and the consumers. The retailers may be viewed as the party in charge, since they may benefit financially from directing the consumers. Though, concerning uncertainty when purchasing high involvement products, also the consumers may benefit from being directed to channels where they are offered higher levels of service. However, since the retailers are directing the consumers with the ulterior motive of realizing transactions, the retailers may be viewed as the party in charge in this matter. This can be connected to the description by Shirkhodae and Rezaee (2014), concerning perceived risk. Since these researchers are describing that consumers tend to evaluate products and search for additional information when the risk is perceived to be high, retailers may be able to affect the consumer movement patterns by offering the consumers possibilities to evaluate products and receive additional information. Though, Shirkhodae and Rezaee (2014) are discussing differences between perceptions of risk and product involvement. The retailers of this study have not discussed the aspect of risk to a greater extent, but their descriptions are implying that consumers prefer to search for information regardless of whether the consequences of the purchase are perceived as positive or negative. Based on the descriptions by the retailers, information is required when high involvement products are offered. By offering information, perceived insecurity can be reduced. It is likely that the retailer, able to decrease the insecurity perceived by the consumer, is chosen by the consumer when the purchase is about to be conducted. Thus, insecure consumers may be a source of power for retailers. This means that the description by Clegg, Kornberger and

Pitsis (2005), regarding uncertainty as a source of power in organizations, also may be applicable to a multi- and omni-channel retailing context.

#### 4.2.5. Consumer channel choice – a matter of consumer decisions and retailer guidance

The descriptions made by those retailers which are not actively directing their customers, are implying that retailers also are working according to the preferences of the consumers. Offering the consumers the possibilities of choosing between channels may be viewed as a fashion of letting the consumers be the party in charge. The researchers Piotrowicz and Cuthbertson (2014) are implying that retailers should both try to direct consumers to certain channels, and to offer the consumers the possibility to decide the terms on which to interact with the firm. What this may mean to the division of information-based power between retailers and consumers, is that it certainly is an ongoing balancing act between these parties. While the retailers may be in charge in one matter, the consumers may be in charge in another.

Chiu et al. (2011) are discussing the role that consumer perceptions, of being capable of using various channels, have in channel switching behavior. Similarly, Farag et al. (2007) are discussing experience as an influencer regarding search and purchases online. Since perceptions of capabilities of using various channels have been found to increase channel switching behavior, the capabilities and experiences of channel usage, perceived by the consumers, may also have an impact on the division of information-based power. It is likely that consumers, which are perceiving themselves as capable and experienced, are more likely to view themselves as *in charge*. Simultaneously, consumers which are not perceiving themselves as particularly capable of switching between channels, or as experienced of using the online channel, may experience a greater need to be guided and directed by the retailers. This may be viewed as consistent with the discussion of retailers being more likely to be in charge in situations, in which the consumer is perceiving risk or insecurity. The more secure and capable the consumer is perceiving itself to be, the more power this consumer may have over its purchase-decisions and movement patterns. The lesser security and capability the consumer is perceiving, the greater power and opportunities to direct the consumer the retailer may have.

#### 4.2.6. Adjusted content directing consumers and information symmetry pressuring retailers

The retailers of this study are describing adjustments of content to certain channels as important, and particularly adjustments of information content. They are also describing adjustments of content to the target group as necessary. This may imply that retailers need to consider which target group will be reached

in what channel, in order to reach out with their messages. For instance, extensive information in the online channel may enhance the possibilities that consumers are conducting their purchases online. Thus, adjusted content directed to the consumers may function as a source of power for the retailers. Though, the transparency, generated by the information in the online channels, may function as a source of power for the consumers as well. For instance, informed consumers may put pressure on the retailers. This is consistent with the description made by Labrecque et al. (2013), regarding an increasing power among consumers when the information asymmetry is being reduced. Thus, the consumers may be the party in charge as well.

#### 4.2.7. The division of information-based power when retailers are handling consumer movement patterns

In order to be able to answer the third research question of this study, an analysis based on the first two research questions needed to be conducted. In this analysis the discussions by retailers regarding multi-and omni-channel strategies, and their perceptions and handling of consumer movement patterns have been connected to existent research within the chosen field. The analysis has revealed that the aspect of information is important to take into account, especially when consumer movement patterns are being handled. The strategies of retailers are, in turn, essential when handling the consumer movement patterns.

The purpose of the discussion of this chapter has been to answer the third research question of this study: “Based on the answers to the former questions, how can the division of information-based power between retailers and consumers be interpreted?”. The aspect of information asymmetry is essential also to the answer of this question. Due to a decreasing information asymmetry between retailers and consumers, the power among consumers has been described as increasing. The availability of information is offering the consumers great opportunities to be informed and thus, to be able to make purchase-decisions independently of the retailers guidance. Though, there may be a need for guidance when high involvement products are regarded, especially if the risk of the purchase is perceived to be high. The division of information-based power may be a balancing act, in which the aspect of information is central. Thus, the power divided between retailers and consumers may be referred to as *information-based power*. Based on the discussion of this chapter, the party in charge is varying. It may be a matter of consumer perceptions and the fashion, in which retailers are handling these perceptions. Thus, retailer strategies of handling consumer movement patterns are essential for the division of information-based power between retailers and consumers. For instance, if retailers make sure to benefit from the insecurity of consumers, the retailers may be viewed as the party in charge. When the consumers are perceiving themselves as secure and capable, the retailers may perceive difficulties in directing the consumers and thus, difficulties in being in charge of

the situation. As well as in an organizational context, insecurity may be viewed as a source of power in a multi- and omni-channel retailing context.

In conclusion, the division of information-based power between retailers and consumers may be viewed as affected by the information aspect. Therefore, the power may be viewed as information-based. Another aspect influencing the division of information-based power may be the perceived risk and insecurity among consumers, and the fashion in which retailers may respond to these consumer perceptions. Thus, retailer strategies may be essential to their abilities of handling consumer movement patterns, as well as to their abilities of being the party in charge and exercising power over the consumers.

### 4.3. Summary of discussion

Based on the discussions by the retailers, it is apparent that the strategies of the firms are affecting their success in reaching opportunities and handling challenges. Whether the firm initially has chosen to work according to a multi- or an omni-channel strategy, and has the prerequisites of working according to one or the other of these strategies, may have an impact on the success when adding new channels. It may also have a certain impact on the complementarity of the added channel. This should be viewed as the answer to the first research question: “How do retailers, offering high involvement products, discuss multi- and omni-channel strategies?”. To explicitly answer the second research question: “How do retailers, offering high involvement products, handle consumer movement patterns between various retail channels?”, we may state that retailers are describing information as a central aspect of their perceptions and handling of consumer movement patterns. The aspect of information is described as bidirectional: consumers are receiving information *from* the retailers, and the retailers are receiving information *about* the consumers. Thus, the aspect of information is being used to handle consumer movement patterns – to direct and to follow the consumers on their paths-to-purchase.

The descriptions of consumers requiring availability of information, may be viewed as a fashion for consumers to exercise power over retailers. Simultaneously, the understanding of consumer movement patterns and where the customers should be met in order to be directed, together with the offer of information, may be beneficial to retailers. The retailers of this study have been describing their actions of directing the consumers. When retailers have prerequisites to direct the consumers, for instance through information about the customers, their possibilities of exercising power over the consumers may increase. Though, the availability of information and the decreasing information asymmetry may also enhance the possibilities for consumers to be in charge. Furthermore, actions of facilitating for consumers to make purchase decisions, for instance through product reviews, may affect the division of information-based

power between retailers and consumers. The ability of consumers to exercise power over retailers, may be influenced by their perceived capabilities and experiences, as well as on their perceived risk and insecurity.

Since the retailers of this study are describing both their actions of directing consumers, and their fashions of offering consumers the possibility to decide on what terms to interact with the firms, it is difficult to state whether the retailers or the consumers is the party in charge. The division of information-based power between retailers and consumers, in a multi- and omni-channel retailing context, may be a matter of retailer strategies and consumer movement patterns. It is likely that proper strategies, and an understanding of how consumers are preparing and making purchases, are enhancing the possibilities of retailers to exercise power over the consumers. Though, consumers may still be able to exercise power over retailers in some situations. Thus, to answer the final research question of this study, the division of information-based power between retailers and consumers in a multi- and omni-channel retailing context may be interpreted as a continuous and complex balancing act between retail strategies and consumer movement patterns.

#### **4.4. Suggestions for future research**

During the work process of this study we came to reflect on several interesting aspects, regarding the use of various channels. Though, we did not have the opportunity to explore those aspects further in this particular study. Since this study has been focusing on retailers, offering high involvement products, it would be interesting to study retailers, offering low involvement products, as well. Thereby, a greater understanding of similarities and differences between the operations of firms working with these different product types would be enabled. We believe that such a study could use research questions similar to those of this study. These questions, with an emphasis on low involvement products, would probably generate a different analysis and discussion. It is likely that the information aspect, which has been frequently discussed in this study, would be less salient in such a study.

After having conducted this study, we consider it particularly interesting to explore the division of information-based power in connection to low involvement products. We have a hypothesis that the division of information-based power between retailers and consumers may be more asymmetric, when such products are concerned. We are basing this hypothesis on a potential greater access to such products, and potentially lesser requirements concerning substantial product information. Thus, we also have a hypothesis that retailers, offering low involvement products, have less opportunities to influence the consumers on their paths-to-purchase. It would be interesting to explore this further, in order to test these hypotheses.

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## Appendix 1

Semi-structured interviews with retail consultants:

- Först och främst, hur kommer det sig att du hamnade där du är idag?  
[First of all, how did you end up where you are today?]
- Ni har X kanaler, hur arbetar ni med dessa?  
[You have X channels, how do you work with these?]
- Hur upplever ni att era kunder rör sig mellan era kanaler?  
[How do you experience that your customers are moving between your channels?]
- Arbetar ni med att försöka styra konsumenterna mot särskilda kanaler?  
[Do you work with trying to direct the consumers toward specific channels?]
- Är det någonting annat du vill tillägga?  
[Is there anything else you would like to add?]

## Appendix 2

Semi-structured interviews with retailers:

- Först och främst, kan du beskriva din nuvarande tjänst?  
[First of all, would you like to describe your current position?]
- Är det här vad du har gjort under hela din karriär, eller hur kom det sig att du hamnade där du är idag?  
[Is this something you have worked with during your entire career, or how did you end up where you are today?]
- Ni har X kanaler, hur arbetar ni med dessa?  
[You have X channels, how do you work with these?]
- Har du och de företag du varit på använt någon typkund vid utformningen av de olika kanalerna?  
[Have you and the firms, in which you have been working, used a certain customer type when designing the various channels?]
- Vi tolkar det som att de produkter du har arbetat med och arbetar med är högengagemangsprodukter. Då tänker vi att det krävs en viss ansträngning från konsumenternas sida innan köpet kommer till avslut. Hur tänker du kring detta?  
[We are interpreting the products you have been working with, and are working with, as high involvement products. Thus, we are thinking that a certain effort is required from the consumers before conducting a purchase. How do you think of this?]
- Sett till samtliga av dina erfarenheter av att arbeta med flera kanaler, i vilken kanal upplever du att man generellt möter flest kunder?  
[Based on all your experiences from working with various channels, in which channel do you perceive that firms generally meet most customers?]
- Har du arbetat aktivt med att försöka styra konsumenterna mot någon (eller några) särskild(a) kanal(er)? I så fall, hur har du gjort detta?  
[Have you actively worked with directing the consumers to a certain (or a few certain) channel(s)? If so, how have you done this?]
- Vilka anser du är de största utmaningarna med att arbeta med olika kanaler?  
[Which challenges do you consider the greatest, when working with various channels?]
- Vilka anser du är de största möjligheterna med att arbeta med olika kanaler?  
[Which opportunities do you consider the greatest, when working with various channels?]
- Har du några andra tankar om arbete med olika kanaler eller om konsumenternas rörelsemönster, som du skulle vilja dela med dig av?  
[Do you have any other thoughts of working with various channels, or of consumer movement patterns, which you would like to share?]

## Appendix 3

Respondents:

**Business consultant:** Consultant within tendering processes and e-commerce and omni-channel solutions, emphasizing both B2B and B2C. Former working experience within, for instance, the industry of construction goods. Also experience from distributing e-commerce solutions. Conducted in person at a café. 2015-04-07. 43 minutes long interview.

**Management consultant:** Consultant consulting small and medium sized firms, within e-commerce, concerning investments and marketing. Former working experience within the industry of outdoor products and the industry of construction goods. Conducted through Skype. 2015-04-16. 42 minutes long interview.

**Omni-channel consultant:** Consultant within marketing and omni-channel solutions. Former working experience within, for instance, the tire industry, and the cosmetic industry. Experience from leading positions. Face-to-face at a restaurant. 2015-04-10. 40 minutes long interview.

**Chain manager:** Chain manager at a firm offering household and leisure goods. Experiences from being responsible for the daily operations, marketing, buying and store operations within the industries of household and leisure goods, construction goods, and the restaurant industry. The interview was conducted at the office of the respondent. 2015-05-11. 26 minutes long interview.

**E-commerce manager A:** E-commerce manager at a Swedish firm offering furniture. Approximately ten years of e-commerce experience. The interview was conducted at a restaurant. 2015-04-16. 24 minutes long interview.

**E-commerce manager B:** Former e-commerce manager at a firm offering construction goods to both consumers and firms. Experiences from project management, marketing, campaigns, and e-commerce within the industry of construction goods. The interview was conducted via telephone. 2015-05-12. 23 minutes long interview.

**Omni-channel manager A:** Omni-channel manager at a firm offering construction goods to both consumers and firms. Currently working on a project of implementing e-commerce as a complementing sales channel. Experiences from e-commerce, customer service and marketing within, for instance, the industry of construction goods. The interview was conducted at the office of the respondent. 2015-04-27. 26 minutes long interview.

**Omni-channel manager B:** Omni-channel manager at a company with various firms offering construction goods. Experiences from omni-channel strategies, merchandise planning, buying, finance and logistics. Also experience from working within the food industry. The interview was conducted via telephone. 2015-04-29. 42 minutes long interview.

**Retail and e-commerce manager:** Retail & e-commerce manager at an international firm offering cosmetics. Experiences from campaign constructions, and from working with physical stores, online store, and catalogue. The interview was conducted via telephone. 2015-05-01. 25 minutes long interview.

**Sales and marketing manager:** Marketing and sales manager at a firm offering garden-related products. Experiences of marketing and sales from, for instance, the industry of construction goods and the industry of heat pumps. The interview was conducted at the office of the respondent. 2015-04-17. 36 minutes long interview.