The preferred Complex Purchase Process in-store

– A case study on IKEA

Authors

Malin Fredman

Sophia Nilsson

Tutor

Annette Cerne

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SAMMANFATTNING

Examensarbetets titel: Den önskvärda komplexa inköpsprocessen i butik - en fallstudie på IKEA

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Handledare: Annette Cerne

Nyckelord: Multi-kanaler, digitala verktyg, teknologi, engagemang, upplevelse, detaljhandel, komplexa köp

Syfte: Syftet med denna studie är att hitta vilka möjligheter detaljister bör fånga för att förbättra den komplexa inköpprocessen i butik, genom att integrera online-kanaler. Detta för att möta kundens krav i den ständigt föränderliga multi-kanal miljön.

Metod: Genom en kvalitativ ansats och ett abduktivt synsätt, har följande studie genomförts. Semi-strukturerade intervjuer har gjort med både kunder och anställda i detaljhandeln. Fokusgrupper med kunder har dessutom genomförts för att få ett ytterligare perspektiv. Studien bedrevs som en inbäddad fallstudie där det övergripande fallet var den komplexa inköpsprocessen och kunderna utgjorde fallets delmoment. Den insamlade empirin analyserades sedan genom "pattern-matching", där empirin jämfördes med ett förväntat teoretiskt mönster.

Teoretiska perspektiv: Studien tar sin teoretiska utgångpunkt i multi-kanal teorier och teorier om engagemang, upplevelser, teknologi och konsumentbeteende. Ett teoretiskt mönster konstruerades utifrån multi-kanal teori, teknologi, teorier om dagens stressade konsument, vikten av att skapa en upplevelse samt teorier om komplexa köp.

Empiri: Den komplexa inköpprocessen är av särskilt intresse för studien då tidigare forskning har pekat på att kunder vill ha en uppevelse när de handlar och att ett komplext köp tar lång tid. Men idag växer multi-kanaler allt mer, så som internet, och kunden har mindre tid till shopping, förhållandena för att göra ett komplext köp borde således ha förändrats. Urvalet för studien var kunder som varit involverade i ett komplext köp och anställda i detaljhandeln som dagligen arbetar med komplexa köp. Detta för att få både ett kund- och företagsperspektiv på processen.

Resultat: Resultaten visar att man genom att förse kunder med en snabb, effektiv och engagerande shoppingupplevelse kan förbättra den komplexa inköpsprocessen i butiken, vilket kan ske med hjälp av online kanaler, i form av digitala verktyg. Resultaten visar också att dessa digitala verktyg inte kan vara substitut till anställdas hjälp, men kan fungera som komplement.

ABSTRACT

Title: The preferred complex purchase process in-store - a case study on IKEA

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Authors: Malin Fredman and Sophia Nilsson

Advisor: Annette Cerne

Key words: Multi-channels, digital devices, technology, engagement, experience, retailing, complex purchase

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to find what opportunities retailers should capture in order to improve the complex purchase process in-store, through integrating online channels. This in order to create the best possible way to meet customers' demands in the ever-changing multi-channel retail environment.

Methodology: This study was conducted through a qualitative embedded case study, with an abductive approach. The empirical material was collected through semi-structured interviews with both customers and employees in the retail industry. Focus groups with customers were also performed in order to get an additional perspective. Once collected, the data was analysed through "pattern-matching", where the empirical material was analysed and compared with a previously composed theoretical framework.

Theoretical perspectives: The theoretical foundation of this study is multi-channel theory and theories about engagement, experience, technology and consumer behaviour. A theoretical framework was constructed, based on multi-channel theory and various theories regarding today's busy consumer, technology and the importance of creating an experience as well as theories about complex purchases.

Empirical foundation: The complex buying process is of particular interest for this study as previous research indicated that customers want an experience while shopping and that complex purchases are time consuming. Since the use of multi-channels is increasing, as the Internet, and customers have less time for shopping, the preferred complex purchase process should be different compared to before. The sample for the study was customers who have been involved in a complex buying process and employees in the retail sector who work with complex purchases on a daily basis. This to obtain both a customer and company perspective.

Conclusions: The results show that providing customers with a fast, effective and engaging shopping experience can improve the complex purchasing process in-store, which can be done by increasing the use of online channels, in the form of digital devices. It was also found that digital devices cannot be used as substitutes in-store, but as complements to employees support.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Due to our constantly changing world the retail environment has changed, which in turn entails new challenges for retailers (Hurst & Black, 2011). It is widely known that today's customers path-to-purchase look different from before. Customers have greater opportunities where and when to shop, thanks to retailers' multi-channels[1] (Lihra & Graf, 2007; Neslin, Grewal, Leghorn, Shankar, Teerling, Thomas & Verhoef, 2006; Shim, Eastlick & Lotz, 2003). Customers expect retailers to offer them a variety of channels to choose from, especially e-commerce[2], which has become a more widely used channel.

The retail market is characterized by continuously growing multi-channel usage and increasing competition (Blázquez, 2014). Multi-channels have plenty of purposes, some are to make the buying process more effective and provide a wide range of information for customers (Åkesson, Edvardsson & Tronvoll, 2014). Retailers have begun to integrate multi-channels with each other. This partly because customers demand to move freely between different channels (King, Sen & Xia, 2004). This integration implies many benefits for customers, especially when customers make more advanced purchases that require a lot of information gathering and support, like a complex purchase (George & Edward, 2009).

Multi-channels have been transformed into omni-channels, which mean that different multi-channels are integrated with each other, therefore it becomes hard to distinguish each channel separately. The boundaries between online[3] and offline[4] channels have vanished. A relevant subject in today's competitive market place is to create a suitable mix of channels within the offline environment in order to satisfy customers, which not many researchers have been focusing on.

In order to create the best mix of channels, the retailer has to know how the customer moves between channels. Customers use multi-channels when making purchases, but in varying ways (Åkesson, Edvardsson & Tronvoll, 2014). Other research indicates that the majority of customers search for the product on Internet to accumulate information, before going to the bricks-and-mortar store[5] (Hazan & Wagener, 2012; Åkesson, Edvardsson & Tronvoll, 2014). Further on, one third of the customers visit the physical store to look at a product. About 50 percent of those mean that they always buy online, but want to touch and feel the product before they make the actual purchase (Fulgoni, 2014). This indicates that customers' path-to-

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[1] "*Multi-channel retailing* is a marketing strategy that offers customers a choice of ways to buy products. A true multi-channel strategy covers purchases from a store, purchases from a website, telephone ordering, mail orders, interactive television, catalogue ordering and comparison shopping sites" (Linton, 2015, n.p).

[2] *E-commerce* stands for electronic commerce and means "the buying and selling of goods and services, or the transmitting of funds or data, over an electronic network, primarily the Internet" (Rouse, 2005, n.p.)

[3] An *online channel* in this study is a channel that has connection to Internet, eg. computer, mobile, tablet and an app.

[4] An *offline channel* in this study is a channel that has no connection to Internet, eg. physical store or a catalogue.

[5] *Bricks-and-mortar store* refers to store built of physical material such as bricks and mortar, that you can drive to and enter physically to see, touch and purchase merchandise (Rouse, 2015).

purchase takes different directions, both from offline to online and from online to offline. Retailers therefore need to get to know their customer again in the new omni-channel environment in order to create effective purchase solutions for their customers (Coca-Cola Retailing Research Council Europe, 2012).

A major problem is that retailers do not see the importance of online channels. Online channels need to be integrated within the entire company and not be treated as a separate unit. The issue for the retailer is how to link the physical store, online channels and at the same time listen to customers' new needs (Liyakasa, 2012). Research shows that many retailers ask themselves how to integrate different channels with each other in order to create value for their customers (Neslin et al., 2006).

Additionally Customer Experience Management (CEM), point out that the consumer wants to be engaged in the purchasing process and get an experience while shopping. A lot of research argues that retailers need to make their customers engaged and create an experience for customers in the buying process (Kamaladevi, 2010; Åkesson, Edvardsson & Tornvoll, 2014; Verhoef, Lemon, Parasuraman, Roggeveen, Tsiros & Schlesinger, 2009; Harrigan & Mile, 2014). An experience can be created through the use of different multi-channels (Maklan & Klaus, 2011). This means that multi-channels, engagement and experience are what customer wants while shopping. The question still remains, to what extent retailers can integrate multi-channels into an offline environment and how the integration still can make customers feel engaged and get an experience.

Another part to take into consideration in order to improve the offline environment and the purchasing process is the development and increased use of technology. Retailers have to work increasingly with digital devices[6] in-store to stay competitive (Handelns Utvecklingsråd, 2014; Hazan & Wagener, 2012). Digital devices can help retailers to be present online, which has become really important, since customers use it for searching and information gathering (Shim, Eastlick & Lotz, 2003). The increased use of digital devices is expected to continue. Today, 80 percent of customers feel more comfortable using digital devices instead of interacting with an employee in-store (Sniffen, 2014). Digital devices will have a significant effect in-store and new research is required to figure out how to meet customers' needs and wants (Handelns Utvecklingsråd, 2014). From this it is possible to conclude that technology has a major impact on the retail environment in-store.

It is moreover important to consider that today's customer is busier than ever before and has less time for shopping. Underlying reasons for this are the economic and social factors in the society. Customers tend to want a perfect work, family and social life, which create a lot of time pressure (Alreck & Settle, 2002). The buying process therefore need to become easier and faster (Oh, Yoon & Shyu, 2008; Handelns Utvecklingsråd, 2014; Moström, 2015). Some

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[6] *Digital devices*, in this study, are devices that have an e-commerce function that both the retailer and customers can use.

researchers mean that using digital devices can generate a more effective, but also engaging purchasing process (Deloitte, 2014).

In order to know how to improve the offline retail environment it becomes relevant to study a specific kind of purchase process. This in order to be able to draw conclusions of what can be improved, where and why. The complex purchase[7] process is chosen, which normally makes customers highly involved and a lot of information seeking is required in order to reduce the amount of risk that is associated with it. The conditions for a complex purchase should have changed since many customers feel a lack of time. They increasingly use a variety of different channels and have great access to information (Sarathy & Patro, 2013; George & Edward, 2009). Today customers should want their high involvement purchase to be fast and effective, more similar to a low involvement purchase. Therefore it might be particularly useful for retailers to start analyzing how they can make improvements for complex purchase processes in order to provide today's customers with the support they need. This is an unexplored area, which becomes relevant to study more in detail.

To summarize, this study is of value since market conditions have changed for making complex purchases. Multi-channels and technology have emerged and consumer behaviour has changed thereafter. Little research has been done in the new multi-channel world on how the customer wants a complex purchase to be performed in-store. It is possible to argue that since customers today are much busier than before and complex purchases require a lot of time, planning and information gathering, customers probably want a complex purchase process to be a fast, effective and engaging shopping experience[8]. Can a complex purchase be fast and effective while also engaging the customer?

Integrating online channels in an offline environment could maybe be a solution since it can improve conditions for both the customer and the retailer. Customers will potentially get a better in-store experience, because online channels, in form of digital devices, can reduce waiting times, make customers feel engaged in the process and give them increased access to information. One might also believe that customers are already engaged when buying a complex product, but the aim of this study is to create an engaging shopping experience.

The objective is to examine how e-commerce, in form of digital devices, can be better integrated in the physical store in order to improve the complex purchase process in-store. It proves to be a potential gap in the theory concerning how to integrate online channels in-store, in form of digital tools, in order to create an engaging, fast and effective shopping experience and to optimize the complex buying process, which potentially can lead to a better perceived customer in-store experience. Instead previous research has focused either on only

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[7] *Complex purchase* in this study will mean a purchase that is time consuming, expensive to make and demands a lot of information gathering.
[8] *Engaging shopping experience* in this study is when the customer feels engaged in the buying process through personal interaction, digital devices and the atmosphere in-store.

creating an experience or making the purchasing process faster and effective. This study moreover distinguishes itself by focusing on the complex purchase.

1.1 Purpose and research question

The purpose of this study is to find what opportunities retailers should capture in order to improve the complex purchase process in-store, through integrating online channels. This in order to create the best possible way to meet customers' demands in the ever-changing multi-channel retail environment. Based on the problematization above, the research question of this study is:

How can one improve a complex purchasing process in-store
through the integration of online channels?

A theoretical model, at the end of the literature review, will try to summarize how this study believes those above mentioned components are linked with each other. Focus groups, short interviews with customers and in-depth interviews with employees will be performed in order to find out what customers believe can be improved will answer the research question.

1.2 Delimitations

To make the research even more valid and more narrowed the complex purchase process of a bed is chosen. The bed purchase is a complex purchase since it requires a lot of information gathering, planning, money and it is a purchase you make only a few times in your life.

The furniture industry is chosen since the most important multi-channel is still the bricks-and-mortar store (Lihra & Graf, 2007; Handels Utvecklingsråd, 2014). Online sales of furniture only represent a minor part of total sales (Carroll, 2004). It is therefore valuable to see how furniture retailers can improve the in-store process of buying a complex product in order to create a better shopping experience.

Moreover, the study will be done on the Swedish furniture industry since it is one of the greatest of its kind (TMF, 2013) and the most developed in Europe in 2014 (Tv4Play, 4 Feb, 2015). In 2012 the furniture market in Sweden was ranked as one of the most successful in the world (TMF, 2013). IKEA was then chosen as a case company. This since IKEA is one of the leading furniture companies in Sweden. They use a lot of multi-channels and they want to improve their offline concept by incorporating online channels. IKEA moreover has a huge target group and handle many complex purchase processes. This makes IKEA an excellent case company.

To find out what can be improved in a complex purchase process, it is essential to take both a company and a customer perspective in order to get the full picture of what is reasonable for achieving a better complex purchase process in-store. Hopefully this study will help retailers

to optimize their customers' complex purchase processes in-store, which will lead to a better integration of multi-channels and a better in-store experience. This in turn will be useful for both the customer and the retailer in the long run. The retailer will get more loyal customers and customers will get a fast, effective and engaging shopping process while shopping for complex products.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is provided to help answer the research question: How can one improve a complex purchasing process in-store through the integration of online channels? The theory in the literature review is based upon two relevant theoretical areas of marketing, marketing communication and retailing. It is widely known that customers today have the power in the purchase process because of the great access to information through multi-channels (Bell, Gallino & Moreno, 2014). They also expect a strong shopping experience from all the various channels (Lihra & Graf, 2007). Customers moreover expect their shopping trips to be performed in a fast and easy way (Bell, Gallino & Moreno, 2014; Fulgoni, 2014; Rigby, 2011).

A lot of research has been done in those different areas, but not on how the different areas should be integrated with each other and work together. Could these different parts be integrated to create a fast, effective and engaging shopping experience in the complex purchase process in-store? A theoretical model will conclude the literature review by summarizing the crucial areas and their connections with each other.

2. 1 Multi-channels

2.1.1 Definition of multi-channels

A channel is, according to Neslin et al. "a customer contact point, or a medium through which the firm and the customer interact" (2006, p. 96). The customer can interact with a company through multiple channels, such as Internet, mobile devices, catalogues and physical stores. It is a revolutionary and spreading trend in the shopper environment, that retailers need to adapt (Neslin et al., 2006). Retailers must use multi-channels in order to stay competitive (Oppewal, Tojib & Louvieris, 2013).

2.1.2 Usage of online and offline channels

Many retailers use multi-channels. Companies do not always use their full potential to integrate online and offline channels with each other and consequently fail with their multi-channel strategy. It is important for companies to take advantage of their online and offline channels in order to create capabilities and to further exploit the synergies that can be generated (Agnihotri, 2015; Wagner, Schramm-Klein & Steinmann, 2013; Randall, 2014). Companies often fail with providing customers to move freely between different channels, which customers demand today (Lihra & Graf, 2007; King, Sen & Xia, 2004).

Many retailers today have a channel mix. They have a website, a physical store, a catalogue and more, but are not using those channels at the same time and at the same place, as in channel integration. Channel integration is comparable to omni-channel retailing since it involves how companies should integrate their different channels. An example of an integration is when online tools are used in-store (Wallace, Gieseb & Johnson, 2004). Research shows that there can be many advantages of integrating online functions into an offline environment (Neslin et al., 2006). By providing a multi-channel system customers will be able to use services in various places, at varying times during the day and also on various devices (Wagner, Schramm-Klein & Steinmann, 2013).

Moreover, customers are increasingly using online tools, such as websites. Internet is a major information source, even a bigger source than the brick-and-mortar store or the catalogue. Neslin et al. states that around 43 percent of retailers' customers use Internet for searching for a product and then purchase it in-store (2006). One contradictory study states that 26.6 percent of online customers bought their products on the Internet after visiting the physical store (Van Baal & Dach, 2005).

Channels a company chooses to use affects the future of entering another channels. This has to do with brand image. If a company is using offline channels and decides to also go online, customers' view of the offline channel will transfer to the online channel. For example a strong offline brand image was shown to give positive effects when entering a new online channel (Kwon & Lennon, 2009). According to Piercy, a poor performance in the online channel may damage the customer usage of the offline channel (2012). Therefore it becomes important for retailers to manage both online and offline channels in the same way (Piercy, 2012).

2.1.3 Managing multi-channels

There are many challenges that companies must handle in order to succeed in a multi-channel environment. Many offline retailers adopt some kind of ad hoc strategy (create a website in desperation) and do not exploit all opportunities that online retailing entails. Foremost they do not integrate Internet retailing with their brick-and-mortar channel (Agnihotri, 2015). To succeed with multi-channel marketing the focus must be to integrate the entire range of company activities through using cross-channel management teams and to provide information to flow freely between all sections (Hayes & Schumacher, 2008).

Having integrated multi-channels opens up possibilities to have a closer relationship with customers, since they might search for a product in one channel, purchase in another and pick up in a third (Dholakia, Zhao & Dholakia, 2005; Kumar & Reinartz, 2012). The success depends on how well a company knows its customer. To truly know the desired shopping process, will be a key of creating long-term loyalty, and in turn profitability (Hayes &

Schumacher, 2008). There are clear signs that having integrated channels that work well boosts customers' satisfaction (Montoya-Weiss, Voss & Grewal, 2003).

Customers expect multi-channels from retailers since they then stock a wide range of products, which can provide efficient collection of relevant product information. Multi-channels also create a sense of security, since customers know that the channels' width supports them to not miss out on valuable information (Hsiao, Yen & Li, 2012). They feel that if a company has a large portfolio of channels, it is easier for customers to get assistance, as there are many different ways of support. The various combinations of service output can more easily solve customers' complex needs (Wallace, Giese & Johnson, 2004).

Furthermore, customers increased information seeking forces companies to develop innovative ways of providing information (Bell, Gallino & Moreno, 2014). According to Fulgoni the most valuable function, based on customers' view, is to get support in the search process (2014).

2.1.4 Multi-channels transform into omni-channels

A new concept in retailing is Omni-channels (Bell, Gallino & Moreno, 2014). Rouse refers to the term of omni-channels as "the seamless melding of the advantages of in-store shopping with the information-rich experience of online shopping" (2014, n.p.). What distinguishes the two is that omni-channels are about how to integrate the different multi-channels with each other (Rouse, 2014; Winter, 2012). Another definition of omni-channels is that the boundaries between offline and online have become blurred and the channels are closely combined with each other (Shon, 2014; Winter, 2012; Bell, Gallino & Moreno, 2014).

The difference between multi and omni-channels is difficult to understand. After studying a lot of literature it seems to be that omni-channels are created when online and offline channels are fully integrated with each other. Piotrowicz and Cuthbertson describe the issue in omni-channel retailing as "customers expect consistent, uniform, integrated service and experience, regardless of the channel they use; they want to move *seamlessly* between channels - traditional store, online, and mobile - depending on their preferences, their current situation, the time of day, or the product category" (2014, p. 8). As expected, to provide a seamless experience[9] that achieves all this, can be difficult. Many companies are trying to develop this today and therefore more research is needed on how to create a seamless integration of channels (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014). Traditional stores will not be profitable in the long run, and online and offline can no longer compete with each other (Rigby, 2011).

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[9] *Seamless experience* in this study means that customers can get a good coherent experience across channels.

Multi- and Omni-channel theory becomes relevant for this study since the aim is to discover how to improve the complex purchase process through integration of multi-channels. Existing theory in the multi- and omni-channel field do not examine how integration of more online channels can be made in an offline environment with regard to the complex purchasing process. Furthermore, this study will take its focus on integrating multi-channels, since omni-channeling is still a very vague and difficult approach of integration.

2.2 The complex purchase

2.2.1 Definition of a complex purchase

In this study, a complex purchase and high involvement purchase are closely related concepts. The involvement in the process is the effort the customer puts into the process of purchasing a product (George & Edward, 2009). If the product belongs to a more important purchase, it will generate higher effort from the consumer (Bloch, 1982; Smith & Bristor, 2006). Laurent and Kapferer support the definition of high involvement purchase. Their definition is "the product is important to the buyer, there is a high perceived risk, there is a symbolic value to the product, there is an emotional value to the product" (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985, p. 43). It is therefore an important area for the retailer to consider since many purchases today require more involvement.

High involvement products are products that need a high degree of information seeking effort from customers and there is a risk associated with the purchase (Grant, Clarke & Kyriazis, 2010). The risk can be of financial, psychological or social risk but also the risk that you become unsatisfied with the product (Sarathy & Patro, 2013; Barber & Venkatrraman, 1986). Antonides and Raaij agree partly and mean that when products are expensive it becomes a difficult choice for the customer to make (1998). The risk comes from that the customer holds a lot of expectations about the product (Barber & Venkatrraman, 1986).

Information seeking and information attainment becomes highly relevant in complex purchases (Sarathy & Patro, 2013; George & Edward, 2009). In general, consumers want information since it provides benefits for them. Consumers will make better decisions and they acquire increased knowledge about the product (Neslin et al., 2006; Hsiao, Yen & Li, 2012). When customers are making a high involvement purchase they spend more time in-store (Behe, Zhao, Sage, Huddleston & Minahan, 2013; Bloch, 1982).

Furthermore information is more valuable when customers are purchasing expensive goods or products that they will have for a long time (Antonides & Raaij, 1998). This because information will reduce the risk that comes with the purchase of a complex product (George & Edward, 2009). Information seeking is not something customers always like. If the cost of

obtaining information is too high and the information search will not generate a better result, customers will not search for information (George & Edward, 2009; Antonides & Raaij, 1998). Therefore, it becomes crucial for retailers to integrate different channels with each other in order to stimulate purchasing and lessen the costs for customers using different channels (Noble, Griffith & Weinberger, 2005).

For a high involvement product, the feeling that you made the right choice is really important. Customers will feel satisfied if they get good information that their purchase was the right one and that their expectations match with the reality (Berber & Venkartraman, 1986). Therefore, it becomes highly relevant for the retailer to manage high involvement purchases in the right way. They must offer their customers a lot of support in the process (George & Edward, 2009).

2.2.2 Consumers' complex purchasing behaviour

Research explains that factors that influence customers can be both external and internal. Svatošová defines the internal factors as "personal and psychological factors" and the external factors as "cultural and social or demographic factors" (2013, p. 16).

The social experience can be one motive for shopping, including interaction with the sales people or other customers and can change customers' behaviour. Interactions make customers spend more time in-store and they can get affected by what sales staff and other customers tell them, which potentially can increase their buying volume (Zhang, Li, Burke & Leykin, 2014). Hence, there cannot be too many other customers. Too many other customers can result in greater waiting time for customers, which bring out negative feelings (Zhang et al., 2014).

Moreover, today's customers are more time sensitive. Economic and social forces make the customer feel stressed over time. There is a high pressure on customers, they need to have a great family life, working life and social life. Therefore, the customer wants to "buy time" (Alreck & Settle, 2002). This goes well in line with what Bouzaabia, van Riel & Janjaap support, that convenience is a really important factor for retailers to consider (2013).

Consumer behavior also becomes important in e-business. When customers have previous Internet experiences it will generate higher confidence and additional online purchases when making initial or repeated purchases and interactions in the e-market (Hernández, Jiménez & Martín, 2010). In order to increase the understanding and use of online purchasing, companies can provide instrumental aids such as computers and kiosks in-store. Through educating pure offline channel purchasers with in-store technologies and user-friendly shopping sites can create possible changes of customers behaviour. This will furthermore make them more comfortable and positive towards online purchasing (Shim, Eastlick & Lotz, 2003).

Customers often purchase books and tickets on Internet, since they feel quite sure of what they will get. Customers only have low uncertainty about quality in such products and often do not require any staff support (Svatošová, 2013). This might have changed the last two years since customers are getting increasingly used to online shopping today (Zorzini, 2014). Not a lot of research has been done in the last two years on how customers today feel about buying more complex products online. The main motives for purchasing online are lower costs, comfort of shopping (nonstop and everywhere), saving time, which are all factors that contribute to convenience (Svatošová, 2013; Alreck & Settle, 2002). A crucial component when using e-commerce is the ease of use. To easily find the product and to easily purchase is of major importance and will provide customers with convenience (Bhatnagar, Misra & Rao, 2000).

Customers prefer to obtain objective and clear information when they are online and want subjective and more complex information when they are offline (Ratchford, Lee & Talukdar, 2003). When a customer is offered valuable information and a person get increased understanding, value is created (Grant, Clarke & Kyriazis, 2007).

Moreover, customers are given plenty of advantages through using Internet, but there are despite this some disadvantages. One major disadvantage concerns that a website cannot reflect the product entirely. Creating a positively perceived environment is a strength that a brick-and-mortar store can achieve, which in turn generates the possibility to influence customers' quality perception (Turley & Chebat, 2002). One author argues that consumers, despite the growing use of Internet, still favour to search and purchase their products in-store (Parasuraman, 2013).

The research question for this study involves to gain a deeper understanding of how the complex purchase process can be improved. Therefore it becomes important to know what a complex purchase is and how customers feel about it. Previous research has not examined how customers feel about complex purchases and how they want it to be performed in today's multi-channel environment where consumers have less time and appreciate increased convenience.

2.3 Creating experiences - a valuable instrument

2.3.1 The importance of creating an experience

Some researchers state that customers are not yet satisfied with the way multi-channels are handled (Kamaladevi, 2010; Maklan & Klaus, 2011). Retailers need to offer something different to retain and attract new customers. One solution is to create customer experience (Verhoef et al., 2009; O'Brien, 2014; Kamaladevi, 2010; Sathish & Venkateskumar, 2011).

An experience can be a lot of different things. It can be the shopping environment, the employees or a feeling customers have while shopping (Schmitt, 2003). Multi-channels will provide possibilities for retailers to use different channels in order to create a seamless experience for their customers (Maklan & Klaus, 2011). This is a vital area to take into consideration since it is becoming increasingly important for retailers to retain their customers (O'Brien, 2014).

It is of great importance today to create a personalized experience. This provides the retailer with possibilities to create value together with the customer (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). According to Liyakasa, managers speak about making purchases more personalized across channels, since they have recognized a need for it (2012). Gathering more information of consumer behaviour can therefore provide information for personalizing the retail experience. Experiences are not sufficiently investigated in the retail field because there has been more emphasis in the field of management (Kamaladevi, 2010).

2.3.2 How engagement is linked with experience

Creating an experience is the future of retailing according to Liyakasa (2012). Therefore the ordinary CRM [10] has developed into Customer Experience Management (CEM). The difference between CRM and CEM is that CEM is about creating experiences, where CRM instead focuses on what the customer has done in the past, thereby customer history (Verhoef et al., 2009). CEM means getting the customer as pleased as possible through experiences (Kamaladevi, 2010).

Some researchers make a distinction between experience and engagement. This study argues that those two areas are more similar than dissimilar. One explanation of customer engagement is that the customer takes part in the organization's offerings and activities. These activities and offerings must be designed compelling to what the customer needs and likes. One way in achieving this is to let the customer be engaged in creating the experience. Moreover, customer engagement commonly occurs when interacting with staff (Vivek, Beatty & Morgan, 2012). Therefore one can see similarities with experience, since an experience can occur when customers are interacting through technology, but also with employees (Grewal, Levy & Kumar, 2009; Sathish & Venkateskumar, 2011).

Åkesson, Edvardsson and Tronvoll explain in their article that "experience drivers" are the interactions customers participate in (2014). To conclude the above-mentioned arguments "engagement refers to the creation of experiences that allow companies to build deeper, more meaningful and sustainable interactions between the company and its customers or external stakeholders" (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2007, p. 2). Engagement and experience are very

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[10] A simple explanation of *CRM* is "having a great relationship with your customers" (Addcent, 2015, n.p).

similar and merge with each other, which makes them hard to differ. It is possible to believe that customers want an engaging experience since research points out that customers want to feel engaged, but also get an experience.

Kamaladevi defines experience as all processes that occur around the individual customer (2010). An experience occurs each time the customer interacts with someone or something either offline or online (Kamaladevi, 2010). Moreover, if customers get engaged in the purchasing process they can feel greater excitement in-store (Wakefield & Baker, 1998). The gathering of product information can also create engagement in the buying process (Puccinelli, Goodstein, Grewal, Price, Raghubir & Stewart, 2009).

Some theories argue that technology might generate a better experience for the customer (Verhoef et al., 2009; Bodhani, 2012). Bringing in online devices in-store will support to provide a good customer experience (Bodhani, 2012). Åkesson, Edvardsson and Tornvoll mean in their article that the customer can obtain a positive experience by having access to information online both before and during the purchase of the product (2014). Customers like to be engaged in an online environment (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler, 2004). Online technology can provide a positive experience by reducing the waiting time. If customers frequently have to wait for their turn, it creates a negative experience (Åkesson, Edvardsson & Tornvoll, 2014). Moreover, since online shopping is growing, the store will become more of a place where the customer can get experiences and be exposed to the brand (Bondani, 2012).

Customer experiences can be influenced from how the store is constructed and designed. The retailer should focus on creating a great in-store experience to make the customers visit the store more frequently (Parasuraman, 2013). Retail atmospherics, displays, colours, lighting, music and other instruments of the human senses will also generate an improved in-store experience (Hultén, 2012).

Retailers must not forget that creating experience and engagement will demand higher investments made by the retailer (Kumar, Aksoy, Donkers, Venkatesan, Wiesel & Tillmans, 2010). Engaging the customer requires that the retailer works extensively with the marketing mix in different ways. The retailer must adapt new technologies (Sashi, 2012). Using technology in order to create personalized interaction would generate a great in-store experience (Parasuraman, 2013). Therefore more research of today´s customer is needed since there are many new technological opportunities for the retailer to adapt. It becomes important to know what customers think about it before making major investments.

Theories in the field of experience and engagement do not explore if customers want to have an engaging experience when making a complex purchase and what can be an engaging experience that improves the complex purchase process in-store. It is moreover not known if an engaging experience also can be fast and effective.

2.4 The use of technology

2.4.1 The technological retail development

Technology has emerged as a useful tool in the retail environment. Technologies have become tools for creating more value for customers. Digital tools are said to have an impact on how much customers purchase (Deloitte, 2014). Around 84 percent of people use digital tools and 22 percent of those purchase more (Lobaugh, Simpson & Ohri, 2014).

Communicating well electronically with the multi-channel customer is today a necessity for retailers (Fulgoni, 2014; Meuter, Ostrom, Roundtree & Bitner, 2000). Communicating well through digital tools can make the buying process more effective (Turner & Shockley, 2014; Kumar Panda, Kumar Dash & Kumar Rath, 2011; Rigby, 2011). Technology also brings many opportunities such as the provision of information and advice (Rigby, 2011).

Technology will and has changed the retail environment. Digital tools such as smartphones and apps are providing the opportunity to integrate online with offline channels. Through the use of computers, smartphones and with better knowledge of how consumers behave in the environment, retailers can influence customers' purchase decisions and also create greater customer experiences (Inman, Sciandra, Sheehan, van Ittersum, Jia, Dai & Jia, 2013; Blázquez, 2014). Retailers are therefore working with incorporating mobile and digital technologies into the physical store, which can provide customers with more information and confidence to make the final purchase decision (Shon, 2014).

Another area, regarding the physical store, touches upon the fact that technology should work as a complement to the store team and not the other way around. It demands that the store team is well habituated with the technology solutions provided and can use different devices as support for their work. This is important since employees otherwise can be seen as barriers for technology implementation (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014). Levin, Levin and Heath state that there should be search functions within the store that both customers and employees could use (2003).

Furthermore retailers need to consider that the digital experience is not only a part of the IT-department, as many companies believe. The technology needs to be integrated with the marketing department as well. The different departments need to work together to create the best retail experience (Hathway, 2014).

2.4.2 Customers want technology

Retailers should adapt to the trend, integrating more technology in-store, since it will continue to grow (Inman et al., 2013). Retailers cannot only look at their closest competitor anymore for inspiration, they must expand their vision (Lobaugh, Simpson & Ohri, 2014). 117 million people have for an example a smartphone today (Inman et al., 2013). Retailers should explore how customers' purchase process looks like and try to fit the right mix of digital tools to influence the customer to buy their products (Inman et al., 2013). Customers have many devices to use in the shopping process and expect the retailer to provide them with support and make these different devices and services customized (Lobaugh, Simpson & Ohri, 2014).

Customers nowadays expect the same benefits they get online to take place in-store (Sluis, 2014). Results from previous research show that technologies support customers to find products more easily, it saves time through getting access to a lot of information and can reduce waiting times (Bouzaabia, van Riel & Janjaap, 2013). The most important object for the customer is the access to information. Other research papers point out that the store also needs to provide convenience and ease when entering and exit the store, but also when searching for the product or service (Bouzaabia, van Riel & Janjaap, 2013). The convenience factor is highly valuable for the retailers to focus on for their busy consumers. It will make customers come back to the store (Pihlstrom & Brush, 2008).

The customer is increasingly accepting technology today, compared to some years ago. One theoretical model that was created to detect how much technology the customer accepts is the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). One explanation of TAM is, "TAM theorizes that a technology that is easy to use, and is found to be particularly useful will have a positive influence on the intended user's attitude and intention towards using the technology" (Teo & Pok, 2003, p. 485).

It becomes important for retailers to keep in mind that even if customers are more acceptant towards technology today, it is still important that the technology is easy to use (Bodhani, 2012; Meuter et al., 2000). Several researchers have also proven that when people uses online technologies they experience waiting times and problems that appear more negative than when they are in the physical store without technologies (Åkesson, Edvardsson & Tronvoll, 2014).

Moreover, trust is often very hard to generate in e-commerce (on the Internet), since trust often is created when interacting with other people (Gefen & Straub, 2004; Salehina, Saki, Eshaghi & Salehina, 2014). Retailers should have in mind that some customers tend to not trust mobile devices (Spaid & Flint, 2014).

2.4.3 Today's technological possibilities in-store

There are plenty of different opportunities for using technology in-store. Technology is one way of integrating different channels with each other and improving the seamless experience, but more research is needed in how to do it in the best possible way. Some useful technological possibilities for retailers to use are E-commerce, Smartphone, Tablet and Digital Signage.

2.4.3.1 E-commerce/Website

Internet has quickly emerged as an important channel for retailers to possess (Narayan & Panda, 2014). Digital devices can be incorporated in order to bring e-commerce into the physical store (Bodhani, 2012). An important matter for retailers to keep in mind is that motivation to purchase is different for customers who use online tools compared to those who use offline tools. If the customer has been shopping at the same site or place before, it will make them behave differently, compared to if they were shopping for the first time. Therefore it becomes essential for the retailer to know its customers well (Hernández, Jimenez & José, 2008; Narayan & Panda, 2014).

2.4.3.2 Mobile devices

Almost everyone has a mobile phone and many own a smartphone. Mobile devices, such as smartphones, tablets and computers are everywhere. These devices have become great tools to assist customers in the shopping process. Through using a mobile device the customer can check online price, product reviews, compare products and much more (Spaid & Flint, 2014). When customers are in-store they use their mobile phones for browsing while they are looking at different products. Retailers need to keep up with creating new experiences for customers' mobile phones (Sluis, 2014). Apps are widely used tools for creating an experience (Sluis, 2014).

Inman et al. argue that in-store mobile technology can change customer behaviour and make them buy more than expected (2013). It can also increase the time customers spend in-store, which in turn can lead to increased purchases (Inman et al., 2013). Mobile devices also make it possible for retailers to offer promotions to their customers. Some studies point out that if the customer is offered promotion closer to the purchase, it is more likely that the customer will get affected by the promotion and purchase the product (Inman et al., 2013).

2.4.3.3 Digital Signage (DS)

Another example of a digital device that can be used in-store is Digital Signage (DS). It is a possible way for integrating online with offline channels (Dennis, Michon, Brakus, Newman & Alamanos, 2012; Shon, 2014). DS usually takes the form of digital screens in-store, showing an advertisement or information of the products or services (Dennis et al., 2012). DS

also evoke feelings and captures customers' attention, which can lead to that the customer is spending more time in-store and purchasing more items (Brakus, Dennis, Gupta & Almanos, 2014). A study shows that DS mainly affects people that are in a hurry to finish their purchasing trip. DS provides them with fast access to information by tentatively showing the offerings from the retailer (Dennis et al., 2012). DS will furthermore help to create a better customer experience (Shon, 2014; Brakus et al., 2014).

Technology can be a way of improving retailers' multi-channel integration, which can be done through incorporating online tools in-store. There is no research on how much customers would accept technology integration in-store when in the complex purchase process. Since customers nowadays show indications to be more acceptant towards technology, incorporating more technology in-store might be the way for retailers to develop their traditional channel.

2.5 SOS Framework - A literature resume

Based on the literature review, it is possible to believe that multi-channels through the use of digital devices in-store could create a fast, effective and engaging shopping experience in-store when purchasing complex products. It becomes interesting to see where the focus of improvement should be incorporated in the physical store in order to provide this. It seems like the customer wants support in the areas of Search, Orientate and Shop, which is based upon findings in the presented literature review.

2.5.1 Why Search, Orientate and Shop (SOS)?

Throughout the literature review it is visible that customers are eager to find product information, search for alternatives and plan their purchase, which together will go under the term *Search* in this study. Search is assumed to be a critical factor that customers want support with when making a complex purchase. Customers want to search for information about the product before making the purchase (Neslin et al., 2006; Åkesson, Edvardsson & Tornvoll, 2014). They want to be able to compare products and prices (Hsiao, Yen & Li, 2012). High involvement products are products that need a high degree of information seeking effort from customers and there is a risk associated with the purchase (Sarathy & Patro, 2013; Barber & Venkatrraman, 1986). It makes searching for information a highly relevant area to improve. Lately there has been an increase in information seeking. Companies should therefore develop innovative ways of providing information (Bell, Gallino & Moreno, 2014). Technology can provide more information, give advice and a more effective shopping experience, which can create convenience for the customer (Rigby, 2011).

We believe that the Search stage in-store needs to be improved, which previous literature has indicated, and that it will contribute to a better complex purchase process.

A second area is *Orientate*. Customers want to be able to move freely between online and offline channels (King, Sen & Xia, 2004). Technologies are a good support for customers in order to find products more easily. The physical retail store also needs to be easier to navigate through, since today's customer wants to save time. Customer appreciate convenience, therefore it makes sense to improve the orientation for the customers. We believe that improving the orientation in-store will generate a better complex purchase process.

The last area that we believe needs improvement in-store is *Shop*. Customers in general do not like waiting for help when purchasing their items (Åkesson, Edvardsson & Tornvoll, 2014). As many people know, today's queues to the cashier are everyday occurrence, which do not make customers particularly satisfied. Therefore it can potentially create value through reducing the waiting time and making the final purchase an easy and effective shopping experience. To create a better Shop stage in-store, will also improve the complex purchasing process.

We believe that through incorporating e-commerce, in form of more digital devices, in the Search, Orientate and Shop stages (SOS) the complex purchase process in-store could be improved. This will provide customers with a fast, effective and engaging shopping experience. The theoretical model for this study ended up being:
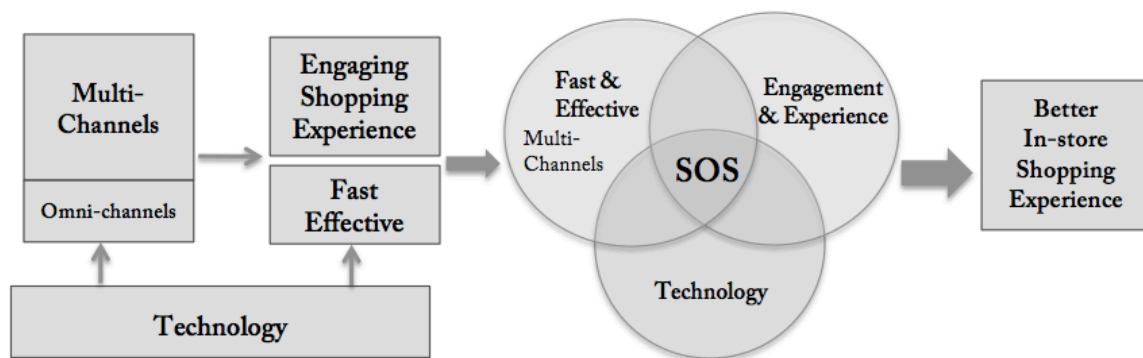
Figure 1. *The SOS-model.*

The first part of the framework (before the second-right-pointing-arrow), illustrates what the theory states today. Multi-channels are needed and customers want to have a fast but also engaging experience. Technology has a major impact on the multi- and omni-channel usage and is proven to make customers engaged and create a better experience, this is why it is lying underneath the three square shaped boxes and permeate all of them. We believe that all these

integrated together in-store, as illustrated in our self-composed model (SOS) as the integrated circles, can create a better complex purchasing process in-store. The SOS framework shows that engagement & experience, multi-channels (fast and effective) and technology need to be integrated with each other in the parts of the process Search, Orientate and Shop to improve the complex buying process in-store. The literature has shown signs that this could be a possible solution to improve the process. Those specific steps will make it possible to create the best mix of online channels in the offline environment with the use of digital tools. The model reflects the parts a retailer has to consider in order to answer the question - *How can one improve a complex purchasing process in-store through the integration of online channels?*

Furthermore, since well-integrated multi-channels and the use of digital devices are quite new concepts in the retail world more research is of great value. Our goal is therefore to examine this in-store and try to figure out where the retailer should incorporate online channels in order to improve the complex purchase process and multi-channel integration. It is possible to claim that there has not been a vast amount of research with the focus on creating a fast, effective and engaging shopping experience in-store with the support of digital tools, especially not with a focus on the complex purchase. Instead, previous research has had its focus on only creating an experience or that the process needs to be fast and effective. This study will provide useful insights about customers' and employees' preferences towards incorporating online channels in the offline environment and how it could be done in the best way.

2.5.2 Sub-questions

After studying the literature it was found to be relevant to have sub-question in order to answer the research question, *How can one improve a complex purchasing process in-store through the integration of online channels?*. The sub-questions are:

1. What are customers and employees preferences towards integrating multi-channels in-store?
2. What characterizes a complex purchase?
3. How do customers move today between multi-channels when making a complex purchase?
4. Do customers want to have an engaging shopping experience in-store when making a complex purchase?
5. Do customers want the complex purchasing process to be done in a fast and effective way when in-store?
6. What are customers and employees preferences towards technology in-store when in the complex purchasing process?

The first question is of value since we have to know if customers have an positive attitude to towards integrating channels, in order to know if customers believe that the process can be improved through online integration. We also have to know that the bed buying process is a complex purchase in order to apply the research on the right kind of process, which make question two valuable.

Question three is also of value since it is important to find out how the customer moves and what channels they like and use when in the complex purchase process, to be able to improve the in-store process. Question three is moreover important since we want to make sure that the store is still the most important channel when making a complex purchase and that it will become of great value that we improve the process in-store.

We also have to make sure that customers want an engaging shopping experience and that the process should be a fast and effective experience. This to be able to explore if digital devices in-store will contribute with this and if it would be appreciated by customers. This makes question four and five valuable. Finally it is of importance to know that customers want technology in-store in the complex purchase process, or else the integration of them will not add value to the process.

3. METHODOLOGY

In the following section the choice of methodology will be presented. The different parts of the methodology are chosen in order to support and find the answer to the study's research question, How can one improve a complex purchasing process in-store through the integration of online channels?

3.1 Research approach

The aim of this study was to investigate how customers use multi-channels when making a complex purchase, in this case the purchase of a bed, and to see if an increased integration of online channels in-store could optimize the complex buying process and therefore improve customers' in-store experience.

A qualitative research approach was chosen since the study focus on obtaining deeper insight. This allowed the researchers to gain an understanding of all respondents and their views, but it also allowed for theory to gradually emerge over time (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Moreover, a qualitative research is about seeing an intrinsic pattern of the respondents instead of imposing preconceived ideas on data (Bryman & Bell, 2011). It fits this study since the aim is to understand the process of a complex purchase, based on the path the consumer takes and how a company then can optimize it. Previous research, within the relevant areas for this study, has mostly been based on a quantitative research approach. It is therefore interesting to perform a qualitative research in order to reach new empirical findings and to approach the area from a new angle.

The qualitative research method has been criticized for giving too subjective notions as the method treats a small sample with low generalization opportunities (Kvale, 1983). This study intended to gather rich empirical material on the specific phenomenon, a complex purchase process, in order to be able to draw conclusions and gain a deep understanding without the need of generalize.

Moreover, this study is based on an abductive approach, which basically is a mixture between an inductive and deductive approach. An abductive approach is about conceptual and theoretical development and takes its starting point in the area that the researcher is familiar with, marketing communication and retailing in this study. It is a process-oriented approach, which enables observations continuously during the research. It allows the theoretical and empirical areas of the study to develop gradually, and the researcher can go back and forth in the areas during the process (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008). This was of value since more interesting theoretical areas were found during the research process to include in the literature

review. It was crucial that theory could develop throughout the study since the researchers progressively gathered empirical material and step-by-step saw a more visible theoretical pattern. Additionally the abductive approach suits this research since this study took its starting point in a well-known subject, the use of multi-channels, and then investigated more deeply into suitable theories that could support the researchers to answer the research question (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008).

3.2 Research design

This study focuses on one particular case, the complex purchasing process. It constitutes a single case study, and more precisely an embedded case study, because the research focused on the process but also individuals, that became sub-units of the case (Yin, 2003). The other option, possible to chose within a single case study, is to make a holistic case study. It means that the researchers evaluates the global nature of the case and do not focus on gaining deeper understanding. This type of case would not suit this research since this case study intends to deeply understand a complex buying process and the individual in the process (Yin, 2003).

IKEA was chosen as the case company since they work with a multi-channel strategy and has realized the importance of being present both online and offline. IKEA has been investing considerably in online channels, but their main channels are still offline, their physical store and catalogue (Keenan, 2014). IKEA offers possibilities for customers online to connect to their physical stores, such as checking stock of products. Those services are not enough according to Adri Kraa, the head of IKEA's online business. Customers demand more and development is required in services online (Perry, 2008).

IKEA is trying to keep up with the technology of today (Truong, 2013). It is obvious that they want to join the tech-evolution. According to a Business Developer at IKEA they are trying, but not really exploiting the opportunities that can be found in the offline environment and the way of creating the best shopping experience in-store (Hansson, 2015b). IKEA was therefore an interesting case company for implementing the research. Moreover, there exists many complex purchases within IKEA, ranging from buying a kitchen, to wardrobes and beds. IKEA belongs to the top three list of best rated beds in Sweden (Bäst I Test, 2015). Their beds are obviously not an issue, instead their challenge is about how to make the best process of buying a bed and how to create the best buying experience. IKEA's main focus, for now is about how to improve the customer experience in their physical store (Forne, 2013), which makes this study even more relevant. This since it aims to improve a complex buying process in-store, which hopefully will improve the in-store experience.

IKEA is using computers in-store, an app and their website, but this is an area which needs improvements. It becomes very interesting to examine and analyse if customers complex

purchasing experience in the physical store could be strengthened through integrating more online channels, for example through the use of digital devices in-store.

A case study for this research was suitable since the research question that was answered includes "how" (*How can one improve a complex purchasing process in-store through the integration of online channels?*), but also since the study aimed to research a complex phenomenon closely. A deep understanding was crucial in order to understand how a complex buying process worked, but also to investigate how customers felt about integrating more online channels in-store (Yin, 2014). Another reason for using a case study is the fact that a case study is descriptive. It is useful in this study because there is no simple answer like "yes, online channels will help the customer", the aim is to find out how it can help and why (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

3.3 Instruments for data collection

Many different types of instruments were used for collecting the empirical material. Group interviews, in form of two focus groups, were the initial instrument. Then 19 short interviews were held with customers at an IKEA store and lastly six in-depth interviews with employees were held to get a company perspective.

Different instruments of data collection were chosen since the study wanted to have a broad perspective, both from customers' view and the company's view. Focus groups were performed to get an idea about customers' thoughts about the complex purchase process. This material worked as the foundation for the creation of the short and in-depth interview guides. Moreover, interviewing customers in-store enabled the study to reach people from different age groups, backgrounds and occupations, which was difficult to reach through focus groups. This since conducting focus groups takes much time, and therefore it was easier to reach people in the near surroundings. In-depth interviews with employees were performed instead of many short ones, since it is hard and time consuming to get in contact with relevant employees.

Two focus groups were the first instruments for collecting the empirical material. They were chosen since the researchers decided the topic needed to be discussed, and if that is the case, focus groups are recommended (Wibeck, 2000). Both focus groups were formed in order to explore how the informants find a complex buying process and what they consider to be beneficial to support them in the process. Moreover, the focus groups investigated behaviour and motivation, what the respondents feel about the bed buying process, which makes it a justified method (Wibeck, 2000). Using focus groups enabled us to gain a wider scale of ideas, which would be harder to gain through only individual interviews (Wibeck, 2000). A wider scale of ideas is valuable since the process is complex and it generated good ideas for

questions for the individual interviews that the researchers had not thought of. It is also an instrument where it is possible to decrease the interviewer's role, which is a way of balancing and lessening the role compared with the individual interviews, where the interviewer has greater impact (Wibeck, 2000).

There are two distinctions in how to organize a focus group, either structured or unstructured. The more the interviewee controls the interaction with members of the group, the more it is considered to be structured (Morgan, 1996 in Wibeck 2000). Since the theme already was chosen and there were specific subjects to be discussed, a more structured method was preferred. The focus group interviews were handled in a semi-structured way where respondents were given space for free discussion, but the researchers had some control.

When performing the focus groups, one interviewer took the first half of the questions and acted as the discussion leader. The other one listened and took notes, but also made sure the current interviewer did not miss out on anything important. Then the interviewers swapped roles when half of the questions remained. The switch was made in order to divide the responsibility and to remain focused.

An interview guide was created for the focus groups (see Appendix 1). When creating this, but also the interview guides for the short and in-depth interviews, it was important to reflect upon the order and the severity of the questions. A interview guide should start with an opening question that is of an easy kind just to make respondents feel comfortable (Wibeck, 2000). Next in order is the introduction question that was asked in order to open up for discussion. This question needs to be broad to "break the ice". Respondents in both focus groups were given a couple of minutes to reflect over their answers before everyone was asked to tell about their process. This since we did not want their answers to affect each other. Moreover, the interview guide included some key questions, questions of big importance for this study (Wibeck, 2000). Those are the bold questions in the guide.

Both focus groups were focused interviews, which means that informants were carefully chosen because their involvement in a particular situation, in this case, the process of buying a bed (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Five respondents were selected to participate in the first focus group (see Table 1) and four to the second focus group (see Table 2), after considering different theoretical suggestions. Bryman and Bell mean that six to eight people is a reasonable amount of participants in a focus group (2011). Another view of the best amount of participants is to have four to six respondents in a group, where the author argues that scarce time and resources are factors to take into account (Wibeck, 2000). Since this study had scarce resources five and four respondents were chosen, more in line with Wibeck's recommendation. The focus groups took between $1 - 1.5$ hour to perform.

Name	Age (estimated)	Interview date
Ellen	20-30 years	5/3
Sandra	20-30 years	5/3
Madeleine	20-30 years	5/3
Sara	20-30 years	5/3
Emma	20-30 years	5/3

Note that all names are fictitious

Table 1. *Customers - Focus group 1.*

Name	Age (estimated)	Interview date
Ted	20-30 years	6/4
Axel	20-30 years	6/4
Carolin	20-30 years	6/4
Helena	20-30 years	6/4

Note that all names are fictitious

Table 2. *Customers - Focus group 2.*

Since the focus groups only are one part of totally three instruments for collecting empirical material, it is arguable that we only used two focus groups, instead of three groups that Wibeck argues for (2000). Moreover, the focus groups were homogenous. This means that the respondents have a similar age and socioeconomic background (Wesslén, 1996 in Wibeck, 2000). It was favorable for the discussion since all persons had common experiences and interests, which allowed for more intense debates (Jarrett, 1993 in Wibeck, 2000).

Participants in both focus groups were contacted through Facebook, where we posted a message asking if anyone had bought a bed at IKEA during the last two years and would like to participate. They were promised "fika"[11] during the focus group as a tool to attract respondents. Wibeck also mentions in her book that it is important that the researchers need to be in time in order to prepare for the focus group (2000). We booked a room in a library, where we performed one focus group and were there in advance to put out the material and to practise the questions. The second focus group was conducted at one of the researcher's home. Respondents of both focus groups were given a pencil and a notepad to be able to make notes during the discussion. This in order to not interrupt and not forget what they wanted to add to the discussion. The "fika" and the note material were provided in order to make the

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[11] *Fika* means coffee and cake.

participants feel comfortable. The subject was introduced briefly again and we introduced ourselves. It is moreover important to make the discussion valid for the whole population and not only for the small groups. We thought we achieved this through the well-considered and creative interview guides (Wibeck, 2000).

The participants were asked if recording was okay and if they wanted to be anonymous, before the focus group started. All of them wanted to be anonymous. Their names are fictitious when used in the analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Both focus groups were documented with two mobile phones that recorded voices. This to increase the possibility that the technology would not fail. Recording also made it easier not to make mistakes or misunderstand the respondent when performing the analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2011). As mentioned above, the focus groups laid the foundation of the other interviews. Therefore we transcribed one focus group in order to discover what questions that needed improvements. The transcripts were done through a level three transcription (Wibeck, 2000). This means that the interviews will not be fully transcribed. Words such as ehm, mm, that are not real words were not written down (Wibeck, 2000). This transcription method was performed on all empirical material in the study.

The second and third research instruments were short interviews with customers in-store and in-depth interviews with employees. The various interviews were held in a semi-structured way. Within the qualitative method, semi-structured interviews are often used to provide great flexibility for the interviewer but also for those who answer the questions (Bryman & Bell, 2011). It created value to the study because the researchers wanted to ask some specific questions, but at the same time allow the interviewees to speak freely about their experiences regarding the bed buying process (Bryman & Bell, 2011). When performing the in-depth interviews, one of the researchers was in charge of asking questions and the other one was taking notes and made sure nothing was forgotten, which is recommended by Bechhofer, Elliot and McCrone (1984) in Bryman och Bell (2011). The short interviews in-store were held by one researcher in order to make the process more efficient. Two short interviews could then be held at the same time and the respondent did not feel uncomfortable with two people observing and asking questions. 19 short interviews were performed with customers in the bed department at the store, two of them were held in pairs, since the customers were in the store together and their answers were very similar (see Table 3). The short interviews contributed with customers' perspective on the bed buying process and their view of potential improvements.

Name	Age (estimated)	Interview date
Moa	30–40 years	12/3
Pär*	30–40 years	12/3
Eva*	30–40 years	12/3
Erik	20–30 years	12/3
Anna	40–50 years	12/3
Jens	50–60 years	12/3
Siv	50–60 years	12/3
Robert	30–40 years	12/3
Mona	40–50 years	12/3
Ulla	40–50 years	12/3
Linus	20–30 years	13/3
Sofie	20–30 years	13/3
Kurt*	60–80 years	13/3
Berit*	60–80 years	13/3
Chris	20–30 years	13/3
Saga	20–30 years	13/3
Ylva	50–60 years	13/3
Olle	30–40 years	13/3
Tom	20–30 years	13/3
Mats	30–40 years	13/3
Louise	20–30 years	13/3

Note that all names are fictitious
* = The questions were answered in pairs

Table 3. *Customers - Short interviews in-store.*

We performed the short interviews at the bed department. Customers that passed were asked kindly if they could answer some questions for about 5-10 minutes. We believed that enough customers were interviewed since we could not get anymore additional information as their answers were similar in the end (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 in Merriam, 1994). Customers were keen to answer the questions since they were waiting for assistance in the bed department anyway. They were asked if it was okay that we recorded their answers and were given the choice to be anonymous, which they all are in this study.

As mentioned above, the short-interviews enabled the study to get a wider range of participants from different ages and backgrounds, which becomes important since IKEA has a wide range of customers and different age groups are either more or less keen to technology usage. The solution to the research question must be approved by the whole customer range and the employees. The in-depth interviews with employees contributed with a better understanding of the retail environment and what could be improved in the process. The retail environment would be hard to understand only from a customer perspective due to that customers experience different things when they are in-store and it becomes hard to get the full picture of the process from only their perspective. Both the short and in-depth interviews were furthermore retrospective since the respondent reported facts about the bed purchasing process (Ruane, 2006, p. 108).

Six in-depth interviews were held, about 45 minutes to 1 hour each (see Table 4). All of those started with a presentation of our study, without making it too obvious what we were studying. We introduced ourselves and asked them for a short presentation, to make them feel comfortable (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Moreover, the interview guides for both the in-depth and short interviews followed the same structure, starting with more easy going questions and then moved on to deeper and more advanced questions that were intended to answer the research question (see Appendix 2 & 3) (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Name	Position	Placement	Interview date
Johan	Salesman Bed Departm.	Malmo	12/3
Martin	Product Developer	Almhult	12/3
Anders	Manager Bed Departm.	Malmo	13/3
Pierre	Shopkeeper	Almhult	18/3
Hjalmar	Web Manager	Almhult/Helsingborg	18/3
Fredrik	Business Developer	Almhult/Helsingborg	23/3

Note that all names are fictitious

Table 4. Employees - In-depth interviews.

Pilot interviews were performed on all three kinds of instruments. This in order to testrun the interview questions. The purpose was to make sure that the questions asked would contribute to valid empirical material and that the questions were understandable (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Those pilot interviews were performed on people in our vicinity, to save time and effort. People that we knew were probably more honest as well in their feedback.

One problem with performing interviews is that the method can be criticized for subjectivity of the respondents and the researchers (Bryman & Bell, 2011). However, according to Kvale (1994), one of the strengths with using qualitative interviews is that you reach subjectivity in perspective, which is related to that you get many interpretations of themes from different perspectives that provides a richer empirical material (Kvale, 1983; Kvale, 1994).

This study is looking for the individual preferences and feelings of their complex purchase processes, which often been subjective. But we do not question respondents, we are trying to understand their thoughts and feelings about the process (Thompson, Pollio & Locander, 1994). The subjectivity from IKEA could be seen as a problem, since they have a unique concept and working environment. It probably affects both customers and employees. We as researchers have thought of this the entire process and also developed interview questions for all respondents without focusing on the specific concept of IKEA.

The subjectivity from the researchers can be caused since the researchers rely too much on what they believe is important (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This has been avoided through discussing the subjectivity with each other and being aware that it exist, and both of us have been presents during most of the interviewees so the answers would not be misunderstood later when analysing the empirical material.

Furthermore, the interview method can be criticized for not being formalized or standardized and too dependent on the personal interaction between the interviewer and interviewee and their knowledge (Kvale, 1994). However, we believe that the interviews allows for flexibility, and personal dialogue that will contribute with profound knowledge of the complex purchase process.

To conclude, the three different instruments used in this study complement each other. The focus groups enabled for a deeper discussion and a wide range of ideas and customers feeling *after the purchase*. The short in-store interviews with customers gave us a broader perspective from people in different age groups and backgrounds and captured customers *in the process* of buying a bed. The in-depth interviews with company representative gave the company perspective on the *whole process* and better insights in how the bed purchasing process could be performed in different ways by customers and what actually can be possible to improve. These different views generated saturation and helped us answer the research question. Customers' perspective gave us answers on what customers liked to improve in-store and the company's perspective gave us answers of ideas on what could realistically be improved.

3.4 Sampling

The three different instruments for collecting empirical material had specific selection criterias. It was of major importance to decide some selection criteria in order to get hold of appropriate respondents. The first instrument was the focus groups. The criteria for selecting interviewees for the focus groups were that they should have been involved in a bed buying process at IKEA during the last two years. Two years was chosen as a time frame since the respondents still needed to remember how the process went. The only criteria for the short interviews was that the customer where in the bed buying process at IKEA.

The in-depth interviews were held with a Salesman at the Bed Department, a Bed Department Manager, a Web responsible (headquarter), a Business Developer (headquarter), a Product Developer and an Shopkeeper e-commerce[12] (headquarter). Those different respondents were chosen in order to provide varying views from how IKEA is working both online and offline. Another requirement for the employees was that they should have been employed at IKEA for

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[12] *Shopkeeper e-commerce* is an employee that is in charge of developing sales in an efficient and effective way in all media in order to attract more customers to come more often and buy more.

at least two years, in order to have gained experience of working at IKEA and be knowledgeable in their field.

The sampling of respondents for the individual interviews was done through judgemental sampling, which is a kind of non-probability sampling. Judgemental sampling means that the researchers choose specific respondents that they consider represent the population that is going to be studied (Malhotra, 2010, p. 379). This sampling was done throughout the selection criterias that have been presented above. Moreover, it was assumed that the people shopping at IKEA represent a reasonable part of the population since IKEA's target group is vast and contains people from all types of social classes. The employees at IKEA may also conceivably represent the other employees at IKEA. This because their strong corporate culture is considered permeating the whole enterprise (IKEA, 2015a).

3.5 Research strategy

This study started with a planning phase. A research area of interest was decided, how to improve the in-store shopping experience with digital tools. An agreement with IKEA was conducted and on the initial meeting the topic of the thesis was agreed upon. Then the search for relevant literature started where areas such as multi-channels, Customer Experience Management, consumer behaviour and technology, was found. Different theoretical fields where decided and then we started writing the literature review. A theoretical model (see Figure 1) was then created in order to illustrate what the study expect to find and how we believe the theoretical areas are interrelated in order to improve the complex in-store shopping experience. Moreover, this model was used as an inspirational source for creating the sub-questions. When creating the theoretical model and the literature review we used different keywords (see Figure 2).
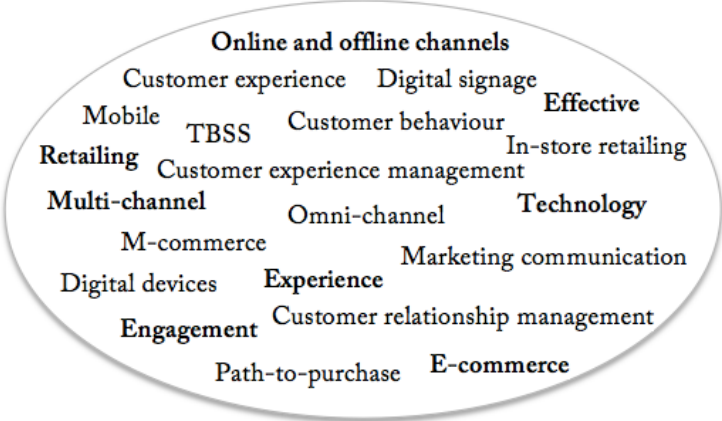

Figure 2. *Key words.*

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After finishing the literature review a draft of the methodology was made, which was completed before the analysis started. Six theoretical related questions where created at the end of the literature review, since we believed that these will contribute to answering the study's research question. Different interview guides were developed after finishing the literature review. Throughout the entire process, meetings with supervisors at IKEA and tutor at Lund University were held to obtain feedback. We also went back and forth a lot in the theoretical material and empirical material, which supports our abductive approach.

The data analysis was performed after collecting the empirical material. Analysing data means that the researchers analyse, examine and categorize the data to find evidence that makes the purpose of the study valid (Yin, 2003). The goal with the analysis was to reach credible conclusions that are entrenched in the empirical data (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984 in Merriam, 1994).

The collected empirical material was analysed using "pattern-matching", which means that a constructed theoretical framework was compared with the empirical material. If the theoretical framework matches the empirical data, the study has come up with a result that is consistent with reality (Yin, 2009).

The analysis was made through some distinct steps. *The first step* in the analysis started with finishing and summarizing all the transcripts of all the different interviews. The gathered material of transcripts was then organized into three different documents (in-store, focus and in-depth employee interviews) and organized by question and person. Those documents were then divided up between the researchers in order to start with the second step of the analysis.

The second step included to colour-code answers in order to match these answers with the different theoretical areas (each area got a specific colour), that lay the foundation for this research. Developing categories was an intuitive process that required systematic and constant thinking of our research purpose to categorize correct (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984 in Merriam, 1994). Those three documents filled with different coloured text were then organized into six new documents representing each theoretical area (each colour). Each of the six documents were named after the theoretical area they represented and *the third step* started with finding theory from the literature review that matched with the different statements from respondents. Theory that was not used in the analysis was taken away from the literature review, since it did not add any value.

The fourth step was to make a new document where all the parts were put together. The text was now consisting of arguments from interviews interspersed with supporting theory. Theory that was not directly connected to the research question and sub questions were taken away. This in order to make the analysis to point out the strongest arguments and findings. Strong findings, in the analysis, were also supported with strong citations from the

interviewees. An important aspect to remember is that the entire analysis have been matched with theory, but we only kept the most essential theory in the analysis to make it clearer for the reader. Finally, the discussion and conclusion were made, based on the major findings in the analysis. After having a first draft, IKEA got to read it and come with feedback, in order to not mention inappropriate things.

3.6 Validity and reliability

It is always important to be critical of how the research has been designed and how the data has been collected. Therefore it becomes important to estimate the study's validity and reliability. Validity is if the researchers measure what it is supposed to be measured, which can be both external and internal (Bryman & Bell, 2011). If the study has an external validity, it means that the study's results can be generalized over the entire population, which often is difficult to achieve in a qualitative study. Being able to generalize is not the goal of this study. The goal for this study was to get a deeper understanding of how the bed buying process looks and how it could be improved. When the research focuses more on depth, understanding the processes and underlying factors, it is not of the same importance to make generalization (Merriam, 2006). It is possible to further argue that the study's results could hopefully be applied to other companies in the furniture industry. Hopefully also on other complex purchasing processes than the bed, since buying a wardrobe for example encounters similar complex issues as a bed.

Moreover, internal validity is about how the results fit in with the reality (Merriam, 2006, p. 177). Internal validity was achieved since the participants of the interviews were carefully selected. The study achieved triangulation, which also can increase the internal validity. Triangulation was accomplished since the study was performed by more than one researcher and the empirical material was collected from varying sources and in varying ways (Merriam, 2006). Furthermore, in order to get the results to be consistent with reality, the respondents of the study could wish to be anonymous, which they were in this study. This can contribute to more honest answers (Guba & Lincoln, 1981 in Merriam, 2006).

Reliability depends on how much you can rely on the analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Reliability can also be external and internal. To achieve high external reliability the study has to be able to be recreated with the same result another time. Since the study is qualitative in nature and the data collection is carried out in a social context, which does not often stay unchanged, it might be difficult to guarantee external reliability (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 395). Moreover, the study has an abductive approach, which means that theory and empirical material alternate side by side, which can weaken the reliability of the study (Merriam, 2006, p. 182). When performing a qualitative research it is difficult to achieve strong reliability. Therefore the researchers instead can examine the research findings based on the "degree of

dependence" and "context" (Merriam, 2006). The result of the study's degree of dependence and context can be improved by triangulation. If the researchers clearly document how the study has been performed, it could make it possible for other researchers to follow the same track, which in turn can strengthen the degree of dependence and context (Merriam, 2006). In this research, the degree of dependence and context was strengthened by a strong and clear methodology section and well-written and documented research strategy, which enables other researcher to follow in the same path.

To reach internal reliability the study need to be approved by all authors who have been involved in the process, which has been made (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 395). Moreover, internal reliability was hopefully achieved through the well structured planning, the suitable interview guides, pilot interviews and excellent cooperation. IKEA also approved the study after reading it, which increase the reliability. Hopefully this qualitative study's validity and reliability is relatively high by implementing all elements presented above.

4. IKEA – THE CASE COMPANY

In 1943, Ingvar Kamprad, a boy from Älmhult in Sweden, started what was to become one of the largest furniture chains in the world (NE, 2015). IKEA, which stands for Ingvar Kamprad Elmtaryd Aggunaryd, is built upon the vision to "create a better everyday life for the many people" (NE, 2015).

IKEA works with multi-channels today. Their multi-channels are the physical store, the website, the mobile website, the app, the catalogue, order through phone call and order through faxing (Hansson, 2015a). In 2014, IKEA had 315 department stores in 27 countries all over the world. They had around 716 million visits to their stores and over 1.5 billion visits to their website. The same year, they reached total sales of 28.7 billion euros (IKEA, 2015b).

IKEA works a lot with creating an experience for their customers (Edvardsson & Enquist, 2008). The physical store is built around a guided walkway through a major exhibition area (see Figure 3). Customers start at the top floor where the living room section begins and this top floor ends with the children's section. Then the restaurant section appears just in time when people start to become hungry and tired. Then the arrowed walkway continues on the ground floor with smaller built up themes with items such as lamps, frames and candles. Customers then walk to the self-service area where customers are intended to pick up everything they need for their furniture purchase. When done with assembling the furniture, customers arrive at the check out. Customers can choose between an ordinary check out with cashiers or a check out with self-scanning. When done in check out, a kiosk then offers customers ice cream and hot dogs on the way out. What distinguishes the in-store experience is the way customers are supposed to take care of their own purchase from start to finish.

Figure 3. *Map of IKEA store Malmo (IKEA Mobile, 2015).*

IKEA always tries to adapt to trends and be a market leader (Hansson, 2015b). As mentioned in the "Methodology" they are already trying to adapt to the wide technology trend. IKEA is working with digital signage, Internet kiosks and a virtual reality app, but still they are not integrating their multi-channels in an optimized way and have to improve themselves (Hansson, 2015b).

According to O'Dowling-Keane, who writes for Internet Retailing, IKEA has to improve its in-store technology and he also states that they have missed out on the power of the mobile phone (2013). It seems like IKEA has realized this issue. The CEO, Peter Agnefjail, has according to EVIGO, commented something similar to that "IKEA will now put more emphasis on e-commerce in order to meet the needs of today's connected consumers, but will also not forget about traditional sales" (Burza, 2014, n.p). IKEA has started to try out a new "click and collect" system that will enable the customer to order online and pick up their furniture at the physical store, during the opening hours. It is something that is currently being tested but has aspirations to be a well-functioning system that improves the furniture buying process (Hansson, 2015b; Burza, 2014).

5. ANALYSIS

The following section will analyse and compare the observed empirical patterns with the literature review. The study aims to investigate how companies can improve a complex purchasing process with the help of incorporating online channels in form of digital tools in-store. The analysis is built around primary themes derived from the study's three various interview guides (see appendix 1, 2 & 3) and the theoretical model.

It is important for the reader to keep in mind that all of the questions answered by the respondents regarded the bed buying process, which was confirmed to be a complex purchase.

5.1 Multi-channel preferences

5.1.1 Expectations of multi-channels

From the analysis it was found that the respondents have experienced the constantly changing world and through that, the trend of multi-channels, which many previous studies also have shown (Neslin et al., 2006; Blázquez, 2014). Both focus groups have seen the increased competition in the market and that customers are more stressed today than some years ago. The Web Manager meant that IKEA could follow this trend better:

> *"When it comes to multi-channeling and omni-channeling*
> *the furniture industry is not the most prominent".*

Customers interviewed agreed and indicated that they want IKEA to be trendy and give them something extra, like an experience, in the complex buying process. Carolin mentioned:

> *"IKEA is such a big company, it would be strange if they*
> *did not follow the multi-channel trend".*

The Bed Department Manager, supported this by stating that he has realized that IKEA needs to be innovative and "live in the future" to be the leader in the industry. The employees have also noticed a demand from customers. Customers want IKEA to be available at different times and places, which can be solved through having multi-channels. There are moreover clear indications that multi-channels are needed. The Salesman Bed Department said:

> *"We reach more people with more channels".*

Ted mentioned, since IKEA has many different customers it is important to be able to meet all their demands, since customers have different channel preferences. Ted said:

"If the customer sees you, you exist".

Moreover, many retailers are having a hard time reaching a seamless integration of multi-channels. The Web Manager explains that it was a big trend a few years ago to built up a content bank and spread it on as many channels as possible. Today it is not possible to run the same concept over all channels, retailers have to adapt to each individual channel. The Web Manager explains that IKEA has links between their department stores and their digital part, but they do not know how and what actions to take in order to reach integration. This illustrates the difficulty in managing multi-channels as Neslin et al. states (2006). The Web Manager indicated that IKEA must come closer to an omni-channel strategy by saying:

"There are many parts that we actually do not utilizes today. There are some parts on the web where we must use the same approach as we do in the department store, with an experience".

The Shopkeeper perceived that IKEA has always been very strong as a physical store, but online customers are increasing and they need to explore how to meet them better. The employees state that managing multi-channels in the same way can be hard since the personal contact is hard to achieve online. Personal help and advice are difficult parts to substitute with digital tools. The wide range-presentation is also hard to reach in the same extent as in the physical store. The Web Manager also states that IKEA has different concepts in-store and on the website, which make it difficult to unit them.

The majority of respondents moreover support an increased integration of multi-channels in-store in order to improve the offline environment. This is clearly in line with what Piotrowicz and Cuthbertson state about customers wanting a seamless integration (2014). Ted made an example of how to integrate them by saying:

"When you come to the store and are buying a bed you start to use technology devices, but when you get to a certain stage, a salesperson comes to you and gives specialized and personalized support. Customers first use technology and deselect the things they are not interested in and then get the personalized help. It would become a more effective process when coming to the sales representative, and the next person will receive quicker assistance too".

Furthermore, the multi-channel environment provides customers with better information seeking capabilities. Employees have noticed that customers are more well-read than before and therefore also expect to get more advanced information and advice from employees. The Salesman Bed Department said that customers today plan their trips more than a couple of years ago. Sandra experienced that she was more well-read than the employees when she bought her bed. She said:

> *"Once you got help after standing in the long queue at the bed department, it was not a lot more information that you got from the sales representative than you could read yourself on the Internet. I would have liked to get even more expert help of those who worked there, since I felt like they only where referring to what I could read on the website"*.

This is a clear example of how customers want more valuable information for the time they sacrifice when standing in line. Employees believe that this happens because customers have a wide range of information available online and that the technology development might also be the reason, which several researchers support (Åkesson, Edvardsson & Tronvoll, 2014; Shim, Eastlick & Lotz, 2003; Bell, Gallino & Moreno, 2014). From the short interviews it was found that they wanted a lot of information about the product before making the purchase. Louise said:

> *"We were very well-read before we bought the bed and therefore we knew all the details, which would not be possible without multi- channels"*.

Most of the customers interviewed wanted to make sure they had enough product information in order to make the best purchase decision. One employee stated that customers want to make sure that the quality in-store was the same as expected from the website and they need a lot of planning, since it is a complex purchase.

5.1.2 Multi-channel opportunities and difficulties

The Shopkeeper explained that IKEA knows the importance of having a close relationship with customers nowadays when customers can search for a product in one channel, purchase in another and pick up the product in a third. He said:

> *"We must be with the customer and meet the necessary demands and provide alternatives for them. If the customer requests to shop by mobile, we must deliver.*

Before it was only the department store, now we must meet
with them in different channels".

IKEA has experienced issues with having multi-channels. One challenge is to achieve the same feeling throughout all different channels, which seems to be the downside side of using multi-channels. The Business Developer explained that they have problems regarding information to flow freely between all sections and that it is IKEA's own fault that they are not adapting to technology in the right way. It is hard to get all employees working in the same direction in the new multi-channel world and get everyone to realize the importance of integration. Theory point out this as one of the biggest obstacle for integration (Agnihotri, 2015; Hayes & Schumacher, 2008; Hathway, 2014). IKEA needs to focus more on the benefits of what e-commerce can provide and let go of old traditional approaches that may not work in a modern world, which also Rigby clearly states in his article (2011). It is an important factor that all employees work together, otherwise it can create barriers for technology implementation. Another employee means that IKEA has to actively work with selling the whole concept in-store and clearly promote that customers can order and pay online as well. All employees state that IKEA needs to make the process simple and have focus on creating holistic solutions. The Business Developer explained the situation today where information does not flow freely by saying:

"It becomes a vicious circle, if we do not do our job on the
website, there will be too many questions in-store, there
are no technical aids, it becomes a bottleneck, because
there are many customers and not enough employees. It
ends with that we are doing ourselves a great disservice."

The Business Developer moreover explains that internal politics also have a great impact on the use of multi-channels and the different departments need to work together to enhance multi-channels.

5. 2 Buying a bed is a complex purchase

According to the respondents, buying a bed is categorized as a medium to difficult purchase and implies a lot of complexity since it is quite technical and often demands a lot of planning and costs a lot of money. The complexity described is supported by many previous studies (Sarathy & Patro, 2013; Barber & Venkatrraman, 1986; Antonides & Raaij, 1998). Louise explained the complexity by saying:

"I would say that it is one of the hardest things to buy".

Many respondents state that a bed is a major purchase, since it involves a lot of money to invest. Sofie illustrated this well. She said:

> *"You sleep a third of you life in a bed so it is an important*
> *purchase that costs a lot. It is not fun to spend money on a*
> *crappy bed that you may have to change after two years".*

Linus explained another side of the complexity and said:

> *"It's something you really spend much time in and have*
> *for a long time. It should be good quality. It is perhaps not*
> *the bed that is the most important, but the springs and the*
> *mattress".*

Respondents indicate that price in relationship to quality, softness and mattress are parameters that are difficult to evaluate without help. Price, since many customers believe that high price means high quality. They get a bit worried when IKEA has low prices and wonder if the quality is good enough. Moreover, all customers responded that it was very hard to find what kind of bed that would suit them. Sandra explained:

> *"When you are in the store you need to get help beyond*
> *what you can see for yourself. Above all things, the*
> *hardest part is which bed that fits me".*

Buying a bed can also be a risky procedure according to respondents, which correspond very well with what is related to a complex purchase. Carolin points out the insecurity of not buying the right bed. Hence, the warranty of 30 days, made her feel more comfortable with her complex purchase. Several of the customers agreed, they felt more confident with the warranty.

Moreover, obtaining personal support was shown to be important for the majority of customers, which goes well in line with what George and Edward states about personal support (2009). Customers often want help to take a decision since they feel insecure on their own. Several customers prefer coming to the store rather than buying online. Madeleine's statement clearly shows that she felt relieved when talking to a specialist in the area. She explained that:

> *"Even if it feels like it was a bit stressful when I was at*
> *IKEA, it was reassuring that a person checked my spine. It*
> *is reassuring that I get a "confirmation" that this*
> *particular bed is the right one for me".*

5.3 Customers' complex purchase process

5.3.1 Online to Store vs. Store to Online

All customers in both focus groups went to IKEA since they had the need for a bed, they either had moved or their old bed was not good anymore.

According to many interviewees, external factors that mainly affect their bed purchasing are friends and family. One respondent explained this well by saying that:

> *"If you see an IKEA bed at a friends house, it is more*
> *likely that you will buy one of your own, since you can try*
> *it in the right environment and get reviews and feedback*
> *from people you trust".*

Ted mentioned that offers from IKEA could affect his choice. Carolin and Axel mean contrary that external factors do not affect them since they have IKEA as top-of-mind. Eight of nine customers in the focus groups had IKEA top-of-mind. Five out of seven in the focus groups would buy the same bed again at IKEA or at least look at IKEA first. Some customers meant that the choice would depend on their economic situation, if they have a lot of money they might go somewhere else.

The majority of customers asked had been visiting the website before coming to the physical store. This is a usual way to start the process according to earlier research (Hazan & Wagener, 2012; Åkesson, Edvardsson & Tronvoll, 2014). Focus group 1 supported this argument since the majority were searching on Internet before making their actual store visit. Madeleine explains the beginning of her process of purchasing a bed, as other also indicated. She said:

> *"My bed purchasing process started from home. I checked*
> *the Internet and compared different stores and found the*
> *kind of bed I was looking for, size and so on. I compared*
> *different qualities and guarantees. Based on that, I went to*
> *different physical stores and checked various beds and*
> *prices".*

The employees also believe that customers start online, to look for information and then visit the store to try out the product. The Web Manager knows that around 60-70 percent have been preparing themselves online before the store visit. The employees state that it is crucial for IKEA to meet the customer in the right way in the first step online and work actively with the customer on the website before the store visit. Seven customers in-store out of fifteen had been at competitors, before arriving to IKEA.

The Shopkeeper and The Bed Department Manager, explained the same phenomenon, that customers make their pre-study at home on their computer and mobile phone and this step consists of checking the product, comparing with other products and competitors. The employees also mean that IKEA should take advantage of this, that the digital visit has taken place in many cases before coming to the physical store.

Many customers wanted to make sure that the quality in-store was the same as expected from what they have seen on the website. The Bed Department Manager explains that customers come to the physical store if they are unsure of the product, in order to ask employees for support and advice. The majority of the interviewed pushed for the importance of being able to try the bed before buying it. This goes well in line with Svatošová's article about that customers will only buy products on the Internet that involves low uncertainty, otherwise they want the personal help in-store (2013). All employees interviewed indicated that since many feel uncertain about what kind bed that fits them, they come to the store to try it out and to get support from experts in the area. This seems to lessen customers perceived risk. Some customers meant that they could have bought the bed online, but would in any case still like to try the bed before buying. Four of the employees strongly state that the department store has an essential function as a showroom, which probably will never totally disappear despite the increased use of Internet. To not be able to try the product is a constant limit for online-channels. The Bed department Manager explained this very well:

> *"Here, customers can get to know and feel the product*
> *and thereby quality-test them by themselves".*

This agrees with theory that push the importance of that the store is still the most important channel when purchasing furniture (Lihra & Graf, 2007; Handels Utvecklingsråd, 2014). Another pattern, which is not described detailed in the literature, only briefly, are all the steps back and forth between online and in-store (Hazan & Wagener, 2012; Åkesson, Edvardsson & Tronvoll, 2014; Fulgoni, 2014), which seem to be the most common pattern before taking a final complex purchasing decision. Many customers' complex purchasing process consists of being online and in-store several times in order to be well prepared to make the final decision. Madeleine explained, what many customers indicated, after being in-store:

> *"I went back to the comsuter at home, where I compared*
> *again and there I decided on IKEA. Then I went to IKEA*
> *with a trailer. At IKEA, I decided what bed that suited the*
> *budget and time frame and I got support from sales*
> *representatives at IKEA who checked my spine. This*
> *ended up with that I bought a bed".*

Sandra, explained the back and forth argument, by saying:

> *"We went to IKEA three to four times before we could*
> *decide on what kind of bed to buy".*

Furthermore, it seems like digital devices are not particularly used in-store when purchasing a bed. Only three customers used some of IKEA's digital tools when in-store, which were related to maps and the stock area. Many of the customers that were interviewed used their mobile phone when they were in-store, but for taking pictures, using Instagram/Facebook or calling. Interestingly the majority of interviewed did not go to either IKEA's website or IKEA's app when they where in-store. The majority of customers were even unaware that the app existed. There were only three that used the app in the process, they were using it as a search engine and shopping list. All employees however agree upon that an app is required to support customers in-store, but it need to be developed.

5.3.2 Previous usage affect channel choice

The Salesman Bed Department pointed out that e-commerce is increasing and that this area is of great focus at IKEA right now since customers show a major interest in the area and are changing the way they shop. But no one in the focus groups bought their bed on the Internet. Some stated that it was because they usually do not buy things online, so why should they buy their bed online. This agrees well with theory that old behaviour will affect how customers shop (Hernández, Jimenez & José, 2008; Narayan & Panda, 2014). Some meant that they could have bought the bed online but would in any case like to try the bed before buying it.

5.4 Varieties of experiences

As mentioned above the competition on the market has increased and retailers therefore need to offer customers something different to stay competitive. One example of doing this is to create an experience, which IKEA today does in-store through their unique store concept. But in this competitive environment, what kind of shopping experience do retailers need to create?

5.4.1 An engaging shopping experience

Customers clearly show that they want their complex shopping process to be fun, they want to interact with employees, get help and support. It is therefore possible to conclude that customers want and think it is important to be provided with an engaging shopping experience when buying a complex product. This goes well in line with earlier research (Kamaladevi, 2010; Åkesson, Edvardsson & Tornvoll, 2014; Verhoef et al., 2009; Harrigan & Mile, 2014).

Jens supported this by saying:

"Personal contact is the most important when in-store".

The employees at IKEA see some difficulties with giving the right engaging shopping experience through all the various channels. The Shopkeeper mentioned that customers clearly want the personal help, which is hard to provide through online channels. The Shopkeeper suggests to have an online chat where an employee appears and asks if customers need help to navigate or find something special. This could potentially be a way of giving the customers a similar shopping experience throughout different channels.

The Business Developer argues that customers are already engaged when they come to the store, that they have made a commitment and effort to come there. Sandra agreed, she explained:

"You go to IKEA to get an experience and you are engaged in the process".

Louise said:

"There is much more involvement when buying a bed than buying milk. The bed is a big part of your home".

Others from the focus groups agreed. Everyone in focus group 1 think that going to IKEA is a fun experience and five customers think that buying a bed and going to IKEA is more of a happening.

Technology can furthermore provide customers with a good and engaging shopping experience when they are in-store. Customers agreed with that technology could be good in an engaging perspective, which earlier research also point out (Verhoef et al., 2009; Bodhani, 2012; Inman et al., 2013; Blázquez, 2014). Customers strongly stated that it cannot substitute personal help, but can be helpful in some occasions. Customers mean that being engaged in technology can make them feel that the time of waiting in line becomes shorter. Jens illustrates what some customers said. He proposed the following in order to shorten the waiting time:

"One can perhaps have a device that can answer some questions".

Ted, said that online tools in-store become more useful when buying less complex products, like a lamp, since you do not require a lot of information and help to make a decision. This can be related to what the Business Developer said about quantitative and qualitative questions. He argues that there are two different kinds of questions. Qualitative questions are questions customers need personal support or advice with. For example what kind of colour

on the bed legs fits to my light wood floor? is a qualitative question. A quantitative question have a clear answer, either yes or no. For example does this 140-centimetre mattress fit the Sultan bed?. The Business Developer means that online tools in-store could complement the employee with answering those quantitative questions since around 80 percent of all questions addressed to employees are of the quantitative kind.

From the empirical material it is clear that customers appreciate an environment, which is easy to get an overview of, easy to find products but also inspiring. Two participants, Carolin and Ted, mentioned that all the things you can see at IKEA really inspire them. Sara means that she believes the bed department could be more inspiring. She explained:

> *"All the beds are white. I think it would have been nice if*
> *there was more colour, the beds could have had different*
> *colours for different kinds. For example divided by age,*
> *length or that IKEA at least did something fun out of it".*

Interacting with employees can be another way to get an experience according to the theory (Vivek, Beatty & Morgan, 2012; Grewal, Levy & Kumar, 2009; Sathish & Venkateskumar, 2011). The majority of respondents agree with this. Customers clearly appreciate the store the most, it becomes an important channel, since all the people from the interviews like to touch and feel the product and get personal support before making the complex purchase. They also want to get the confirmation from experts in the area. Madeleine explained:

> *"It feels reassuring that you get a "confirmation" from*
> *someone who is more proficient in the bed-for-me-area".*

Customers gave clear indications that the personal service gives them a good experience. Other people in the focus group agree and The Salesman Bed Department explained:

> *"A customer really needs personal expertise when it*
> *comes to purchasing a bed".*

The Product Developer means that customers mostly have basic questions where they can find the answers on the price tags, but they want the employee to confirm it for them. This also goes in line with what has been said above about quantitative questions, which account for the majority of questions asked.

The Bed Department Manager, has experienced that customers need more support today and want the personal contact somehow, especially when making more complex purchases. Two of the employees agree that the store makes it possible to create a great experience and the personal meeting can affect the experience a lot. The Business Developer states that the employees have a positive impact on customers and can assist the customer as a personal

advisor. The confirmation of making the right choice also goes well in line with the theory of complex purchase, that customers want confirmation of that they have made the right choice (Berber & Venkartraman, 1986).

Moreover, customers state that improvements could be done to make a better in-store shopping experience since many experienced bad service from sales representatives, it is hard to find the right bed, waiting time, severities in keeping track of total costs and that products were not in stock.

5.4.2 A fast and effective shopping experience

The majority of customers believe that the shopping experience can be improved from that the process goes smoothly and without problems. Moa mentioned:

> *"A good shopping experience is when the process goes smoothly, without long queues and you find what you are looking for".*

To find what you are looking for and that you can get the product in an easy way is highly appreciated by customers. When customers think of a good shopping experience they want it to be easy and effective. Earlier research has explored this (Bouzaabia, van Riel & Janjaap, 2013; Pihlstrom & Brush, 2008), but not specifically in the complex purchase process. Focus group 2 mentioned that these improvements can be implemented before customers come to the store or in the store. The Web Manager stated that time is of great value for the customer, but as long as the customer feels the energy and enjoys the process, time is not as important. Other employees also see the importance of making the process easy and effective and to try to do it in a creative way. Five respondents in the focus groups point out that they need the choice to be easy for them when buying a complex product.

Sara means that there are too many possible choices, Helena agrees and again point the importance to find the perfect match for the individual customer. The majority of customers pushed for the importance to easily find the products they wanted to purchase. According to the employees at the IKEA store in Malmo, one of the most common questions asked is where products are located.

Nine out of 15 customers asked, said that time is important when buying a bed. Linus explained that:
> *"Time is crucial!".*

Erik agreed and said:

*"Today, it is crucial to speed up all processes since time is
a valuable resource".*

Some of the interviewees said that buying a bed takes time, but it is important that you use the time in the best possible way and try to make it effective. The Shopkeeper agrees and states that time is increasingly important for customers. Many of IKEA's customers are parents, where time is even more scarce. Thus, complex purchases need more time. Emma and Sandra mean that they allocate time to the things they prioritize, so time is not a big problem, but still want the purchase to be effective. To wait inline to get help to continue what you were doing, that time is annoying. According to the Business Developer, this is an area that IKEA has issues with today, as most retailers have. The problem concerns peak traffic, which occurs when many visit IKEA at the same time. He stated:

*"It occurs that queues build up to a high extent, much
more often than we would prefer. We always prefer to
have less queues".*

The Bed Department Manager, moreover explains that customers want a lot of support. The staff at the bed department can be understaffed, it is not possible to spend 20 minutes on each customer. There is no room for such service. Customers do not like it, but if they see that IKEA's employees are doing everything they can, they get calmer and understand the situation. Queues at the end of the shopping trip are the worst according to the interviewed customers, but they still mean that they are quite prepared for them since it is IKEA, they expect a lot of people. Emma furthermore explains that she feels stressed if people behind her in the queue are stressed.

To make the process more effective for their customers, The Shopkeeper means that, IKEA needs to come closer to its customers in order to increase the convenience. IKEA has to work with e-commerce to come closer to their customers, but still keep the department-perspective. He also explains that "show rooming" is the upcoming trend, to only show products and that the customer returns home and makes the order from their own computer. Moa means that if you know what you want, then it is nice to sit back home and use Internet. Another customer summarized:

*"If you do not have time and you are comfortable with it,
then the Internet truly can help you in your everyday life".*

Several employees point out that Internet provides convenience. The Salesman Bed Department, states that IKEA and their customers could save time through using Internet and technology. Having a tablet could facilitate their sales job.

The Salesman Bed Department argued:

> *"As a sales representative you are expected to cover many product areas and through having a tablet we could save an incredible amount of time instead of going back to desktop computers all the time".*

Five customers point out that it is easy to shop at IKEA. Sofie said that the reason she goes to IKEA is that it is the easiest to go there. One couple also points out that they checked the Internet and that they anyway, chose to come to IKEA since it is the quickest way possible to get a bed. Erik and Mats both pointed out that since they had time constraints, it was more convenient to pick up the furniture directly in the department store than ordering online. Customers experience it as faster to come to the physical store to get things instead of ordering online.

In the part about engaging experiences it shows that customers often want personal support. The Shopkeeper believes that it is maybe 10 percent that do not want personal help. That is an important group of customers who need to be in focus. IKEA needs to meet them in a better way. The Bed Department Manager supports what The Shopkeeper explained through saying:

> *"There are definitively 1000 customers that pass the bed department, when buying a bed, without asking for personal support.*

Several customers support this argument, they want it to go fast when at IKEA and seemed to make the entire process by themselves. Ellen stated that:

> *"I do not like to spend a lot of time in a department store. If I go there, I usually have a particular item that I want to look at. Then you want it to proceed fast, so you come home soon, since you know what you want".*

According to customers, a good shopping experience consists of simplicity and smoothness. The above stated arguments support the theory that the convenience factor is really important for customers today (Bouzaabia, van Riel & Janjaap, 2013; Pihlstrom & Brush, 2008; Rigby, 2011). The Shopkeeper mentioned that they are working at IKEA to provide the customer with a "green light feeling" throughout the store. That everything runs smoothly and that red light does not appear. He explained red light as long queues or inconveniences for the customer.

Louise supports this and explains what many customers have indicated. She argued that important parameters when making the actual purchase in-store is that:

> *"It runs smoothly and that the product is in stock. That everything is easy when you pay and that the pick-up in the self-service-area works smoothly".*

Madeleine made a summary of a shopping trip that is filled with simplicity is:

> *"Everything works fine, you come in, you do not wait, you get help, you hear what you need to hear, I get my warranty there, I get the pat on my shoulder. For me it is that I do not have to wait much and I get the help I need, or that I find information on the Internet before. It will be the same price when I add legs, bed mattress, etc. Actually that everything runs smoothly, then I am satisfied".*

Ellen agreed and meant that it would also been nice to have a quick way to screen out the beds that she absolutely did not want.

> *"If I make a test, and there are 25 beds possible from the start, but only 10 of them are beds that fit my pre-registered online profile, that would give me more value to know what would fit me and then I only need to focus on choosing between those 10".*

All members of the focus group 1 agree with Ellen. This could potentially be done with technology.

5.5 Perceptions of technology

5.5.1 Customers' acceptance towards technology

All the respondents showed a positive attitude towards technology in-store. They however meant that they must be used and designed in the right way. One employee explains that customers do not only want technological devices, but that these can function as complements for the sales representatives in-store. Most of the customers agreed, that technology would work as a complement next to the employees, which goes well in line with what Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson found (2014).

Olle said:

>*"Technology can be a good tool to support the complex purchasing process".*

Customers indicate that it cannot substitute, since the personal support is still the most important in-store, getting accurate help. Ted gave the suggestion that:

>*"When customers come to the store they start to use technology, but when they get to a certain stage, a sales person comes out and gives them more help. This will probably make the process more effective as well".*

Seven out of 14 of the interviewed customers and two employees mentioned that technology must be easy to use and understand, which Bodhani (2012) and Meuter et al. (2000) clearly state in their articles. Many customers mentioned that the process could become faster and more effective with the help from technology.

5.5.2 Improvements through technology

All respondents strongly believe there are many technological devices that can be improved in-store, which theory also indicates (Sluis, 2014). The Business Developer believes that many people find it difficult to imagine a digital world. The employees point out that it is important to not force customers into technological systems and to do it in an easy and pedagogic manner. One solution to this would be to help the customer in the physical world to understand it. He moreover pointed out that:

>*"The right kind of technology can make the bed purchasing process work faster. It feels like IKEA, until the year of 2005, was in the front line, but we forgot the whole technology development. Who does not have a living room today, which is fully integrated with a Smart TV, tablets and smartphones?".*

Respondents from the interviews agreed with this. The Shopkeeper suggested that the payment could be done faster after customers have decided for the purchase, maybe already in the bed department, through digital devices.

The employees believe they should be better in providing customers with the right information and make it more clear for them about different concepts, prices and solutions. The Web Manager mentioned the digital "mattress guide" that they have had before at IKEA. This guide helped customers to find the right bed through making customers specify how they

sleep, weight and length. But the guide was too complex, customers did not know how to use it. Customers have moreover clearly indicated that they would like something like the "mattress guide".

Madeleine believed that technology could make the waiting time become more efficient. If it is a long line, customers can pass the time with the help from technology and through this not experience queues as negatively. As Ted mentioned before, customers can make some preparations with the help from technology so it goes quicker when they get the personal help, which the rest of the focus group agreed with.

There were many suggestions from the empirical material on what can be improved technology wise. The specific kind of technology is not the interesting part, it is what can be improved with the support from technology, in other words where the retailer and customer have an issue they want to avoid. The suggestions of improvements seems to have with that customers want information, save time and have a easy process when purchasing a bed. Those improvements are corresponding with what Bouzaabia, van Riel & Janjaap state (2013). Erik would like a better flow in the process and therefore gave the suggestion that someone could pick up and gather all things for him in the warehouse to increase the convenience. Chris wants help during the process in order to not forget anything. Siv wants shortcuts in order to not walk the entire "walk-way" in-store. Ylva wants to avoid queues and think that there should be a possibility to do all the steps yourself. All those suggestions could potentially make the shopping trip proceed faster. Several customers moreover want help to keep track of the expenses and to get a holistic picture of their total bed purchase. Madeleine gave a suggestion on how to make the process work more efficient. She said:

> *"It would be good to have a small surf station where, if there are people waiting, they can in the meantime keep busy through doing a bed-test. Maybe that customers can do a test, either on a digital station or through the app where they enter the weight, length, and their preferences".*

A digital tool like that could help customers with what kind of bed that would fit and to proceed the first step so that the salesperson then knows what to focus on in order to give more personalized help. Ted believes that using technology becomes a way for customers to pass time. He additionally believes of something that can make you see if the bed can fit your room at home. He said:

> *"For example you take a photo of your room, then chose a bed to put in and then it get fitted in the room and one can see if it is still possible to open doors and if it is proportional to the room".*

5.5.3 Technological possibilities in-store

5.5.3.1 The website

The website has many strengths. All of the employees clearly state that it provides availability for customers to see the product range and three of them mean that the visit at the website works as the preparatory step before you go to the physical store. Moreover, the website had 65 million visits in Sweden in 2014, compared with the physical stores, which in total had 37.8 million visits. The website therefore have a major impact on customers purchasing process and overall willingness to buy.

Interestingly eight out of nine from the focus groups believe and trust the online channel more than the offline channel, which do not correspond with what previous research state about difficulties in building trust in e-commerce (Gefen & Straub, 2004; Salehina, Saki, Eshaghi & Salehina, 2014). They find the information online to be more updated and trustworthy. Ted said:

> *"I would say online because it feels like it is more updated and faster and I can always turn to the website if I think something in the store might be wrong, like information about price".*

This illustrates the importance of managing all channels in the same way, as discussed earlier, since it is easy for customers to compare channels with each other as Ted explained. Moreover, focus group 1 discussed that IKEA should use their website to increasingly trying to affect their customers. Sara gave an example:

> *"When you buy one thing more suggestions should come up of what you can buy that matches or complements your purchase. And then IKEA should already have some personal information about you on what you like. IKEA should know what kind of person you are, for example gender, age, styles you like and so on".*

Ted also gave a suggestion on how to provide the customers with more information online:

> *"That a human model test lay the beds, so one could read that he is so tall, weighs so much and one can see if he likes some bed and what he thinks".*

5.5.3.2 Mobile devices and applications

5.5.3.2.1 The Smartphone

Employees see that a good way to integrate online channels in the offline environment is through using customers' mobile phones. They state that the mobile phone is one of the most important tools when it comes to integrating channels, which correspond well with theory (Spaid & Flint, 2014; Sluis, 2014; Inman et al., 2013). Almost every customer owns a phone and that provides IKEA with great opportunities to improve the contact point with customers in-store.

One possibility to use the mobile phone more is through the app. Employees are seeing that customers are using the app, but they state that it can become better and used in a wider range. The Product Developer said:

> *"20-30 percent are app users, not a majority of the customers".*

The Business Developer has some suggestion on how to improve the app. He thinks it needs to have more information about the products, it should provide offers and give push-notices and information about queues and waiting times. Above all, it would also have a payment function. The app could potentially help customers to handle the payment process more effectively through connecting their phones to a payment station. Those features in order to optimize customers' time in-store. The Bed Department Manager mentioned that the app needs to be promoted better, especially in-store. The majority of respondents believed that IKEA could make increasingly use of the mobile device while customers are in-store.

Another way for IKEA to use customers' mobile phones more in-store is through start using push-notices. The interviewees were keen to receive push-notices to their mobile phones if they are connected to IKEA's Wi-Fi, so they somehow agree on receiving them. Focus group 1 think it can become more convenient for them, that the notices can help remind them of products. For example mobile ads can come up in real time as you pass furniture you have been looking at on the website. They also believe that the mobile can be a tool for helping customers in the entire process before, during and after the purchase.

Furthermore according to the Shopkeeper mobile usage is an area to exploit. He stated:

> *"I see it as self-evident that the digital should be in-store and I think customers want it too. It is an absolute majority that has a mobile phone with them, so how can we use that tool? We see customers are more digital. It is precisely how and what we are going to incorporate that is the big question now".*

5.5.3.2.2 Tablets

A tablet is another tool that the employees truly believe could support customers in-store. Salesman Bed Department had thoughts about that they should have wireless computers or tablets so they can walk around with such technology as supportive sales tools and help customers more effectively. The Business Developer means that he would like to put out a tablet next to each bed. This could solve the problem with queues. He explained that:

> *"Let's start with the tablets. People are 100 percent comfortable using such devices. It may be that we could show short film about the product and it does not need to be integrated in lots of other things. Instead of the catalogue in-store customers could use those tablets. I want to know more - play. Customer shall not need to hunt information, it will just be there. Sure many like talking to a person, but you have a 15 minutes queue to this sales person, here you can check immediately".*

It is possible to state that the section "Digital Signage" also fits with this suggestion that the employees make, since tablets can function as DS.

5.5.3.3. Digital Signage (DS)

The majority of customers is keen to digital signage and thinks that it can help them in their complex purchase process. This goes in line with theory that states that DS can provide customers with fast access to information (Dennis et al., 2012). Linus said:

> *"It can be very helpful, especially in the beginning of the store, to have maybe a digital search device, so that you know in advance where products are located".*

Some customers also mentioned that the digital signage could be annoying. For example Emma said:

> *"If it is old, boring and hard to use technology it is worse than paper signs. Things do not have to be digital to be good".*

Furthermore customers believe that it becomes easier for retailers to replace the message, advertisements, for example, when using digital signage. The Bed Department Manager prefers digitals signage since he believes that DS can be very informative and captures customers' attention better than paper signs. The Salesman Bed Department also supports what the others said and suggests that it would have been beneficial to have digital signage in-store next to each bed.

6. DISCUSSION

The following discussion outlines the empirical results of this research. The results answer the research question and objectives of the study, How can one improve a complex purchasing process in-store through the integration of online channels?. The discussion also includes the study's theoretical contribution, implications and limitations. Thereafter suggestions for future research are given.

6.1 Result of the sub-questions

Customers' and employees' opinion towards integrating more online channels in-store were positive (see Table 5). All respondents agree upon that it is important for retailers to follow the multi-channel trend, which all retailers should keep in mind to stay competitive. Interviewed customers see the benefits of it since it provided them with better purchasing conditions. They get access to an increased amount of information, which makes them feel more secure and confident of making the right purchase. Using multi-channels provide the benefits for retailers of being visible everywhere, but at the same time it presents some integration difficulties. There are many aspects that impede the integration of different channels. An important aspect is that both sides, physical store and e-commerce, must promote each other and work together in order to make both parts thrive. They need to support each other in order to create the best overall solution for customers.

The physical store was confirmed to still be the most important channel for customers when buying complex products. Customers want to feel and quality test the products before purchasing it, which makes this study relevant, since it focuses on improving the in-store environment. Another major channel, Internet, provided customers with opportunities to search for information before as well as during the purchase, which was found to be of great importance when buying complex products. Moreover, many respondents mean that it is more convenient to come to the physical store to purchase their complex product instead of ordering online. It is an interesting finding since it differs from previous research, which states that purchasing online is more convenient. The reason behind this seems to have a connection with that the product is complex.

The respondents also agreed upon that buying a bed is a complex purchase, which makes this research valuable, since the correct purchase process has been studied (see Table 5). Results show that buying a bed is categorized as a medium to difficult purchase. It is possible to draw the conclusions that the majority of customers, when making a complex purchase, do not feel capable by themselves to take the final decision. All employees interviewed indicated that since many feel uncertain about what kind of bed that fits them, they come to the store to try it

out and to get support from sales representatives that are experts in their different complex areas. This seems to lessen customers' perceived risk and uncertainty.

Moreover, results show that customers want to have an engaging shopping experience in-store when making a complex purchase (see Table 5). Personal support is the most significant aspect in order to create an engaging in-store experience, since customers clearly requested personalized help and want to interact with employees. It becomes important that retailers provide this support and remember that customers nowadays are increasingly well-read. Retailers should take advantage of this by providing customers with something extra, like this study suggests, an engaging shopping experience. Other ways, not as significant as personal help, of creating an engaging shopping experience are confirmed to be through the use of technology and creation of an inspiring in-store atmosphere. The provision of personalized information through digital tools in-store was also confirmed to be appreciated by customers.

An engaging shopping experience is however not the only aspect that improves a complex purchase process in-store. Results show that customers consider a good complex purchasing process to flow smoothly and to be simple. The process should be easy and effective and include access to a lot of information. Customers could set aside time for the complex purchase, but to wait in line in order to proceed with their purchase made them dissatisfied. Therefore it is possible to conclude that retailers should allocate resources in order to decrease annoying waiting times for customers when making a complex purchase.

A major finding in this research is that technological devices in-store cannot work as substitutes, since the personal contact still is the most important in-store support when making a complex purchase. Results show that technology can improve waiting times and the incorporation of technology in-store was highly appreciated by respondents in the complex purchasing process. The conditions that in-store technology had to live up to was that it worked as a complement and was easy to understand and use. To be easy to use and understand are therefore crucial aspects for retailers to consider when designing digital in-store devices.

The empirical material indicates that there is a distinct amount of customers who want to make their complex purchase all by themselves, which are arguments and results that support the incorporation of digital tools in-store. Those customers are an important number who need to be in focus as well, and a group that the employees believe will increase over time, in pace with technological developments.

From the analysis it was possible to see that digital devices give customers increased information, help them save time and provide customers with a smooth process when purchasing a complex product, in order to improve the process (see Table 5). Trying to create

a mattress guide that is easy to use would potentially improve the complex purchasing process, according to the results.

The analysis shows that online tools, in form of technology devices, could support and complement the employees with answering quantitative questions[13] in-store. The quantitative questions in-store could support customers with what kind of mattress, its softness, price, quality and fabric that fit the individual and can be a first step in narrowing down the choice of beds for customers. The technology in-store should work to make the choice more simple for the customer and the following step should be to get advice from employees.

Summary of the empirical material

Agreement level between the empirical material and theory	High	Medium	Low
There is a clear need for integrating multi-channels	X		
The bed buying process is a complex purchase process	X		
Customers want an engaging experience in the complex purchase process	X		
Customers want the complex purchase process to be fast and effective	X		
Customers need of technology in-store when in the complex purchase process		X	
Online tools in form of digital devices can make the process become fast effective and engaging experience	X		

Table 5. *Summary of the empirical material.*

6.2 Result of the SOS-framework

From the literature review it seemed as customers wanted support in the areas of Search, Orientate and Shop when in a complex purchasing process. When analysing the empirical material it was found that integration of online channels in-store, was mostly desired by customers in the Search and Shop stages in order to make the complex purchasing process to become a fast, effective and engaging shopping experience. Search and Shop prove to be areas of greater importance for customers than Orientate (see Figure 4). It was only the employees from the empirical material that confirmed that the most common question was where to find different products, which supports the Orientate stage.

Search was found to be of great significance since respondents showed that information gathering was essential in order to make a complex purchase, which clearly takes place in the Search stage. The Search stage could be improved through making the choice of a complex

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[13] The term *quantitative question* was used by an employee, see analysis.

products easier through facilitating the process with personal support and technology in-store. Potentially customers could do the first step by themselves by finding information through digital devices in-store. When they get to a certain point and need specialized help, an employee could give that extra support and then close the deal in a faster and easier way. This in order to provide the customer with extended information in order to find the perfect match for the individual. The result also shows that a better complex purchasing process can be created through providing customers with a holistic product overview of parts and total costs when in the Search stage.

Moreover, findings show that customers did not like to stand in line, especially not when making the final purchase, which happens in the Shop stage. Taking advantage of incorporating digital devices in-store in this stage would be useful, in order to make the process become more effective. Customers indicated a positive approach towards incorporating digital solutions into the final purchasing stage, Shop. This support that Shop is an important stage in the process.

It was found in the empirical material that tablets and mobile phones should be the most beneficial digital devices to introduce in-store to make the complex purchase process better. This since customers are already familiar with them and know how they work. Making the personal help and the help from technology work together in the Search and Shop stage would be beneficial. This since customers will get an engaging shopping experience from both personal help and technology in-store. It will also create a fast and more effective experience, for by example decreasing waiting times, through using technology in-store as a complement to the personal support. All this requires of course that the devices have features of being easy to use and engaging. Finally, retailers must get their employee to work cross-border, between online and offline, since this has been proven to enhance the integration and create a better in-store process.

Due to the conclusions of the study the initial theoretical model has been changed (see Figure 4). The importance of incorporating online channels in the offline environment still applies and answers the research question, how one can improve the complex purchase process. It is found that incorporating digital tools will create an engaging, but also a fast and effective shopping experience, which will improve the complex purchase process. However the integration of online and offline channels will be done in the Search and Shop stage (S2) and not in the Orientate stage as previously assumed (see and compare Figure 1 & 4).
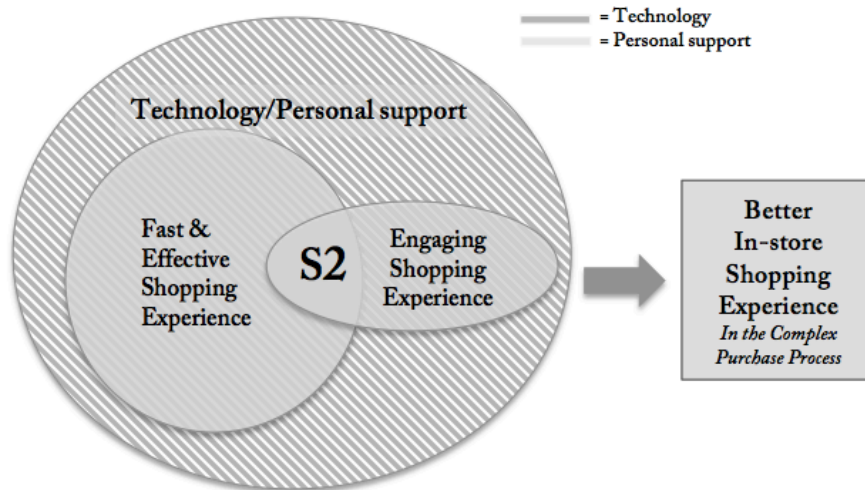
Figure 4. *The revised S2 model.*

First of all, the revised model shows that complimentary in-store technology in balance with personal support permeates both stages, Search and Shop, which is illustrated through the big striped circle. Those two components, personal support and in-store technology, generate an engaging and fast and effective shopping experience, which are illustrated by the two smaller circles inside the big striped circle. To have a fast and effective shopping experience it was found to be as crucial in both stages throughout the whole complex purchase process in-store, therefore the circle is bigger than the engaging circle. An engaging shopping experience was found to be more important in the Search stage, then the Shop stage, which the oval and slightly smaller circle illustrates. This relation is very well illustrated in Graph 1 below. When customers are in the Shop stage they mainly prioritize the complex purchasing process to be fast and to reach an end as soon as possible, more than getting an engaging shopping experience.
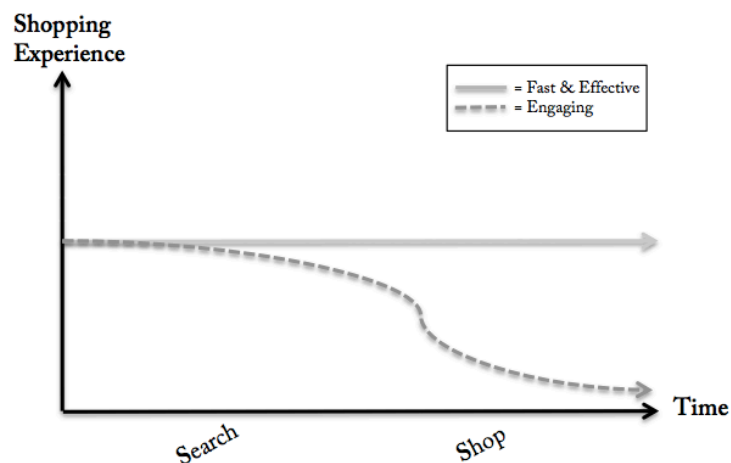
Graph 1. *The complex purchasing process in-store - shopping experience S2*

The revised model and the graph are aimed to be used by retailers in-store to show where they should put their effort to improve the complex purchase process, through the use of technology. Incorporating this concept in the Search and Shop stage will lead to a fast, effective and engaging shopping experience in-store when in the complex purchasing process, which will provide customers with an overall "green light-feeling".

6.3 Theoretical contributions

Our results show that customers are expected to have a lot of knowledge when making a complex purchase today. Previous research points out that access to information is substantial for customers (Bouzaabia, van Riel and Janjaapwhe, 2013). Information is particularly important when making a high involvement purchase, since the purchase is related to risk (Sarathy & Patro, 2013; Barber & Venkatrraman, 1986). Research also points out that retailers should focus on improving this area with innovative techniques (Bell, Gallino & Moreno, 2014). Our research contributes with the insight that customers nowadays, when making a complex purchase, demand something more when coming to the physical store, that can provide them with increased value of information, compared with what they can find on their own.

Time is proven to be a crucial aspect in the complex purchase process in-store, which previous literature does not show. Alreck & Settle have emphasized the importance that time is more valued today than before. Oh, Yoon and Shyu (2008) mean that it is important that the buying process becomes faster, but have not specifically applied it to the complex purchase process in-store.

Another finding is related where to integrate technology in-store. Earlier research done by Handelns Utvecklingsråd argues that digital devices will have a significant effect in-store and new research is required to figure out how to meet customers' needs and wants (2014). This study has an answer where to implement technology in-store in order to improve the complex purchase process. Customers want technology in-store in the Search and Shop stages, when making a complex purchase. It was also found that customers appreciate a fast and effective shopping experience in both the Search and Shop stage, but an engaging shopping experience was found to be of greater importance in the Search stage (see Figure 4 & Graph 1).

The major finding of this study is that retailers should support customers in the complex purchasing process through integrating digital tools that work as complements in the Search and Shop stage of the process. This will provide a fast, effective and engaging experience. This study contributes with the insight that technology in-store should work as a complement in order to improve the complex purchase process. By this we mean that customers in-store can utilize technology as one step in the complex purchasing process. It does not mean to only

provide employees with sales support. Previous research has focused on in-store technology as complements, only focusing on it as sales support (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014).

The finding about technology as a complement stands in relation to the following finding. It was found in this study that the most important aspect in a complex purchase is the personal support. Customers need personal support in order to find the right complex product that suits the individual customer. Previous literature discusses that when purchasing a high involvement product the feeling that you made the right choice is crucial and creates customer satisfaction (Berber & Venkartraman, 1986). Earlier research is of a more general kind, for example Neslin et al. (2006) state that information will provide benefits to make better decisions. They have not explored what kind of information and not in the relation to the complex purchase. From our study it is clear that customers want a sales representative to provides them with personal information, of what kind of complex product that fits them, and that this person supports them to make the final complex purchase decision.

Through our research it is found that technology as a complement will generate both a fast, effective and engaging experience, at the same time, if implemented in the areas of Search and Shop. Verhoef et al. (2009) and Bodhani (2012) said that technology might generate an experience and Åkesson Edvardsson and Tornvoll (2014) said that technology can provide a positive experience by reducing the time of waiting. Other literature shows that technology can make it fast and effective or create an experience (Rigby, 2011). Previous research has not shown that the technologies and personal assistance, if handled in the correct relationship to each other, can create both a fast, effective but also engaging experience, when in the complex purchasing process in-store. This is the new way of meeting the busier and more well-read multi-channel customer.

This study also contributes with a new methodological perspective in this research field since the majority of previous studies have had a quantitative research method.

6.4 Managerial implications

From this study it is possible to make suggestions for retailers to follow in order to improve their customers' complex purchase process in-store. They should allocate resources to improve the Search and Shop stages in-store. The Search stage should have a clear focus on creating an engaging and effective shopping experience, while the Shop stage should be more focused on quick proceedings and an effective experience.

The Search stage could, on a more detailed level, be improved by clearly dividing the in-store process into different steps for customers to follow. Step one should consist of helping customers reduce all overwhelming choices of the complex product by using digital tools in-

store. The customer should then, in step two, get personal and specialized support where the customer receives confirmation which product that suits the individual. The third step, when the customers have decided which product, the retailer should digitally provide the customer with a holistic view of the product, both with regard to price and additional parts.

Through the use of this three-stage-process, and the balance between digital and personal expert help, the customer does not feel forced into only digital solutions and retailers teach the customer to get to know the online channels, which potentially can provide the retailer with an increased multi-channel integration. Furthermore, the customer receives an engaging, but also effective complex purchasing process in-store.

When it comes to the Shop stage, the retailer should minimize waiting times through incorporating digital devices. Since this step is one of the last physical contact points with the customer, it is crucial to create a fast and effective shopping experience, since customers meant that it was their main priority in the Shop stage. This stage could potentially be done already at the complex product department where the customer places the order. The research also shows that customers appreciate smart solutions and it would therefore be wise to keep up the tech trend and develop a payment solution through customers' smartphones/apps, in order to create increased convenience.

Another important aspect for retailers to have in mind is that customers are increasingly more well-read today due to the great availability of information. Customers therefore expect more valuable information and something extra when coming to the store. Retailers need to convince the customer that they are experts in their field and create an experience, preferably with complementary technologies, around the complex purchase.

6.5 Research limitations

When performing a qualitative study, generalisation is difficult to achieve. Making generalisations is not of great importance for this study since it aims to deeply understand how customers want their complex process to be performed, how they feel about technology in-store and if this technology can help them to get a fast, effective and engaging shopping experience.

The research is moreover conducted on the bed buying process at IKEA, which belongs to a peculiar concept, based on creating a shopping experience. It can therefore be difficult to generalize this to other bed purchasing processes, since other furniture or bed retailers do not have this kind of concept. However, customers will probably never completely stop visiting retailers' physical stores since they clearly show that they want to quality-test complex products by themselves. To improve the in-store environment is therefore important and

makes this study relevant. Retailers could therefore take advantage of this study and the experience concept in order to stand out and provide customers with something extra.

Another limitation for this study is the delimitation of a complex purchase. How should other researchers be able to know another complex purchase they want to study really is a complex purchase? The complex purchase is not enough developed and defined in theory. It can therefore be trouble when applying this study on a complex purchase. However, by explaining very carefully throughout the paper we believe that researchers can make the conclusion of what a complex purchase process is, but it can include difficulties.

6.6 Suggestions for future research

This study highlights a new problem, how to incorporate online channels in-store in a complex purchase process and raises many ideas for future research. The study was designed around a relatively strict question, but the results may be fundamental for the integration of multi-channels in-store. Our study is therefore a highly relevant basis for further research.

An interesting area to investigate deeper is to find out what kind of technology tools and applications that could be best suited to improve the complex purchase process in-store. This study shows that technology has to be complementary in-store and it only indicates that the tools to use could be mobile phones and tablets. It would therefore be of great value for retailers to get confirmed in order to know what kind of technology to invest in.

Moreover, the complex process outside the physical store would be interesting to explore further. According to the results, customers move back and forth between channels and therefore retailers have to consider this movement in order to provide a fast, effective and engaging shopping experience through the entire complex purchase process. One suggestion can be to research what could provide an engaging experience on the website, which several employees pointed out as an issue today.

This study was conducted from the furniture industry, therefore we find it would be an interesting research opportunity to carry out this kind of research on another industry with complex products. This to see if the same model can be applied on another complex process than the process of buying furniture.

We hope that our study, together with further research, contribute to the development of a multi-channel theory for today's market conditions.

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APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW GUIDE - FOCUS GROUP

Important to remember

- Point out to participants that it is important that they do not question each other's views. There is no right or wrong answer.
- Let everyone have about two minutes to think through the issues. Go the whole group around and let them speak freely.

Introduction

- Welcome all respondents
- Tell quickly, in a not leading manner, what we are investigating. A proposal:
  As you all know, we write our master's thesis together with IKEA. We investigate how to optimize the customer interaction in-store and have focused on how the bed buying process look like and how it can be improved.

- We will ask a number of questions where it's supposed to go around the group and talk about our thoughts and experiences, but do not be afraid to interrupt with comments or questions during the discussion. If you think of something you want to say in the meantime when another person talks - write down on the paper in front of you to remember!

- For each of you to understand the questions we felt it was relevant to explain what multi-channels are. Multi-channels are channels where the customer and companies meet to exchange information or make a purchase. Multi-channels consist of both online and offline channels. An online channel can be a computer, mobile, tablet, an app. An offline channel does not have a connection to the Internet, for example, a store or catalogue.

- The **Bold** and numbered questions should be asked as a first step and if those do not generate an interesting discussion, the second questions including the *italic* ones can support the discussion.

The process and channel usage questions

1. **Tell us about how the process went when you bought your bed at IKEA?**
   - What channels did you use?
     - *In what order did you use the channels?*
     - *In what channel were you looking for information?*
     - *In what channel did you do the final purchase? Why?*
   - What channel was the most important when you bought your bed?
   - Did you find it easy to move between the different channels?

- What was it that made you go to the department store?
- Did you get support from the employees at IKEA when you bought your bed?
- Did you use any digital tools in-store? (mobile, tablet, PC?)
- How did you experience the support/service?
  - *How was the service in the bed department?*

2. Why did you buy your bed at IKEA?
- What triggered you to buy a bed?
- Why IKEA?
- Why not purchase through Internet?
- Why the physical store?

3. What went good respectively bad during your bed purchase process?
- What did you experience as well working?
- What did you experience as bad/hard during the process?
- Did you encounter any problems during the time you purchased your bed?

4. What do you think is difficult with buying a bed?
- What are the 3 most important parts you generally need help with when shopping?
- How do you perceive the different queues that can appear at IKEA?
  - *When you need help at the bed department*
  - *When at the check out (pay)*
- Was the collection of information important to you when you bought your bed?

5. Is time a crucial factor for you when you shop?
- Do you usually go to IKEA to make quick errands or do you make long "rounds"?

Consumer Behaviour questions

6. How do you think a bed purchase differ from when you buy clothes/food?

7. What external factors affect you when you buy a bed?

8. What feelings did you feel when you were buying your bed?

Experience/engagement questions

9. What is the ultimate shopping experience for you when buying a bed?
- How would you like IKEA to engage in you as a customer?
  - *Offline (in-store)*
  - *Online*
- What can lead to a better shopping experience (in the bed purchase)?

10. What gets you extraordinary happy with a purchase of a bed?
- What is it that makes you feel that a retailer is offering the little extra (you get added value)?
- Would you appreciate more personalized assistance or to make the purchase more on your own?
- Warranty on the bed, how important is it in the choice of buying a bed?

11. Do you want general or personalized information when buying a bed?
- What channel do you consider give the best information?

Technology questions

12. Do you see any difference in how the bed buying process looks today compared with before?
- What do you think the technology contributes with in the department store? (Computers, monitors)
- How do you think the future of the department store look like?

13. What do you think of the current trend, that retailers incorporate more technology in-store?
- Are there any obstacles with technology?
  - *When there occurs a problem with technology, how do you react?*
- What does technology/digital tools bad vs. good?
- What features should technology have?

  E-commerce
  - What makes the use of website good/bad?
  - What do you think about having Wi-Fi in the store?
  - Did you use Wi-Fi inside the IKEA store?
    - *Why/why not?*
    - *For what did you use it?*
  Mobile
  - Is the app good?
  - Offers in-store through mobile (push notices) - good or bad?
  - Do you want to use you own mobile or the technology of the retailer?
  DS
  - What do you think about digital signage in-store?
  - What can digital signage support you with in-store?

  TBSS
  - What do you think about self-scanning?

14. Have you had the use of digital tools when you were at IKEA? How?
- Which digital tools are important for what part of the process?
- When starting you process?
- When making the final purchase?

Loyalty/trust questions

15. Will you buy the next bed at IKEA? Why, why not?

16. What make you loyal to a company?

17. What do you trust the most, Offline (e.g. department store) or Online (e.g. website) channels?

18. What is it that makes you experience a purchase:
- Funny?
- Easily?
- Engaging?
- Personally?
- Unsuccessful?
- Difficult?

Questions about improvements

19. If you get one thing you could change in the bed department or in bed buying process, what would it be?

Additional questions – if there is time

- **What were the most important criteria, for you, as a bed must meet?**

- **How do you perceive your relationship with IKEA, describe it with a few adjectives?**
    - Who do you have the power in the relationship, is it you or IKEA?

- **What would you appreciate most to get assistance with under the bed buying process?**

APPENDIX 2

INTERVIEW GUIDE - CUSTOMERS IN-STORE

Introduction

- When approaching the customers:
  - Hello! We have been commissioned by IKEA to improve customers' bed buying process, which we do as our master's thesis at Lund University. Do you have 5-10 minutes to answer some quick questions?
  - Is it okay that we record your answers so that we can more easily analyse the material later? You can be completely anonymous!

- The numbered questions should be asked as a first step and if those do not generate interesting answerers, the second questions can support.

Introduction question

1. Why did you choose to come to IKEA today to look at a bed?

Multi-channel questions

2. Have you been anywhere else, and looked at beds, before you came here today?
   - Internet?
   - IKEA's website?
   - The catalogue?
   - The app?

3. Have you encountered any problems / difficulties now that you are about to buy a bed? (in the department store)

4. What are the benefits of coming to the physical store?

5. Have you used IKEA's website before?

6. Have you purchased anything on the website?
   - Why/why not?

7. Do you use your mobile phone when in the physical store?
   - Why/why not?
   - What did you use if for?

8. How could the mobile support you in the bed buying process?

9. What could potentially be improved in the end of the purchase, with help from the mobile phone?

10. Do you want personalized information in your mobile phone when visiting the physical store?

11. What does the mobile phone, computer or tablet provide compared to the physical store?

12. Would you like digital billboards for more information in-store?

Experience & Engagement questions

13. What is the most important when buying a bed?

14. Is time a crucial factor when shopping?

15. What can provide you with a good shopping experience in-store when buying a bed?

16. What creates value for you as a customers in-store?

17. What improvements do you think is needed in bed purchasing process?

18. Do you think a bed purchase differ from buying food /clothing? How?

19. What kind of support do you want when purchasing a bed?

Technology questions

20. What do you think about the new trend, as IKEA and other retailers have begun to follow, introducing more technology/digital tools in-store?

21. What are the most important characteristics of technology inside the store?

22. Where in the department store would you have use for more technology? (as digital tools)
    - What kind of technology would you like to use?

Final and summarizing questions

23. When did you decide what kind of bed you wanted?

24. Did you decide the type of bed or supplier first?

25. How would you like to have contact with IKEA after the purchase?

26. Are you going to buy the bed today?
    - Why/why not?

APPENDIX 3

INTERVIEW GUIDE - EMPLOYEES

Introduction

- Welcome the respondent
- Tell quickly, in a not leading manner, what we are investigating. A proposal:
  As you all know, we write our master's thesis together with IKEA. We investigate how to optimize the customer interaction in-store and have focused on how the bed buying process look like and how it can be improved.
- To understand the questions we felt it was relevant to explain what multi-channels are. Multi-channels are channels where the customer and companies meet to exchange information or make a purchase. Multi-channels consist of both online and offline channels. An online channel can be a computer, mobile, tablet, an app. An offline channel does not have a connection to the Internet, for example, a store or catalogue.

- The numbered questions should be asked as a first step and if those do not generate interesting answerers, the second questions can support.

Introduction questions

1. For how long have you been working at IKEA?

2. What are your main duties?

3. Have you got any education about beds?

4. Have you seen any trends in the furniture industry when it comes to multi-channels?
   - For example about technology in-store?
   - For example about customer relations?

Multi-channel questions

5. IKEA offers many different channels for their customers, such as the store, the website, the app and the catalogue. What kind of advantages do you see with offer customers that many channels?

6. What kind of disadvantages do you see with offering customers many channels?

7. What advantages do you see with each individual channel?
   - The store?
   - The website?

- The App?
- Do you know how the app works?
- Do you think customers use the app?
- Do employees use the app?
- The Catalogue?

8. Are all channels used separately or are they used together?

Technology questions

9. What do you think about digital tools?
   - Pros?
   - Cons?
   - Do you think it can work as a substitute for you employees or a complement?

10. What do you believe customers think about digital tools in-store?

11. Do you think there is a way to introduce more e-commerce in-store, how and where?
    - Do you believe that it something IKEA should do?
    - Why/Why not?

12. Do you receive questions about the digital services in-store? What kind of questions?

13. What do you think customers use online-channels for?

14. Where do you believe that digital devices could support the process?

Questions about the bed buying process

15. How do you think the bed buying process looks for your customers?
    - Where do they start, how do they move, and where do they finish?
    - Do you believe it is an easy, medium or difficult process for your customers?

16. Do customers ask many questions about the bed?
    - What are some common questions?

17. Do customers ask about directions in-store?
    - What do they need help with?

18. Are their queues in the bed department?
    - On what days?
    - What time?
    - How does customers react to queues?

19. What can be improved in the bed buying process?
   - Have you received any complains in the bed department?

Engagement & Experience questions

20. IKEA are already working on create an experience in store, how do you think you can develop this concept, or is it already perfect??

21. What does an experience mean to you?

22. Have you seen any difference on how the consumer behaves in-store today, compared to before?

23. What do you believe is the most important for customers when they buy there beds?
   - Fast and effective?
   - That they get an experience?

24. What do you believe customers appreciate the most to get support with?

25. What are most difficult for IKEA to help their customers with?

26. What could help you in the bed department to perform your work better?
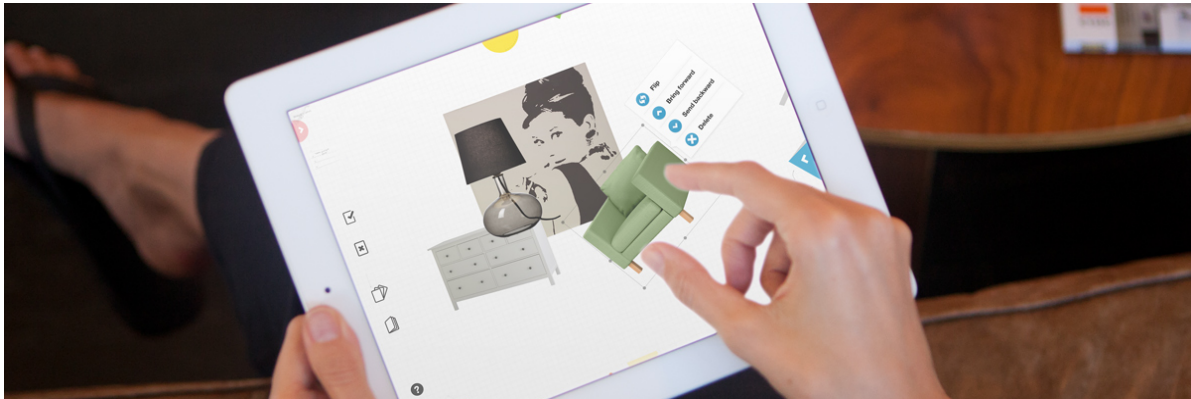   - Technology?

Final and summarizing question

27. What feeling should customer have when they leave the store?

APPENDIX 4

ARTICLE

Complementary in-store tech proven to optimize the complex purchase

New research from Lund University shows that customers, when purchasing complex products, want a combination between technology in-store and personal support. It was also found that retailers should follow a three-step-approach with different levels of efficiency and engagement depending on where the customer is in the purchasing process in-store.

Retailers are increasingly integrating their multi-channels. Therefore customers today have greater opportunities where and when to shop. This integration implies many benefits for customers, especially when customers make more advanced purchases that require a lot of information gathering and support, like a complex purchase. The downside of providing multi-channels is that retailers need to actively work with all channels in order to be competitive, which many retailers express as major challenges that require heavy investments.

A way of overcome the challenges with multi-channels is to adapt to the technological retailing trend. To bring in online-

> **Complex purchase**
> = a purchase that is time consuming, expensive to make and demands a lot of information gathering.

channels, in form of digital devices in-store can improve retailers' multi-integration.

Customers moreover demand more, they are busier and expect something extra from retailers. It also seems like customers expect all purchases to proceed fast.

Due to those market trends and that little research has been done in the new multi-channel world on how the customer wants a complex purchase to be performed in-store, two students from Lund University began to research the area. A case study was performed on a multinational retailer and their bed department, since purchasing a bed is categorized as a complex purchase process.

Their results show that customers, when making a complex purchase, want technology in-store in the Search and Shop stages. Search relates to when the customer search for information in-store before taking the purchasing decision and shop relates to when making the actual purchase at the checkout. Their results show that customers, when in the complex purchase process in-store, want technology as complement to employees. This will provide customers with a fast, effective and engaging shopping experience in-store. Technology was proven to only work as a complement, not a substitute, since the personal help was shown to be of great importance for customers.

It was also found that customers appreciate a fast and effective shopping experience in both the Search and Shop stage, but an engaging shopping experience was found to be of even greater importance in the Search stage (see graph to the right).

Their results now provide guidance for retailers where to implement technology in-store in order to improve the complex purchase process for customers.
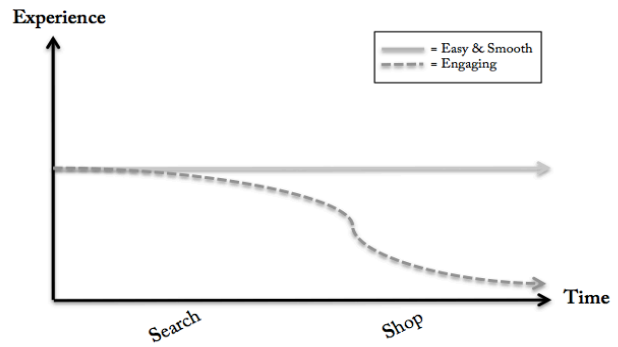
They recommend retailers to adapt a three-step procedure in-store:

1. Reduce customers overwhelming choices of complex products by using fast and engaging digital tools in the Search stage.

2. Provide personal and specialized support from employees where customers receives a confirmation which product that suits the individual.

3. Digitally provide the customer in the Shop stage with a holistic view of the complex product, both with regard to price and additional parts.

Through following these three steps and understanding these findings about the complex purchase process will provide retailers with the tools to make the best in-store multi-channel integration.