



LUND UNIVERSITY  
School of Economics and Management

# Physical Store Image in the Light of E-Commerce

An Internal Perspective on the Swedish Book Market

By

Linnéa Elfving

June 2015

Master's Program in Management

Supervisor: Merle Jacob  
Examiner: Tomas Hellström



# Abstract

Recent developments in the retail industry have spurred interest into the effects of e-commerce on corporate branding, identity and store image. This case study takes an emic approach to understanding the perception of store managers and employees from the bookstore industry in Sweden on physical store image in the light of the new trends in e-commerce. A fusion of stakeholder perspectives is adopted in order to gain a fluid theoretical foundation for measuring store image. The empirical research uses in-depth interviews which are then analyzed theme-wise, also instructed by corporate branding and identity theory. This way, the key results arrived at are two-fold: first, bookstore staff perceives the personal service, advice and knowledge they can convey to the consumer to be of importance to the physical store image, especially compared to e-tailers. Second, even though none of the companies engage in dual- or omni-channel integration, staff is positive towards new trends and recognizes the opportunities for the physical store. However, even though the emic approach to this case study uncovers rich data from store staff more general research in the retail industry is necessary to validate these results.

Keywords: corporate branding, physical store image, dual-channel strategy

# Table of Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1	Background .....	1
1.1.1	Swedish Book Industry .....	2
1.2	Research project .....	2
1.3	Outline of the Thesis .....	3
<b>2</b>	<b>Literature Review</b> .....	<b>4</b>
2.1	Corporate branding and identity.....	4
2.2	Physical store image.....	6
2.2.1	Brick vs Click.....	7
2.3	Chapter Summary.....	8
<b>3</b>	<b>Methodology</b> .....	<b>9</b>
3.1	Research Approach .....	9
3.2	Research design and sources .....	10
3.3	Intensive interviewing for data collection .....	11
3.3.1	Ethical considerations .....	12
3.4	Data Analysis .....	13
<b>4</b>	<b>Results</b> .....	<b>15</b>
4.1	Strategy.....	15
4.2	Corporate identity and brand alignment.....	17
4.2.1	Store characteristics.....	18
4.2.2	Heritage .....	19
4.3	Recent behavioral change.....	20
4.3.1	Consumers.....	20
4.3.2	Staff.....	21
<b>5</b>	<b>Analysis and discussion</b> .....	<b>24</b>
5.1	Strategy.....	24
5.2	Corporate branding and identity.....	25
5.2.1	Store characteristics.....	26
5.2.2	Heritage .....	27
5.3	Behavioral changes .....	27
5.3.1	Consumers.....	28
5.3.2	Staff.....	28
5.4	Discussion and limits .....	30

<b>6 Conclusion.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Appendix A .....</b>	<b>38</b>

# List of Figures

Figure 2.1; Relationship between store identity, store image and its stakeholder perceptions.. 6

# 1 Introduction

Recent information technology developments that have affected the retail industry have spurred an interest in the processes behind corporate brands and the image of individual physical stores (Syed Alwi & Da Silva, 2007; Varley, 2005). It is argued that brand and stores are some of the strongest and most important weapons in the competitive landscape of retailing (Beristain & Zorrilla, 2011). As consumers today have more channels than ever to buy from where the product range is also enormous, the competitive landscape is harsh (Varley, 2005). Some argue that the people working in the retail industry, facing customers directly on a daily basis, play a key role in the physical stores as they are behind the brand or identity of the organization by being an almost tangible asset of the physical store. (Yohn, 2014). After all, they are the closest to the transaction, the lifeline of the store, and the ones that make an impact on consumers and their potential loyalty to the store (Hu & Jasper, 2006). The aim of this particular study is to understand physical store image in the bookstore industry in the light of today's retail landscape from the perspective of employees and store managers. The problematization is instructed by a lack of focus on corporate or internal branding in the context of online and offline sales, as called for by Syed Alwi and Da Silva (2007).

## 1.1 Background

Considering the recent developments within IT and logistics, e-commerce as a phenomenon is a rather new aspect studied within corporate branding and identity literature. Only since a few years has the trend of buying everyday consumables online turned into normal practice for all age and class groups, even though giants like Amazon have existed for over a decade (Brown, Moriarty & Mendoza-Pena, 2014). Some reasons for the rise and popularity of shopping online are low costs and convenience (Cao, Xu & Douma, 2012). This consumer behavior has considerable effects on the retail industry. Several years ago, voices even predicted that some physical retail stores would be completely non-existent within a decade (Fox, 2004). However, several studies have also shown evidence on the consumer's tendency to prefer physical stores over online ones in certain situations (Bernstein, Song & Zhen, 2008; Chen, Chan & Cheng, 2011). For example, consultancies in assignment for retailers find that the physical store is still the foundation for the overall shopping experience, which can be divided into five steps, in the following order: discovery, trial and test, purchase, delivery or pickup and finally return (Brown, Moriarty & Mendoza-Pena, 2014). The newest trend within retailing is to integrate several different sales and marketing channels into the physical store. This way, whatever preference the consumer has, the retailer can choose how to implement such an integrative strategy at each step of the shopping process in order to leverage sales

(Brown, Moriarty & Mendoza-Pena, 2014; Kahn, 2013). So even though so-called “windowshopping” (Shy, 2013), when consumers check products in the store and then make purchases online, can have disadvantages for physical stores, there are more and more voices like Brown, Moriarty and Mendoza-Pena (2014) that argue for the persistence of traditional or a new form of stores. Since the study described in this paper is conducted on a single case within the retail industry, the case background will be discussed below in more detail.

### 1.1.1 Swedish Book Industry

Within retailing, bookstores can be seen as special in their character due to the nature of books as products (Hu & Jasper, 2006). It has gone through similar impact of e-commerce as the rest of the industry but giants like Amazon have not (yet) entered the Swedish book market. Here, the prices of books were released in 1975 while today a majority of European countries still has fixed book prices by law (Pettersson, 2013). However, ever since the market came into a serious downfall every now and again the debate on fixed prices is stirred up again (Olsson, 2015). The biggest issues that people working in the Swedish book market are concerned with are the sales of e-books and the coming of Amazon (Svensk Bokhandel, 2015). People are also aware of what is happening in other markets around the world and famous authors voice their fear for the fall of the ‘traditional’ bookshop (Flood, 2015). However, some interesting developments and trends of later years have been the increasing sales in physical bookstores while the online sellers have seen their best days (Wikberg, 2015). Also, sales of children’s and teenager’s literature is in the uplift globally and in Sweden as well, creating positive hopes for the future among book store chains and staff (Svensk Bokhandel, 2015; Nowell, 2015). The studies conducted on Swedish bookstores, whether online or offline, are mainly from organizations within the industry itself. Hu and Jasper call for more sector-specific academic research for example because of the specific characteristics of the book industry as discussed, which is one of the reasons for why this case study was chosen.

## 1.2 Research project

Since consumer behavior and decision-making during shopping plays a large part in e-commerce, the focus has largely landed on the consumer perspective within the academic literature on the retail industry. After all, it is their behavior, decision-making and attitudes towards brands and shops that make up the bottom-line results and thus profits. There is a clear ‘why’ to these studies, whether quantitative or qualitative. However, there seems to be less clear about what role middle and lower management and store employees have on the process of store image and identity. It has already been established that stores and their staff are closest to the transactions of a business. Understanding their effect on the store in general could increase insight into the success of the store and the general performance of the company it might be part of. As Järventie-Theslaff, Moisander and Laila (2011) argue, a practical approach which looks at everyday processes, such as those found on store level, can

provide insight in the success of the overall corporate brand and its competitive advantage. This level is then combined with an insider or emic approach which has the objective to find original results compared to most other studies within business which are inherently etic (Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012).

The following questions guided the problematization for this thesis: What are store managers doing about their own image and the chain identity? Are they thinking of online opportunities when meeting the customer and training and motivating the staff? Now this does not mean the focus is on investigating a gap between corporate identity and store image, but focus is rather on the micro level only; what are managers and employees with a certain responsibility doing and thinking concerning physical versus online retailing? What are recent changes, recent phenomena or old habits? What are store managers and employees actually doing to leverage the benefits of having a physical store? How do they perceive their store in the light of contemporary prevalent e-commerce? How distinct are the two and why is that important? These considerations have led up to and converged into the following research problem:

- How do manager and staff perceive store image in the light of physical versus online sales channels?

The problem will be addressed through corporate identity and branding literature, to instruct the empirical data gathering among store managers and employees. The research will also draw from store image literature, including studies that compare or cover online versus offline stores and the effect of potential strategies in this field.

## 1.3 Outline of the Thesis

The next section consists of a literature review which will cover three different strands, including a model. After that, section three on the method discusses the exploratory survey conducted, intensive interviewing and its (dis)advantages. Finally, the results and their interpretative analysis will be presented in section four and five including a reflection on limits and implications of that analysis and the research in general.

## 2 Literature Review

Many studies in the field of corporate identity, branding and store image are based on one or another form of gap analysis (Davies & Chun, 2002). Very often, these include a consumer perspective element which is then compared to a management or organizational perspective to see where and/or how this gap in perceptions of the identity or brand comes about. This section will present a combination of studies using various perspectives, consumer, employee and management, taking a critical stance towards the predominant use of separate stakeholder perspectives in retail industry research. For one, taking this specific multiple stakeholder perspective where it is assumed that employees can have various other roles and thus also be other stakeholders means using different theoretical arguments than those that often underpin the decision-making process of the consumer (Hatch & Schultz, 2009).

The first strand of literature covers corporate or internal branding and identity issues, here conceptualized as the higher, corporate level dimension of the study. These fields are relevant for this study because the inherent concepts instruct the dynamics within the company, its management and the store, and thus how employees and store managers perceive various aspects of the store and their role in it. Hence, the literature review will also cover research on physical store image, here the micro- or store level dimension of the case study on which the focus lies. It is assumed there is a relation between corporate identity and branding and store image, in the perception of staff. The last strand of literature then concerns various forms of retailing, whether purely physical or online (e-tailing) or both, which also includes various ideas and strategies on the future of retailing in general. This instructs the other strands mostly through new and current mutual influences of physical and online stores, indirectly also affecting corporate branding and identity. There are overlapping elements in these literature strands but for the sake of the topics discussed in this paper this categorization was chosen as most appropriate. These strands combined then will create a multidisciplinary foundation and uncover and highlight the various intricacies of the data collected guided by the research question discussed in the previous section.

### 2.1 Corporate branding and identity

As van Riel and Balmer (1997) explain in their overview, corporate communications and organizational identity are theoretical fields that are integrated or at least drawn upon for corporate identity literature. Both these fields will not be elaborately discussed in this literature review; instead the focus is on corporate identity where interrelatedness with the other two fields mentioned is assumed. As such, the definition used in this paper is that of

corporate identity being made up of the various characteristics of the business in general and the corporate communications, graphic or visual design, employee behavior and strategy through the company's delivery of products specifically (Vallaster & Lindgren, 2012; Bick, Jacobson & Abratt, 2003 ). The way this paper will conceptualize corporate identity is thus through a multidisciplinary approach (van Riel & Balmer, 1997; Bick, Jacobson & Abratt, 2003). Corporate identity and branding helps a company attain a sustainable competitive advantage because consumers would be able to recognize and identify the company more easily (Syed Alwi & Da Silva, 2007). An important aspect addressed in this respect is a possible gap between its actual and desired mode, which are measured from the point of view of consumers and management respectively (van Riel & Balmer, 1997). In extension to this, strategy-wise too few companies focus on what they do best as a business and are more concerned with reactionary strategies towards competitors in the market, which might undermine the strength and cohesion of the corporate identity (Leinwand and Mainardi, 2010). More recent academic work on corporate identity management (CIM) is often connected to corporate social responsibility and reputation issues. This literature strand will not be discussed further in this paper, which is also why no other external stakeholders than consumers have been included in Figure 2.1, to be discussed below. However, a specific type of corporate identity is considered; corporate heritage identity (Burghausen & Balmer, 2014). Corporate heritage identity implies that a business or organization perceives its history and background to be of importance for its brand identity and, though understudied, is somehow incorporated in the overall corporate identity and communications strategy, as well as in the marketing activities. Since this field is a rather new one the empirical evidence is limited, especially regarding the retail industry (on a store level).

Corporate and internal branding on the other hand is the activity of aligning and incorporating the corporate brand identity among employees (Vallaster & Lindgren, 2012; Hatch & Schultz, 2001). According to most authors in this field, corporate branding, internal branding and employer branding are related topics (Vallaster & Lindgren, 2012). All are founded on the idea of corporate identity; an understanding and alignment of the concept among staff is important because they are the link between the organization and the customer. In Foster, Punjaisri and Cheng's words, "the [brand] promise has to be understood internally and the entire organization has to be committed to deliver on it" (2010;402). Hatch & Schultz would go so far as to say that the corporate brand "influences organizational activities from top to bottom, and it infuses everything the company is, says, and does, now and forever" (2009:10). According to them, there are several possible gaps that need to be analyzed in order to understand how and if employees and managers are aligned under a brand (2001:130). According to Mitchell (2002), there are certain moments when corporate branding is most effective in the sense that employees are most receptive to implementation of internal strategies. Such efforts should be using symbols, visual as well as non-visual (Mitchell, 2002: Hatch & Schultz, 2009). The importance of a successful campaign is clear according to Mitchell, as it strengthens "the company's very soul" (2002:101), in other words, the corporate identity. The corporate brand identity then, separated from the corporate identity, can be multifaceted in the sense that it for example has desired, perceived and communicated aspects (Balmer, 2012). According to Punjaisri and Wilson (2007), one limitation of the

internal branding literature is that there is almost always a consumer perspective (as in what are the results of internal branding for their part) while less studies involve in-depth, qualitative research among employees only. Even though the approach of Vallaster and Lindgren (2012) is different, their qualitative method will be a guide for this study trying to complement the lack of studies with an emic approach. The paper will also follow the practice-based perspective as argued for by Järventie-Theslaff, Moisander and Laila (2011), which allows the research to focus on a micro-level (more on this in section 3, Methodology).

## 2.2 Physical store image

In much of the literature on store image, there is a focus on added value and especially bottom-line results from specific in-store strategies (Davies & Chun, 2002) As Penneward (2013) argues in her study, store image has considerable influence on consumers’ perceptions on the overall, corporate brand. Authors usually make a difference between store identity and store image, where identity is often a question of internal perspectives, “who are we”, while image is “how we are perceived”, thus from an external (consumer) perspective (Chun, 2005). Even though this distinction is taken for granted in most of the literature (e.g. Penneward, 2013), some authors rightly acknowledge that there exists some confusion about and no consensus on how and when to use which terminology (Davies & Chun, 2002). However, this study looks at how staff affects the store’s image as perceived by external stakeholders, as they are stakeholders themselves, which is why the term store *image* is used anyway (Hatch & Schultz, 2009). This approach is similar to those studies comparing consumer with employee perspectives on store image, as if they were both ‘external’ stakeholders (Birtwistle, Clarke & Freathy, 1999). This is also underlined by Mitchell (2002), who emphasizes the importance of approaching employees with similar campaign efforts as consumers or at least as (partially) external stakeholders. In other words, as discussed in subsection 2.1, internal branding attempts to affect and align employees’ perception on store image as well as identity. To clarify the definition and use of the terms and their interaction for this study, see Figure 2.1 for a conceptualization model.

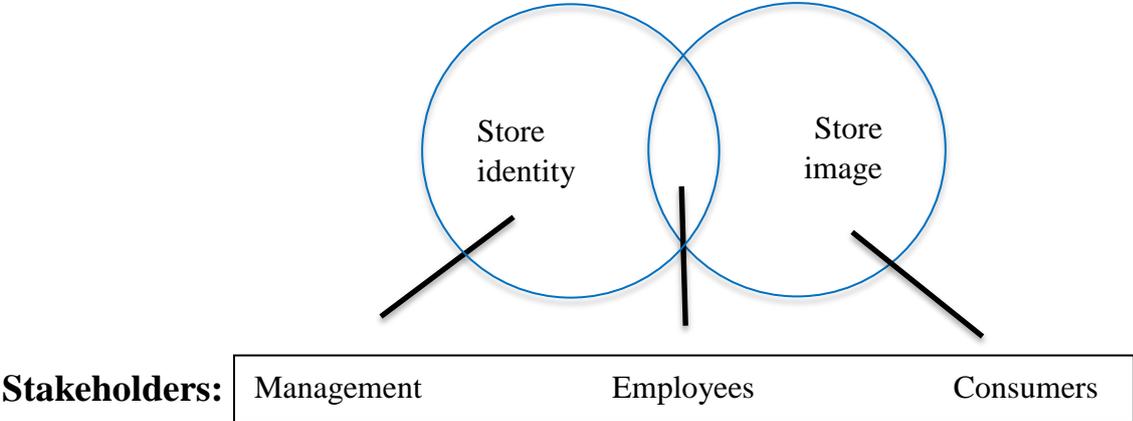


Figure 2.1: Relationship between store identity, store image and its stakeholder perceptions

Figure 2.1 shows the stakeholders are on the same level; regardless of whether they are internal or external they have various effects and perceptions on store image and identity. The employees (in this study including store managers) can be both internal and external stakeholders depending on the situation, which is why their perception addresses a crossover of both image and identity of the store. This overlapping area is what this paper will be attempting to address, arguing for a more fluid conceptualization of store image following from an emic approach.

The store image can deliberately deviate from the overall corporate brand identity, as to adapt and leverage local opportunities for example (Leitch & Motion, 2007). However, in this respect the possible gaps between overall chain and individual store management have been explored and problematized (Beristain & Zorrilla, 2011; Penneward, 2013). For example, Davies and Chun (2002) mention how delegation to individual store managers can result in differentiation among stores within the same chain and depending on the context this is a positive or negative phenomenon.

As to measuring store image, researchers have focused on attributes of the image from a consumer perspective forming scales and themes for statistical data collection and analysis (e.g. Verhagen & van Dolen, 2007; Penneward, 2013; Da Silva & Syed Alwi, 2008). The aspects of the scale are drawn from a literature review by the authors, often combining research on corporate identity, culture and reputation for example (Da Silva & Syed Alwi, 2008). Many focus on tangible attributes like architecture and spatial design in general (Van Marrewijk & Broos, 2012; Varley, 2005; Lu & Seo, 2015) but also price is a much-studied attribute (Beristain & Zorrilla, 2011). Also, and again from a consumer perspective, elements of the atmosphere and service are studied to determine the image of a physical store and/or why consumers would go there at all (Cox, Cox & Anderson, 2005; Hu & Jasper, 2006). A combination of these attributes is used for the theoretical foundation in this thesis.

### 2.2.1 Brick vs Click

Physical store image currently includes and is influenced by multiple sales channels, such as online stores. Many authors have analyzed various business models and strategies companies have adopted or can adopt, such as having both a physical and an online store or only one of them, as well as which strategy a company should adopt in a certain competitive setting. Adopting both offline and online selling channels is called dual- or multi-channel strategy. A retailer adopting such a strategy is sometimes called a click-and-mortar, or click-and-brick, as opposed to the traditional brick-and-mortar retail (offline only) store and the pure online store, an e-tailer (Bernstein, Song & Zhen, 2008; Tojo & Matsubayashi, 2011). One common way of analyzing the strategies to be adopted is by way of game theory (Tojo & Matsubayashi, 2011; Bernstein, Song & Zheng, 2008; Shin, 2007). In these studies, the focus is on how the strategies affect each other in terms of free riding (e.g. on customer service and information) and prisoner dilemma effects (if one company adopts a strategy, the others might need to

follow). Another way authors have analyzed this is through management decision-making models to see how resources should be allocated and if a dual-channel strategy should be adopted at all (Chen, Chan & Cheng, 2011).

The newest addition to the brick versus click literature regards so-called omnichannel retailing (e.g. Brynjolfsson, Hu & Rahman, 2013). This strategy implies using online selling points within the physical store, “blurring the boundaries between traditional and [i]nternet retailing” (Brynjolfsson, Hu & Rahman, 2013:23). In other words, consumers would have the opportunity to complement their shopping experience (for example if a product is not in stock in the store) with online and other IT solutions, where the staff can still have a service and support role. An important concept in this literature is seamless strategy, which is about ensuring the effectiveness of adopting an omnichannel approach (e.g. Chen, Chan & Cheng, 2011; Rigby, 2014). Several authors addressing such strategies highlight how consumers are already accustomed to shopping multichannel-wise, while many retailers are lacking experience or initiative to follow this demanding trend (Zhang et al., 2010; Rigby, 2014). It could also point to a lack of understanding of the contemporary customer, which is also related to a lack of resources to adopt a multichannel strategy (Jeanpert & Salerno, 2013).

A topic that regularly appears in the literature following dual-channel integration concerns risk perception of and trust issues with a brand, especially regarding mutual influence of the online and physical store on purchase intentions (e.g. Verhagen & van Dolen, 2007). Thus dual- or omnichannel strategies affect the perception of the corporate brand. Jeanpert and Salerno (2013) have explored the perceptions of employees on dual-channel integration provided they are already working in a company that has adopted such a strategy. However, as Syed Alwi and Da Silva argue, “very few studies ... attempt to make a comparison between a strictly online context and strictly offline context in the retailing sector” (2007, p. 224). Even though this study will not compare these contexts, it does build on the assumption that there are exclusively online and offline bookstores.

## 2.3 Chapter Summary

In sum, some important terms to this paper have been discussed. Corporate identity is a multifaceted term which is necessary to understand in the context of individual store images viewed through the eyes of staff. Corporate heritage identity is a specific part of this, which is a relevant term since many stores have gone through recent changes such as having another owner or a long history before. Corporate branding is supposed to ensure alignment of stores and staff with an overall brand identity, but there can be deliberate deviations. The ambiguous term of physical store image will be used, combining and fusing several stakeholder perspectives. Lastly, various ways of combining and implementing strategies of various sales channels in a brick-and-mortar or click-and-brick environment and their impact on store image and corporate branding are of interest for this paper. The literature covered builds a multidisciplinary foundation for the research with an emic approach, which will be discussed in the next section.

# 3 Methodology

This section will discuss how the research project was conducted. It will look at the research approach, the design and the sources consulted, the method for data collection including its ethical implications and lastly how the collected data will be analyzed.

## 3.1 Research Approach

In research on corporate identity, internal branding and store image it is not unusual to use qualitative research methods (Van Riel & Balmer, 1997; Vallaster & Lindgreen, 2012; O’Callaghan, 2013). However, while some have also added the e-commerce angle, there is often an assumption in these studies that the research object is already engaging in multichannel strategy in one form or another. Or, these studies use quantitative methods to arrive at the results. Some limits of a quantitative approach include a risk to miss “the overall sense of a body of communications” (Gray, Williamson, Karp & Dalphin, 2007, p. 285). Usually, one cannot ask for clarifications or take any other environmental aspects into account. In this paper, due to the particularity of the bookstore industry and the possible sensitivity of information gathered, missing this sense or meaning of the interviews would negatively affect the results and analysis. The advantage of using qualitative over quantitative methods like questionnaires is the notion of “meaning alignment” (Gray et al., 2007). This meaning alignment between researcher and subject increases with an insider or emic approach, which most research covering similar topics as this thesis do not engage in. This approach is rare in business research but has the advantage of avoiding predetermined themes, theories or other units (Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012). In this case study, the researcher is an employee at one of the companies which implies that some of the sources interviewed were colleagues. Besides ethical considerations that need to be taken into account with an emic approach (see subsection 3.3.1) an insider also has biases and predetermined ideas of what is important or interesting in the subject or object researched, in this case a bookstore.

Due to the nature of interpretative, emic approaches it is common that collection and analysis of data overlap. It is also recognized that data gathering and analysis have most likely occurred simultaneously at some points for this case study, which influences the analysis in many ways; to this I will come back to in the discussion. The results and their analysis will be presented separately anyway, to clearly show on the one hand what interviewees have said on the different themes, in order to on the other hand afterwards critically analyze it in the context of the literature review and theory discussed in section two.

The underlying assumption of this qualitative, interpretative inductive methodology is that an understanding of perceptions and attitudes of staff, from an emic approach perspective, are important in and contribute to understanding the effects on store image. The problem is approached with an e-commerce angle to it, where it is assumed that the new, e-tailing, environment changes the conditions of traditional physical stores or retailers. Furthermore, the data is analyzed using a general inductive approach. This means that the results from analyzing the case study data can be used for generalized comments on the issue (Thomas, 2013). The advantage is that it is more likely to avoid preconceptions (than for example deductive approach, Thomas 2013) as the focus is on what the result of the research is. However, below I will discuss limitations of this approach and its generalizability when embarking on a case study research design.

## 3.2 Research design and sources

The research design is made up of a case study. The case study consists of Swedish physical book stores as a particularity of a larger framework, which comprises the retail industry in general. From the start, as Thomas (2013) also points out, the choice for this specific case was not made consciously in the sense that certain variables were considered and the best fitting case was decided upon. Instead, the case was chosen more out of inherent interest. However, the case is still a representative one of the general field, which is the retail industry. It should be noted that the product niche of books within this industry is quite a special one, as the product could be said to entail more than *just* the physicality of it (Pettersson, 2013). Also, as the amount of data in this case study is limited, a general inductive approach can prove to be misleading. However, the aim is to acquire a “thick description” of the case, collecting rich data and reflecting the complexity and particularity of the case while maintaining an element of generalizability in it as well (Geertz, 1973).

The primary sources consist exclusively of (transcriptions from) interviews. These sources, in this case people, were chosen closest according to the information-oriented selection as outlined by Bent Flyvbjerg (2006). This means they were chosen on the basis of the expected data to be found and collected from them. This is also why some of the interviewees are employees and some managers, as the promotional campaigns were often delegated to employees rather than that they are the sole responsibility of the manager. As such, I expected to gain more data from these employees than from the store manager only. However, to increase data spread I also interviewed one employee that had simply been in the business a long time and from whom I expected interesting perspectives. The interviewees are spread across two bookstore companies, from now on called company one and company two, and four physical stores. That means three interviewees, one store manager and two employees, came from the same store, mainly because it is the biggest and oldest store in the sample. This uneven but varied spread allowed me to gather insight from different perspectives, increasing the richness of the data. In total seven e-mails were sent requesting an interview opportunity out of which five actual interviews resulted. Two phone calls were made to two different

stores out of which one agreed to be interviewed, resulting in a total of six interviews used for analysis. The interviewees will be referred to from letter A to F of which the order is not in any way related to names of the interviewees, stores or companies.

In sum, in order to collect and cover the necessary data this particular research project makes use of interviews. However, prior to setting up and conducting these interviews an exploratory survey was distributed among employees of one book shop. The purpose of this survey was to uncover any issues or general thoughts among employees that would be interesting to take up in the in-depth interviews with both store managers and employees. This is especially relevant because of the emic approach, where I, as an insider, might have relied too much on my biases of the bookstore had I not used a pretest. As Gray et al. put it, such pretesting “often suggests necessary or desirable changes ... [and] identifies ineffective questions” (2007, p. 138). For example, it was noted for this study that questions regarding characteristics of the individual stores and the overall chain needed to be very specific for the answers to be useful. Besides being suggestive on the content for the eventual intensive interviews, the pretest was also a way to be able to make an appropriate information-oriented selection of primary sources.

### 3.3 Intensive interviewing for data collection

For the actual data collection, intensive interviewing can have various advantages and disadvantages. A multiple method approach can have its advantages as well through providing more dense and complementary data, but it can also be “misleading and unnecessary” (Thomas, 2013, p. 141). As this study aims to gather rich data from an internal perspective, a quantitative questionnaire could have caused considerable confusion and frustration among those filling it out. Also, even though focus groups could have been quite informative, considering the working schedules of the employees and managers it would have been too imposing on their professional life. Thus, this study made use solely of interviews, six in total. They were conducted between 13 April and 14 May 2015 and the length of the interviews varied between 22:08 and 49:06 minutes. These differences in time (and content) are the result of the unstructured interview style used, which will be discussed below. In accordance with differences between individual stores, the managers and employees of these also replied in very different ways. This means the interview contents varied considerably, although the topics of the interview guide were always followed. Furthermore, all interviews were conducted in the stores, in a closed space where customers cannot come in. However, in more than half of the interview occasions other employees or colleagues were moving in and out. Subsection 3.3.1 will discuss what importance and effect these kind of environmental aspects have on the outcome of the data collection.

As the interviews were unstructured, a mere topic guideline (see Appendix A) was used. Such an approach ensures that the interviewee is leading the conversation instead of the interviewer in a structured interview for example (Gray et al., 2007). This can lead to unexpected but

useful turns in the conversation, where the respondent for example can ventilate about an issue. It requires the interviewer to be spontaneous and creative in order to react to these episodes and leverage the opportunity for the collection of interesting data (Gray et al., 2007). This also explains the variation in length and content between the interviews conducted. For example, the first interview was a bit more focused on trying to conceive the context of the store and company, the competitive landscape in which bookstores currently reside, while the last interview could be very specific in acquiring data related to the theoretical framework. This also points to the collection and analysis of data happening simultaneously. However, the downside of this is that the interviewer could have limited influence on the direction of the interview, which can reduce the density and validity of useful data collected. Furthermore, as Gray et al. point out, a certain "stability" (2007, p. 161) in the content of the various conversations held is of considerable importance for validity and a "lack of standardization" has implications for replicability issues (Gray et al., 2007:172). On the other hand, (unstructured) interviews can have positive influences on the interviewees through providing increased self-awareness and insight (Gray et al., 2007). This aspect can be of particular interest considering the notion that in the retail industry, employees often feel disrespected or useless in the e-commerce business of today (Yohn, 2014; Fisher, 2012). Overall, the interview method proves to be especially efficient with managers or otherwise busy and responsible professionals, as they might find themselves too important to answer to questionnaires but are open to a more "knowledgeable" interview (Gray et al., 2007). This became evident in most of the interviews as they also returned questions to the interviewer, knowing I was an insider and able to talk about market- and industry-related issues in their daily work.

### 3.3.1 Ethical considerations

Since the researcher was familiar with one of the stores where interviews were conducted, several ethical considerations come into play. In this case access to the data sources is crucial. In most cases store managers were interviewed, implying "endorsement of management" (Thomas, 2013:149). However, no higher levels of management (e.g central marketing responsible, operations manager, etc.) were contacted by me. Even though there might have been contact between the interviewees and their management, this is not seen as likely in this case as the store managers are relatively independent. Also, three interviewees are colleagues of the interviewer, in their professional role, which could influence the outcome of the conversations. These social relations could also have affected the way of asking and which type of questions used, especially since the interviewer and interviewees would be likely to work together in the future. Insider information can influence who is approached and what is discussed, as well as create certain expectations among colleagues (also those not interviewed). For example, asking about specific store aspects and their attitudes on them could put respondents in a difficult position. For this reason, an informed consent form was used. First of all, such a form underlines the opt-in method (Gary, 2013). Since, as mentioned, some interviewees knew the interviewer professionally they might have felt pressured to participate in the research project (i.e. implied consent). It was thus important that the

interview would be formal, as opposed to a colleague to colleague conversation, as well as making the respondents feel taken more seriously and treated correctly. It was also noted that the form helped the respondents be more acceptable to usage of a recording device during the interviews. A downside of using such a form is the usefulness of it; to what extent does it protect the interviewee rather than the university? It can also be questioned, in this case study, to what extent the interviewees felt they had the time to go through the form and possibly ask questions about it. Since the relationship between the interviewer and interviewees overall was rather collegial (at least from the same industry), the respondents might not have seen the necessity of the form or felt uncomfortable reading it in my presence. Advantages of the emic approach and internal relationship mostly regarded the creation of an environment of “mutuality of trust and reciprocity” (Gray et al., 2007:153), I could use techniques such as confirming some of the things respondents dwelled upon by conversing my own experiences. Rather than probing for more or different answers, a “reinforcement” (Gray et al., 2007:156) approach was used in order to establish trust and a context for more openness among the conversation participants.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The interviews have all been recorded and consequently also been verbatim transcribed. The analytical approach used on these transcriptions is qualitative inductive, as mentioned. A typical characteristic of such an approach is the lack of standardized method. This is why it is crucial to describe the exact process of analysis as to increase reliability and validity.

The case study is analyzed on an individual level, as opposed to other options such as an industrial level (Szenberg & Ramattan, 2015). That means that for example methods such as discourse analysis are excluded since these are more relevant for studies on a macro-sociological level (Talja, 1999). For analysis on a micro- or individual level, qualitative inductive interpretation is thus best suitable. Subsequently, for the analysis of the interviews from this case study, I manually segmented, categorized and isolated transcribed text. Some would argue that such an analysis can be done immediately from audio recordings (Neal et al., 2015), which is supposed to make the analytical process faster. However, this paper still uses verbatim transcripts and no computerized software because the research is done by one individual as well as the limited amount of data collected in conjunction with the limited time frame and resources assigned to this research project. Also, using software for coding makes the method more quantitative, with its accompanying (dis)advantages discussed above (Gray et al., 2007). Instead, qualitative coding takes into account whole sentences and the context in which they reside, which makes the process more effective when done manually in this small case example. It is assumed that I understand the meaning (i.e. there was shared or aligned meaning; Thomas, 2013) of the interview content and that no other colleague or student has to analyze or test it (Rodham, Fox & Doran, 2013).

The processes of analysis consisted of putting the interview transcripts next to each other and find common categories and themes by coloring word groups and sentences. The next section will consist of results in a descriptive manner, presenting theme-wise what interviewees have said, while the section after that will analyze these themes in relation to the literature. The results section is therefore quite extensive as to have an appropriate representation of the rich and particular data from the interviews. I have attempted to present a spread of all interviewees and subjects, though the scope of this paper does not allow me to cover everything all interviewees discussed. As mentioned, standardization is difficult in the type of method employed here which is why the themes and sub-categories will be elaborately described, explained and motivated. The following themes instructed the presentation and analysis of the results:

1. Strategy: this theme refers to and is relevant for the theory and literature surrounding the brick versus click strategies, as well as dual- or omnichannel integration and seamless strategy. Here, the interviewees discuss what they perceive their store is doing or not doing with regard to multiple channels, and how that relates to the overall retail industry and their own job description.
2. Corporate identity and branding alignment: this theme also converges with the literature, where interviewees spoke about how their store implemented corporate campaigns and how they perceived this. Also, they spoke about their feelings surrounding how this interaction (store-corporate level) works and if there are potential issues.
  - a. Store characteristics: as mentioned in the literature review, this paper would base its research on categories and elements used in customer perspective based research, proven to be of interest in bookstores specifically (Da Silva & Syed Alwi, 2008; Syed Alwi & Da Silva, 2007). These characteristics have then been discussed with the interviewees and together resulted in theme 2a.
  - b. Heritage: a sub-category here is what I call heritage, because of the literature, but the employees might call it historical or cultural background of the store.
3. Recent behavioral change: even though change is not a direct subject related to the theoretical framework, the theme was very evident in the majority of the interview data, both directly and indirectly. The term 'recent' is included in the theme label because of a focus on the newer, e-commerce trends, which even though they have been present for over a decade only in recent years fully impacted the retail industry and settled down as a stable force on the market. I divided the theme of behavioral change into two subcategories:
  - a. Consumer: the perception of staff, who have direct personal contact with consumers, is very much affected by the changed behavior of bookstore customers. This sub-theme relates both to how internal and external branding strategies should be aligned for a successful corporate identity message, as well as to how the physical store image is mutually created by consumers and staff.
  - b. Staff: the interviewees spoke a lot about their own changed behavior too, in light of consumer behavior and recent retail landscape changes. The emic approach combined with an unstructured interview guide created opportunities for the interviewees to thoroughly self-reflect on their own role in physical store image.

## 4 Results

As argued above, the results will be presented theme-wise. Although the interviews were guided by a list of topics or themes from the beginning (see Appendix A), the results have been categorized inductively. This means that the themes presented here are a result of the data collection and analysis, sometimes overlapping with the initial topics discussed. This is why I present the results and analysis separately but according to the same structure, as they informed each other during the research process (Gray et al., 2007). What has been tried to measure is how staff perceives the physical store image, taking an e-commerce angle towards the issue.

### 4.1 Strategy

The first theme concerns strategies like dual- and multichannel integration, or other IT use of interest, on a store level. Several managers and employees mention how an in-store computer was used for customer's use, but none found it to be a successful addition. How to defend price differentiation in the case of this self-help service was a major issue.

“Yes we had that. At one point we had those computers. One could order, or no, one could not, I mean we could stand there and help the customers to order something. They could find it there and order it like that, and we had that for we a while and we thought it was worthless actually. Because we had to order like, Ok it costs 150 SEK there but here it costs 200. So we took away those, and we wanted to, now we order like... well it changed and then we could only order it for them. We only have to say two things, how long it takes and what it costs.” (Interviewee C, company 1)

However, among most interviewees there is awareness and little skepticism regarding the necessity and opportunities of seamless integration:

“That's a very good question. I know the other shop, the manager is considering doing something with course literature, that the shop would have a kind of package delivery station or some kind of, I mean how would one get that to work. If one would succeed with that then that would be good, but that's for somebody else...” (Interviewee E, company 1)

This has apparently not been a chain-wide strategy for company one but rather some of the stores themselves opted for and tried out a specific strategy, in most cases the placement of a computer for consumer use.

For company two, there was a very different perspective on multi-channel strategy. It was not very much focused on having online aspects in the store but rather on creating partnerships with other cultural actors in the city and be a part of a cultural sphere:

“We also sell some books together with the other shop in Malmö at the library. I also think it’s important that as a bookstore you try to be a part of the cultural sphere in the city, that the store is socially participating and has some events, to show what it has to give really. ... I think that is something bookstores have to explore a little more, maybe be part of a big festival, I mean that you find different ways. To not be afraid of being seen in other places, to be trendy and current.” (Interviewee F, company 2)

Regarding new technologies one store manager did point out the importance of physical bookshops doing something with and about e-books:

“Some customers ask us about e-books, but I think that many are reading both, and don’t feel it’s a problem really, they have their e-book as well as their paperbacks. I rather think that it’s very good for the paper book in some ways. It becomes more approachable to read in general, and kind of like, oh it was kind of fun to read perhaps I should buy myself a [paper] book! I don’t think it’s something to be afraid of. However, I believe it is important for the book shops to take a stand in this somehow. We haven’t sold any e-books until now but of course we are kind of forced to at least take a stand, after all it’s a part of the market.” (Interviewee F, company 2)

So there is a positive feeling about new technologies and products that can complement rather than substitute the physical book. But on the other hand, staff are also very much aware of the fact that e-commerce can be a real threat to the operations of the physical store, and that they have to take a stand in it to continue existing. That can mean for example that all staff need to know everything about everything to always be able to meet the acute customer’s demands and needs in-store:

”Like when they have to buy a pen for a thousand crownes. Then they might go somewhere else to buy it [if present staff is not able to help out because of lack of knowledge], I mean we are not alone, you should not think you are so exclusive, you aren’t. You can probably go online a Tuesday and buy such a pen, get it in the mail the day after, at least the next Thursday you know. So don’t think you [as a physical store] are exclusive. Maybe you could say this long ago but just think that today everything is there on the internet as well.” (Interviewee B, company 1)

This last quote might imply that it is not the product mix that makes the difference for physical stores anymore, partly due to e-commerce, but rather something else. The role of staff here will be discussed in the next themes.

## 4.2 Corporate identity and brand alignment

Interviewees were to various degrees concerned with the way corporate identity informs their job description as well as how the corporate brand is conveyed among colleagues and eventually towards customers. What all six interviewees agreed upon is the importance of service, knowledge and personal advice for the staff to make the physical store a success. As one respondent comments, personal service is what makes a physical store competitively more advantageous than other bookstores, food markets or e-tailers that sell books;

“The most important thing we want to convey is our knowledge, the staff’s knowledge, about the product, and the capability to give personal advice. You want the customer to go out from the store feeling exceptionally satisfied and happy to have gotten that reading experience that is perfect for him or her.” (Interviewee F, company 2)

All interviewees agree on knowledge and personal advice sort of being both the most important product sold and also the most important characteristic, i.e. knowledgeable, of staff. As interviewee E of company one notes, the physical bookstores should provide inspiration both by “giving advice and talking to the customer as well as have an inspirational shop with nice-looking billboards, so that it’s nice to come here”. Both the aspects of staff knowledge and behavior and the outlook of the shop are crucial elements of the corporate brand that central management wants delivered or conveyed to the end customer. According to all the interviewees of both companies, this is done by meetings or workshops and sending out promotional materials that can be used in the store. A sales coach and store manager of company one explains how the internal branding campaign looks like approximately:

“Then they created, first it starts with this heart in the middle, there it’s like the customer that should be in focus, and then around that what we [as staff] should do. Then they also present these key behaviors as well ... it’s not rocket science really.” (Interviewee E, company 1)

However, since the personal sales focus of staff is “obviously a reaction to online” (Interviewee E, April 24, 2015) and the trend is becoming a status quo or a non-personal service strategy, some employees also acknowledge and are perhaps afraid of that customers might see through it:

“... this bookshop which is like a chain has these compulsory advice notes centrally controlled that are supposed to look so personal, so of course, if you have those eyes then you can go in and think, aha here they have advice notes because that’s the way it’s supposed to be.” (Interviewee C, company 1)

However, the overall sense of the interview conveyed a positive perception towards the authenticity of personal advice efforts. In the case of company two the store manager explains how being personal towards the customer is a reflection of the company culture: “If you meet someone from the head office in the store then you talk books. The first thing you do is ask, what are you reading?” (Interviewee F, company 2). Thus it is not perceived as something compulsory but as something inherent to the business conducted in bookstores.

Many also comment on the differences between physical stores, but there is not really any consensus on how this might affect the overall brand or if it at all is an issue. Naturally, store differences arise due to local and regional geographical differences which affect the audience that comes into the store and also the staff who work in the store. Some respondents acknowledge that even though management centrally tries to control all elements of the stores, they also put effort into getting to know their employees' opinion and feedback on the campaigns centrally made by them:

"The thought is that we should do that, it says so in the promotional manuals, like please put an advice note here and there about a local product. And then, for a while we even got suggestions on advice note from top management, at one point. I don't know if they've stopped doing that because I think they asked us in one of their questionnaires if it was good. And I think it was, it's good that they do it. It's better than nothing, when nobody writes the notes. But we are a little bad at it [answering questionnaires and writing notes]." (Interviewee C, company 1)

It is clear that staff values store differences within the company so they can leverage local demand and keep customers coming to the store.

"When we became [company one], the boss told us now we have to stick to the collection completely. Then we lost a lot on, I mean there were no youngsters coming in anymore. Once we got in the stuff we sold like 150 of these pretty erasers in a week. I think that's an advantage that management listens to what is locally adapted." (Interviewee D, company 1)

The overall feeling among interviewees is thus that differences are to be leveraged by the physical stores and that they should not pose a threat or be an issue for corporate branding or identity issues.

#### 4.2.1 Store characteristics

There is some consensus among interviewees, across all stores and both companies, of what a store should at least include and convey. For example, as interviewee E of company two explicitly states, the store lay-out should be intuitive to the customer: "It's the key concepts like, easy to find easy to shop. So it's, everything we do should be transparent and that's what our signs are like too." (Interviewee E, company 1)

Another characteristic is the importance of being clear about whom and what you are as a bookstore. One interviewee states how this might work:

"And I think it is important for physical stores to be superclear about what they wish to convey, what they stand for and that the customer knows what he/she can go and purchase there. Otherwise, if it's too fuzzy, then there is no real reason to go to the store and then you might easily end up on the internet." (Interviewee F, company 2)

A straightforward issue that the physical store employees and managers are concerned with is the way the shop looks. A store manager of company one points to how books should look in order for consumers to keep an interest in coming to a store to buy products:

“We will still be able to sell books that are beautiful, I mean the really nice products. If the publishers continue to make gardening books with appealing covers, good quality bindings and nice pictures, then people will buy it. And if we are talking physical, then it’s important for us that it [store and products] looks appealing.” (Interviewee A, company 1)

As we have just seen, most interviewees do not see a problem with having locally adapted product mixes and campaigns in the physical store in relation to the corporate identity and brand and find a fit between the two:

“I think about these controlled things sometimes, against which there has been some resistance, that it always has to be decided and stuff but we are after all a chain. This is how it is. But we are a large store so we can do both! ... What we think about what we want to show; this is current, this is selling, this is not. And that’s how we should work according to centralized guide, now you have to take this away, it’s very micromanagement. But I mean there is no one who will check in detail, nobody knows if we are doing it right or wrong. But at the base it should look like that, I think.” (Interviewee C, company 1)

However, from the perspective of store managers on other stores (within the same company), even though possible non-conformity is also recognized there is a feeling of understanding for differences more than condescendence or a pointing of fingers:

“Maybe there are certain stores that might find it a hassle to look like every other chain store. For example in [the other store], most call it by its old name, some do but ... I think it can be a little, for some, there is maybe a resistance against all this centralized, because they might feel they lose something.” (Interviewee E, company 1)

The interviewee specifically mentions design aspects of the other store which are not in line with the corporate (visual) identity of the chain, because it is an older store and it requires considerable investments and willingness to change that. This quote and issue also hints at the next part of corporate identity and branding, which is heritage. The next subsection discusses this smaller but important theme found in the interview data.

#### 4.2.2 Heritage

Corporate heritage identity both plays a role in the companies where it is prevalent and where it is as good as non-existent. For example, the oldest store from which the store manager and two employees were interviewed has a very distinct heritage and is locally well-known.

“Yes, we have, many think we have a specific store-spirit, those who work in the bookshop all know what that spirit is. All staff. And those who work at the publishers, generally, know us. So we have a cultural capital because we are well-sorted and we

have competent staff. And we want to continue that, that we are perceived as well-sorted and initiated. ... When I came here, the store was a university bookshop which was very posh to shop at, academics walked in, and it was almost like normal people were afraid to come here.” (Interviewee A, company 1)

The last sentence in this quote hints at what character the bookshop used to have and how that has an impact on today’s image of the bookstore. It also points to a change in the consumer and retail landscape which will be discussed in more detail in the next section. On the other hand, another store is only two years old and its overall brand is only just over twenty-five years old. In this case, a lack of heritage plays a role as explained by the store manager:

“I’d like to think that our company, which is little smaller from the beginning, is a bit better at this being personal thing, and with its flat hierarchy, that everyone is just genuinely interested in books and reading. ... I experienced the other company [one] to be a bit heavier, in a way. And we are just a bit lighter, and trendier, I really think so.” (Interviewee F, company 2)

So even though both companies and all stores attempt to be personal through its staff, the heritage of the store has an effect on what the staff is actually able to convey. In their perception, it is another aspect of what makes the physical store experience special and competitively advantageous compared to online stores.

The next section will further discuss the changes in consumer and staff behavior that are a result from recent changes in the book retailer landscape and that are a common theme in the interviews.

## 4.3 Recent behavioral change

A common theme within all the interviews was change. This should not be surprising if we take into account the case study environment and the competitive wind the book market and retail industry in general is in. even though the interviews were aimed at gathering an internal perspective from store managers and employees, the exploratory questionnaire found it useful to ask questions about staff’s perception of consumers. After all, changes in their behavior could lead to changes in the way staff behaves around and encounters its customers. Therefore, this theme is divided into two parts; consumer and staff behavioral change.

### 4.3.1 Consumers

Consumers behave differently because of increased access and usage of online services on mobile phones, which they can always carry with them and use at any time. One interviewee describes this development, seeing it happening on a daily basis:

“Yes it’s hard to, I mean it [customer internet usage] will always be there and it will only be increasing you know. People are actually standing there with their mobile

phones and scanning the bar codes and price comparing services bring up that book, where it's to be found. There are these apps, so they will scan anyway. And the only thing we can do, one can never, I mean one cannot avoid it." (Interviewee B company1)

Related to the above change, staff has noticed that consumers have changed their purchasing decision-making behavior. For example, if they want advice, they call to the store and ask "which book should I buy for a sixty-year-old, well buy this one I say, and then they reply, thanks a lot I will order it online now!" (interviewee D of company one, April 17, 2015). Most also talk about how consumers are aware of the price and characteristics of the products. This phenomenon is confirmed by several respondents, for example:

"For like a year ago we saw this revolution when really everybody started to use the internet, even those, should we say, group of retirees that hadn't been very used to the net. They talked a lot about prices, that it was expensive, and that it was much cheaper on the internet and that they would... and we had daily discussions about it. We don't have that anymore. Because, now it's like everybody knows it's cheaper online, very few ask why, and if you are after a cheaper price then you just buy it there, and we don't hear about it. I think many people shop at both places nowadays." (Interviewee A, company 1)

Several interviewees agree on the last point made in the above quote. As discussed in the strategy theme above, the contemporary consumer is really shopping in an omnichannel way already, whether these services are all provided by one brand or not. The most recent development is that consumers are, according to several interviewees, actually coming back to or gaining interest in shopping in a physical (book)store:

"An awareness has risen, that for example our store [company one] has existed for over a hundred years, it might not be here soon if people do not continue buying stuff here. We have become sort of an institution that just is there. But now I think many have opened their eyes and understand that we are actually driving commercial activity here." (Interviewee A, company 1)

It is also about a change in attitude at company one, again in reaction to employees having worked in the business for a long time. Now, interviewee A says, not only academics or otherwise literary interested consumers should feel welcome in the store but rather everyone. "What right do we have to judge someone's reading experience? We don't. If someone has an experience by reading [whatever], than that's great." Thus, the changing consumer target and behavior influences attitudes among staff, which is presented in more detail below.

#### 4.3.2 Staff

For many bookstores, recent changes in the retail landscape in general and the product mix (e-books, biking lights, etc.) in particular have meant a changing role of staff. Both managers and employees speak of considerable changes in the job description regarding what they are expected to do and how they are supposed to behave. Especially employees who have been in

the business for decades are aware of and tend to highlight the changes and what it meant for them. One interviewee paints a contrasting picture of how the bookstore used to work:

“Only like when I started working back in 2003 one was supposed to sit behind a counter and just wait around for the customer to approach you. There was no such thing as offering, having active contact. And it’s been like that a lot in the beginning, especially in book stores, almost like a library operation. And then we needed a sort of; how do we turn this around? I mean we weren’t even called salesman back then, we were called bookstore assistant.” (Interviewee E, company 1)

The employees and managers alike are concerned with their own performance because they have experienced the developments within the bookstore. Especially older staff is eager to make known how IT, both internally for communications purposes for example and externally, has changed their role and their way of working:

“Sometimes I am bad at looking on the intranet [internal online communications platform] so it happens that, some are very informed and say: yes we have to do this like this, it says on the intranet. Oh really, I haven’t seen that, because we have different ways of working too so.” (Interviewee C, company 1)

It’s interesting to see how some are aware of their own self-consciousness and think it could be themselves that are the barrier towards better staff service, while the customers do not think about the amount of knowledge and expertise the staff has:

“I don’t think they reflect on what we can or cannot do. It’s more we ourselves that think about that. We feel what we are best at yes. I think that this has been our big problem, that we still have our separate departments in our heads. But it has become much better lately.” (Interviewee C, company 1)

Another respondent is also conscious of the need for a certain new way of working, which in one of the chains is centrally organized into a new selling workshop. Even though the employees and managers are very familiar with customer service and friendliness, the new program is still something they have to actively work with:

“... all of us have days when we are just very focused on something very different, I feel this sometimes when we get a lot of new products and I feel stressed. You just want to get everything up on the shelves and then you completely forget ... I mean like oh, now I’ve forgotten this [salesmanship] for a whole week, right.” (Interviewee D, company 1)

Another store manager sometimes conducts these workshops and explains how this new centrally organized program is kind of a reaction against internet as well, because the stores have to act and behave in accordance, or rather in competition to e-commerce. In relation to this, those responsible for implementing and running the internal sales behavior campaign need to be aware of the specific behaviors constantly, continuing reflection: “... we have this

so-called selling seller, and that is about, are all sellers living up to their key behaviors. And if we don't, what do we do then?" (interviewee E, April 24, 2015).

The behavior of store staff should thus focus on a specific way of selling. For other managers and employees, this is a matter of finding the right balance between being too imposing on a customer and being friendly and helpful:

“As I said, to talk to the customer is important. Then I sometimes think that it's especially important for physical stores to not be too... you know. I can almost think that it's kind of annoying to go into certain stores because the staff is on you immediately. If a store wants to succeed it needs to find a balance there. We talk about it a lot with us colleagues in the mornings and at meetings, how we can avoid ending up like a robot, saying the same thing all day. That's when work gets boring and the customers will notice that feeling. But it's really hard. I think you need to be more interested in the product than in sales. That could be a good guideline. And it also has to be fun, I think, that's important. If you find giving tips and advice on books enjoyable you will not end up in the problematic situation where you might be too imposing.”  
(Interviewee F, company 2)

Another interviewee explains how a successful salesperson finds this balance, and how that affects the customer (and its perception of the store):

“I think that is a competent seller; if you or me encounter a competent seller, it will never feel like you were forced into something, because then the seller must have failed.” (Interviewee E, company 1)

Staff not only have to react to the general changes in the retail landscape brought about by e-commerce, but also to the way consumers behave in this new landscape. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, consumers are more informed about price and product which influences the way staff need to address these issues when speaking to customers:

“It's really, I mean.... the discussions are even worse here. We have it a lot. [...] Yes I mean, we have started, we almost gave up on explaining. Instead, we just say, no but we simply have different expenditures. It's not cheap and it's much more expensive to run a physical store than an online store, so that is why it's a bit more expensive in our store, that's just what we say. And then they just say, well we don't care. No, but that is the way it is. I cannot change it...” (Interviewee D, company 1)

However, depending mainly on the location of the store there are differences between the types of customers that come into the bookshop. According to one store manager, people shopping in specific other stores “don't look at the price tag as much as people do in our shop. They do it a lot” (D). This means some shops are really affected by the new, informed customer while others have more time and resources to be concerned with salesmanship and other intangible aspects of store image. From a managers perspective at company one, it is important to see that these changes in staff sales behavior are not ‘just’ part of a vision by central management but that it actually affects the bottom-line results of the physical store: “We can measure it in economic terms. So it's not just a mode of fashion, like it will pass, but it's what we live on as a store” (interviewee A, April 14, 2015).

## 5 Analysis and discussion

What we have seen is that topics and themes that were chosen for discussion prior to the interview (see Appendix A) partly overlap the theme analysis. For example, change was a big theme throughout the data which was not really something the interview set out to investigate. However, interesting results concerning both consumer and staff behavior were discovered this way. Subsequently, this section follows the themes as set out and described in the Methodology section while it is finalized by a subheading containing the discussion.

### 5.1 Strategy

The research question set out to examine how and whether employees and store managers perceive potential strategies for dual- or omnichannel integration. Neither of the companies has an online sales channel but its existence elsewhere nevertheless affects how the store has to operate (in reaction to it). Company two had no experience with or intention for omnichannel integration at all but company one clearly had some stores trying out a self-service computer in-store, to include a wider offer of products and meet high demands of costumers. However, it did not seem to be success. According to Rigby, “the greatest barrier to adopting fusion strategies is not skepticism about their promise but inexperience with their execution” (2014, p. 86). Specifically, the issue with the self-service computer was the price differentiation. It became unfeasible to explain to customers why the prices differed when ordering books online instead of buying directly in-store. Thus, in order avoid “channel conflict” (Chen,Chan & Cheng, 2013, p. 95), most of the research suggests that physical stores should focus on their special aspects (see section 5.2.1) but it should be possible to seamlessly integrate both. The behavior of staff around this is further discussed in section 5.3.2. However, even without dual channel integration the physical store cannot avoid considering pricing altogether now, as mentioned by interviewee A of company one (April 14, 2015).

Employees and staff in general are aware of the many channels customers have for shopping but generally focus on other aspects than pricing when thinking of physical store image. They feel the channels can exist side by side and do not necessarily have to be adopted by them, especially if there are “operational difficulties” accompanying the implementation (Zhang et al., 2010, p. 170). As pointed out by interviewee F, it is important that they at least acknowledge other channels and products such as e-books out there and take a stand, but that does not necessarily lead to any tensions (May 13, 2015). Interestingly, this co-existence or equilibrium of online and offline products and platforms is also voiced by current author David Nicholls, who also foresees “the survival, perhaps even the resurgence of books and

bookshops alongside the continuing success and evolution of digital forms” (Flood, 2015). It is shown that the interviewees feel it is more important for physical book stores to keep a focus on what they are doing now and perfect that, instead of also diving into e-tailing or dual-channel strategies. This is in line with what various authors have suggested, i.e. that gaining a competitive advantage is best done by focusing on known and special capacities (Leinwand & Mainardi, 2010). This focus also affects corporate branding and identity, which will be discussed in the next theme.

## 5.2 Corporate branding and identity

If interviewees from both companies feel the physical stores should do certain things to strengthen their image compared to online stores, this probably affects how they perceive corporate and internal branding and identity efforts as well. As Hatch & Schultz, write, “top managers need to listen and respond to both internal and external stakeholders if they want to formulate a strategy that employees can and will deliver, and that other stakeholders understand and support. Of course this approach to branding sacrifices a considerable amount of management control” (2009, p. 121). There is a certain degree of difficulty and perhaps resistance against the will of top management to implement salesmanship and its accompanying job description among some of the employees but also store managers of company one at least. The alignment efforts are thus not as simple as perhaps desired but the importance is recognized (Foster, Punjaisri & Cheng, 2010). However, as two or three interviewees mentioned, top management sends out questionnaires to the employees who have worked with the promotional campaigns in order to get feedback on the perceptions and success of the campaigns. This is not really giving up management control though, rather a way of keeping it centrally. Mitchell (2002:100) also confirms the usefulness and need for surveys distributed among employees after a(n) (internal) campaign. It is an example of using marketing tools for the internal branding efforts. However, as Järventie-Theslaff, Moisander and Laila point out, “excessively relying on survey results” can have a negative effect on the engagement and initiative of employees on the floor (2006, p. 203). Despite this, the interviewees discuss check-lists and surveys a lot but seem to be rather positive about this and do not seem to feel constrained that much.

Also, at times of leadership change, employees are more receptive to internal branding efforts (Mitchell, 2002). However, even though store manager A of company one implemented changes among staff regarding their attitudes and general job description upon arrival, the store heritage seems to be of such influence on both the employees as well as consumers that the execution and realization of such changes can be considered to be difficult. However, most seem positive and open towards the changes despite the possible struggles they have with them. Mitchell (2002) as well as Hatch and Schultz (2009) and Van Riel and Balmer (1997) also point to the importance of using symbols in this process, of which the use has been noted by the interviewees as a heart standing for the customer in their internal campaigns. In the external branding strategies, this heart as a symbol is also sometimes used in the logo. It shows the company is trying to do more than informing employees about the

brand because they recognize the “need to convince employees of the brand power” to increase motivation and loyalty among employees (Mitchell, 2002, p. 99).

At the other company, the personal advice notes reflect the flat hierarchy and personal interactions among staff, on store and corporate level. These are yet other examples of using marketing tools for internal branding. The use of external branding and marketing strategies for internal branding purposes points to the perception that employees can be multiple stakeholders at once (Hatch & Schultz, 2009). As such, physical store image and identity perceptions overlap, which is in conjunction with the concept used for this paper.

### 5.2.1 Store characteristics

“Finding what they [customers] are looking for” is an important characteristic of the physical store, which is discussed with several interviewees (Da Silva & Syed Alwi, 2008, p. 176). The store layout should be transparent and even though the staff is always ready to help in case a book cannot be found, it is confirmed for example by interviewee E that easy finding will lead to easy shopping and higher customer satisfaction. This is specifically important in relation to e-tailers, where it’s very easy to find a book (but only if you already know what you are looking for, as interviewee E also notes). In extension to this, Varley argues that “visual merchandising plays a crucial role in the creation and support of a retail brand’s position” (2005, p. 19). As interviewee A of company one clearly explains, despite it perhaps being obvious, it is important for the physical bookstore to have appealing and beautiful products. This is in line with research on store design and physical attributes playing a role in the success of and interest in (book)stores as part of the five steps of the shopping experience (Lu & Seo, 2015; Brown, Moriarty & Mendoza-Pena, 2014).

It should be noted that store image can be of very particular interest for the book industry. As Birtwistle, Clarke and Freathy (1999) have indicated, there is a need for sector-specific research in order to understand store image better. Specific aspects, design as well as atmosphere and service, of bookstores are perceived by the interviewees to be very different from other retail stores such as fashion. As Hu and Jasper state, “bookstores stress personalized relations between employees and customers” (2006, p. 26). However, in the literature fashion stores are seen as a parallel to bookstores as the empirical evidence lacks in the latter case. Interviewee C of company one (April 15, 2015) is one of the respondents that literally says how bookstores are different from clothing stores, but other interviewees have also implied how staff service and knowledge is of more importance in their line of work than in other retailers.

However, perceived physical store advantages such as staff being able to share knowledge and give personal advice is sometimes abused by consumers acquiring this knowledge by visiting or calling the store and subsequently order the product online. This reflects the free rider problem as highlighted by Shin (2007) and others which I will come back to in the next subsection on changed consumer behavior. Despite the perception among interviewees that staff knowledge, service and advice are the most important aspects that put the physical store at a competitive advantage, due to the influence of e-commerce this does not necessarily play out that way specifically because of the free-rider effect. It is therefore even more important

that the store is clear in its image and purpose, focusing on core capacities, because if this is not done the customer “ends up on the internet” (interviewee F, April 24, 2015) (Leinwand & Mainardi, 2010). In order to tap into local customer demand as much as possible to avoid this from happening, the stores do not hesitate to adapt the product mix to leverage this maximally. Most interviewees agree on this being more important than following exactly what the overall chain says is compulsory, which fits with Leitch and Motion’s (2007) idea of deliberately having ambiguity within the corporate identity in order to reach multiple audiences, making the gap between actual and desired corporate identity as theorized by Van Riel and Balmer (1997) unproblematic or even useful in particular contexts. Here we also clearly see a dialectical dynamic between store identity and image as perceived by store staff, indicating the fluid nature of them as stakeholders; they are as external stakeholders perceiving the (local) store image while also being internal stakeholders contemplating (controlled) corporate identity and branding (Birtwistle, Clarke & Freathy, 1999).

### 5.2.2 Heritage

Building on the function of ambiguity among stores within the same company, Burghausen and Balmer also write about a “strategic utility of corporate heritage identity” which can strengthen and be applied to the local store (2014, p. 2311). These authors also confirm that design aspects are of influence on the corporate heritage identity. So the store that has older design and displays than the overall chain intends for all its (new) bookstores to have, as mentioned by interviewee E of company one, might disrupt the corporate identity as “corporate design and corporate visual identity both constitute important parts of” it (Burghausen & Balmer, 2014, p. 2313). This also relates to the ‘non-existent’ heritage of the other store, where a lighter and trendier design is supposed to reflect this (positive) lack as a corporate identity (interviewee F, April 24, 2015). The combination of research from Leitch and Motion (2007) and Burghausen and Balmer (2014) both instructs and explains the way store managers and employees perceive the physical store image in its local and offline setting compared to a supposed central brand and identity.

To conclude so far, despite there being possible gaps between actual and desired corporate identity within a company due to differences between bookstores, this ambiguity is leveraged by store staff and perceived as important to the physical store image.

## 5.3 Behavioral changes

The results showed a particular interest among interviewees for changes in the bookstore industry affecting both consumer behavior and job descriptions. These are not necessarily correlated with the developments within e-commerce and its effects on the retail industry as a whole, but the analysis below will show how and if they are related with regard to consumer and staff behavior.

### 5.3.1 Consumers

As Brynjolfsson, Hu and Rahman (2013) point out, the information and services available while on the move these days blurs the lines between traditional and internet retailing. Thus, consumers have more and more channels to gather information from which will affect the sales (through decision-making) in both physical and online stores (Brynjolfsson, Hu & Rahman, 2013:29). As interviewee B of company one explains, the customers are more aware of pricing and other product information so they have multiple points in various channels which affect their decision when making a purchase (Brynjolfsson, Hu & Rahman, 2013). As Cao, Xu and Douma (2012) point out as well, online sales can have a positive influence on physical store sales. This is also what the interviewees noticed both in consumer and in their own behavior; shopping at both channels is not unusual and shouldn't be seen as a threat but rather as a positive complement. However, if stores are not implementing dual- or omnichannel strategies, consumers can free-ride on information and service by physical store staff and use this knowledge for purchases at other channels, as discussed. Sometimes interviewees experienced this directly, as for example interviewee D did, or were aware of it but did not have such immediate confrontations with consumers, such as interviewee F of company two explains.

From the perspective of employees and store managers, the purpose, enjoyment and importance of the physical store is to function as a meeting place for social interaction. Store staff sees themselves as the hub or the facilitators of this aspect, and the literature both confirms and criticizes this (Hu & Jasper, 2006 and Cox, Cox & Anderson, 2005 respectively). In this respect, there could be a lack of correlation between e-commerce and physical shopping, since the reduced interest among consumers in interaction with staff can depend on other (earlier) developments like "self-service retail formats" (Cox, Cox & Anderson, 2005, p. 251). As mentioned earlier, typical social characteristics of the store are considered to be different in bookstore than in other type of stores as well as in a (small) town center than in a shopping mall in the periphery of an urban area (Hu & Jasper, 2006). Even though the studies from about a decade ago on stores as social institutions seem to deny this function the respondents in this case, as for example noted by interviewee A (April 14, 2015), sense a renewed interest among their customers in the store as an important element in the town's center.

### 5.3.2 Staff

The changed consumer behavior obviously affects the behavior of staff. Interviewee B of company one describes how they have to be ready with more knowledge than ever since the consumer has constant access to information and thus also when interacting with staff in the bookstore. According to Jeanpert and Salerno, the more employees accept their customer's multichannel shopping behavior (and accept their own as well), the higher the chance of them being proponents and supporters of dual- or omnichannel strategies (2013, p. 15 translated). As discussed in the strategy part, it is important that staff know how to and want to convey the brand story in order to continue successfully selling books in physical stores (Hatch & Schultz, 2009). Consequently, and in relation to Mitchell's point on new leaders leveraging

the right moment for the implementation of an internal branding campaign, it is then important to measure or check whether store managers and employees have “changed their behavior to match their new ... role” (2002, p. 101). As several interviewees point out, they are aware of the need for a new kind of behavior which is in accordance with the corporate identity and brand strategies. However, as interviewee C of company one admits, due to all the changes they are not always doing it right or forget to use a new tool such as the mentioned intranet (Mitchell, 2002). In this sense, their behavioral changes are also sometimes a consequence of more general changes in the retail landscape, such as the use of IT by both consumers and staff as well as the competition of e-commerce. Still, the results show that certain aspects of their job are perceived as especially important or in focus in relation to online shopping. As Varley (2005) points out, it depends on the product what consumers might value most in the store aspects. For relatively similar products like clothing and books, “high product knowledge, attentive service [and] a good atmosphere” are very important. In the case study, interviewees seemed to realize and prioritize exactly these aspects. Many mentioned how these aspects had actually become more important as differentiating aspects of the physical store as opposed to (pure) e-tailers. The interviewees contemplate on why consumers would come into the store, stay there, and follow through purchases. In that sense, which is perhaps unsurprising due to the internal perspective, the store managers and employees see themselves as an important part of the store, as mentioned, almost tangible. However, as discussed by interviewee B of company one, the way staff performs its role when interacting with consumers is of importance to the physical store image (Van Marrewijk & Broos, 2012).

Furthermore, as many interviewees recognize a change in their job description being a reaction to the general changes within the retail industry and prevalence of e-tailers in particular, the accompanying behavioral changes are not always consciously so. Especially since consumers have stabilized in their awareness and use of internet and there are no daily discussions about online prices anymore, staff is mostly concerned with physical shops in the area and other chain stores in the country than with e-tailers. This might be explained by the game theory studies on adopting or not adopting dual- or omnichannel strategies, since the bookstore industry seems to have reached a sort of equilibrium or status quo. As interviewee A of company one noted, now that the ‘new-ness’ of e-commerce is over the physical stores can get back to their core competencies (Leinwand & Mainardi, 2010) in order to gain a competitive advantage. The advantage in this case study would not be reached by implementing a dual-channel strategy because of the equilibrium (everybody is already doing it) but by reinforcing and differentiating staff behavior (Hu & Jasper, 2006). In any case, staff has become or is becoming aware of its role in a changing store landscape and that affects their perception on the image of the physical bookstore.

The overall analysis presented two main findings. The first is drawn both from store image and corporate branding literature, which show that interviewees find social aspects to be decisive for the physical store (and its competitive advantage). This issue is in line with a process- or practice approach, arguing for the importance of insights from employees and store level management on the success of a corporate brand in the physical store. The second finding has covered the lack of dual- or omnichannel strategy presence in the Swedish bookstore industry. There is an interest and awareness among the interviewees but there is no implementation or knowledge on this issue yet on a store level. Furthermore, the analysis

emphasized how the physical store identity and image are fluid concepts when perceived by physical store staff, being several possible stakeholders at once. The next subsection will discuss limits and implications of the findings presented above.

## 5.4 Discussion and limits

In many ways, the emic approach contributed to new and interesting data within the case study. The general and theoretical implications of the study are therefore manifold, despite the particularity of the bookstore industry within retail. However, there are several implications to be kept in mind especially because of this emic element to this case study.

Regarding the theoretical framework of this thesis, many of the studies on dual- or omnichannel retailing referenced are from the US and make use of and study examples from their home country. This makes the literature review rather unilateral and perhaps even biased, as the competitive environment and conditions in the US can be perceived as specific (and different from other parts of the world such as Sweden). In the US for example, it is not unusual with megamalls and large, complex designed stores in general (Cox, Cox & Anderson, 2005). Even though Sweden has a retail landscape of shopping malls, this case study focuses on the (old) town's center which is a considerably different context. A recent study on the American book industry assumes the transformation of the traditional book store as it is now "in cyberspace" (Szenberg & Ramrattan, 2015, p. 1). Despite this development or projection in the US, both Swedish book companies where the interviewees are employed do not have an online channel and run on pure brick-and-mortar stores. This difference of markets is perhaps symbolized by the absence of Amazon in Sweden (Svenska Bokhandel, 2015). Also, as mentioned in the introduction, many countries in Europe have regulated prices in the books industry (Pettersson, 2013). However, I recognized this limit and attempted to include academic research done in other countries such as Taiwan and France (Chen, Chan & Cheng, 2011 and Jeanpert & Salerno, 2013 respectively).

Another aspect that requires attention is the primary sources used for analysis in this study. By asking employees and managers from bookstores about brand and store image and their own role in that, there is a risk of them overemphasizing their own importance. This leads to the result that their perception is crucial for top management to take into consideration, as they are the ones closest to the customers and thus the transactions. Also, because of the recent changes in the book retailer landscape, staff in general might have already been more conscious on the topics discussed for this study than they would have been otherwise. On the other hand, just because I introduced topics such as dual-channel integration (in more practical terms) to the interviewees they might have over-contemplated the issue while they normally would have another or perhaps no perception at all on this matter. This can also have resulted in a degree of over-analysis in this case study.

These effects might have been enhanced by the emic approach as 'colleagues' would share more both on the best and the worst parts of the job. As one of the main results of this study concerns sociability and the store as a meeting place for consumers, staff automatically places

themselves to play an important part in this. As Cox, Cox and Anderson's empirical data also do not support the social role of the physical store, it is interesting to note that bookstore staff do still believe in this "myth" (2005, p. 257). In this respect, it needs to be taken into account that the study in this paper was a case study on bookstores, where, as mentioned before, books perhaps are a special kind of product and their stores a special kind within shopping establishment (Pettersson, 2013; Hu & Jasper, 2006). As several interviewees have also pointed out, they feel their customers are often quite culturally versed and feel they demand a specific type of conversation. However, both book chains are trying to also be there for those who do not wish to have such an intellectual interaction but rather want to shop for a 'non-knowledgeable' product (interviewee A, April 14, 2015).

An issue that was taken up by several interviewees without the intention of the interviewer concerned e-books. This particular product was sold by one of the bookstore companies, including devices to read them on, as to be a pioneer in Sweden in this field and follow the trend in the USA. However, as discussed in section three on methodology, because it was relatively difficult to control the interviews through an emic approach such related topics came up and were still used for analysis.

The main findings of the analysis shed light on how store managers and employees perceive the image of their bookstore in the light of e-commerce. However, even though e-commerce does have a profound impact, it does not have an all-encompassing effect on the operations of the physical bookstore. As in any study, due to the scope and timeframe many factors have not been considered. This aspect also impacts validity issues, as the case has been perceived through using specific theories and angles which also implies not using others. Other perspectives prevalent in the retail industry and corporate branding research literature are for example service management, sales management and ethnographic studies of consumer behavior. Especially regarding data on (changed) staff behavior, theoretical frameworks from service management could have uncovered more on how their perception of successful salesmanship and service relates to the physical store image. Due to the sector-specific characteristics of bookstores and the complex aspects of this case study in general it is not the objective to generalize the results, even though elements of it might be used for future research.

The emic approach has resulted in rich, deep and novel insights into store image and the role of store staff. There are various constraints to this perspective which affect the conclusiveness of the results, but it has also demonstrated new areas of investigation because the interviewees opened up about certain topics to the interviewer who was considered a peer. It has also meant that data collection and analysis overlap, which have affected the content of the interviews whether they were conducted first or last. Recognizing this is a general characteristic of qualitative research and unstructured interviews, it must be stated again as in section three that the stability and validity of the results decrease.

## 6 Conclusion

The aim of this case study was to gain an understanding of perceptions bookstore employees and store managers have on physical store image in the light of current e-commerce trends. The research was conducted using a qualitative, interpretative, inductive and emic approach, resulting in rich and complex data that was analyzed by applying such concepts as corporate identity, branding, store image and brick versus click.

At the foundation of this thesis lies the conceptualization of store image, which fused the way previous studies had used the term. Physical store image became something more fluid as a result of the data gathered by way of an emic approach, where interviewees in fact controlled the data to be gathered. The insights that were acquired on the perceptions of the employees and store managers were reflective of the approach used. In other words, being an insider as researcher provided the case study with considerable depth.

What the results and analysis have shown is that store managers and employees perceive their role to be flexible when tapping into various opportunities that can enhance the image and thus the bottom-line results. For one, the social aspect of store image is crucial according to staff. Even though the perception of corporate branding efforts from central management targeting staff behavior on a micro-level is positive, feedback systems are seen as important factor in this process. Being personal is the differentiating factor for physical stores and staff of company one knows this best how to accomplish this from store level adaptations. Company two is smaller and younger and due to its flatter hierarchy central management seems more on the same level as store management.

Another result from this study concerns dual- or omnichannel integration. Although none of the companies adopt any such strategy there is definitely no fear or resentment about it either. Rather, the 'worst' days of the new e-commerce trend are over, i.e. the competitive threat has passed, and stabilization has started to benefit the physical (book)store, perhaps sharpening specific aspects of it. For example, interviewees have mentioned both internal and external (store displays for example) campaigns to be a reaction to or have specific characteristics because of online store competition. It also means aspects of store image like service and personal advice have sharpened and crystallized even more to provide consumers with a differentiated shopping experience. In this sense, there is need for more research on new consumer trends like those that value sustainability, locality and small businesses (anchored in society) for example. This would also lead to research on what impact these developments have on store staff and the store image in general.

The practical implications of these results can affect various stakeholders. First of all, corporate management simply has more information on how their employees and store managers perceive their own role and how that affects the physical store where the actual

transactions of the business take place. It is generally not unimportant to consider lower levels of an organization and thus take a practice-based perspective to know how daily activities are a part of the larger organization and what effect they have. Secondly, and in relation to the first implication, marketing and brand management can thus learn from trends that are of importance to physical stores. Trends are fluid and change fast which can make closer contact with store level employees informative for various strategies and campaigns. Lastly, the employees themselves might have gained more insight into their own role by thinking about e-commerce and physical store image, which could positively affect their sales efforts and general professional success.

It must be repeated that the limited scope of this case study affects the conclusiveness and the generalizability of the results. Despite this limit, the key findings can be used for future research in the retail industry as a whole in Sweden and Europe, increasing the validity and potential of the results from this study. Hence, the particularities of micro-level research on bookstore image through an emic approach can still be used for larger studies investigating the relationship between corporate branding, store image and e-commerce strategies.

# References

- Balmer, J.M.T. (2012). Strategic Corporate Brand Alignment: Perspectives from Identity Based Views of Corporate Brands, *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 46, no. 7, pp. 1064-1092
- Beristain, J.J. and Zorrilla, P. (2011). The Relationship Between Store Image and Store Brand Equity: A Conceptual Framework and Evidence From Hypermarkets, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol. 18, no. 6, pp. 562-574
- Bernstein, F., Song, J-S. and Zheng, X. (2008). “Bricks-and-mortar” vs. “Clicks-and-mortar”: An Equilibrium Analysis, *European Journal of Operational Research*, no. 187, pp. 671-690
- Bick, G., Jacobson, M. and Abratt, R. (2003). The Corporate Identity Management Process Revisited, *Journal of Marketing Management*, vol.19, nos. 17/18, pp. 835-855
- Birtwistle, G., Clarke, I. and Freathy, P. (1999). Store Image in the UK Retail Fashion Sector: Consumer versus Retailer Perceptions, *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 1-16
- Brown, M., Moriarty, M. and Mendoza-Pena, A. (2014). On Solid Ground: Brick-and-Mortar is the Foundation of Omnichannel Retailing, *MMR*, vol. 31, no. 16, pp. 171-176
- Brynjolfsson, E., Hu, Y. J. and Rahman, M.S. (2013). Competing in the Age of Omnichannel Retailing, *MIT Sloan Management Review*, vol. 54, no. 4, pp. 22-30
- Cao, X.J., Xu, Z. and Douma, F. (2012). The Interactions Between E-shopping and Traditional In-store Shopping: An Application of Structural Equations Model, *Transportation*, no. 39, pp. 957-974
- Chen, C.W., Chan, C-L. and Cheng, C-Y. (2011). Using AHP For Determining Priority In Seamless Strategy: A Case Study of the Click-And-Mortar Bookstore, *International Journal of Electronic Business Management*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 95-106
- Cox, A.D., Cox, D. and Anderson, R.D. (2005). Reassessing the Pleasures of Store Shopping, *Journal of Business Research*, no. 58, pp. 250-259
- Da Silva, R.V. and Syed Alwi, S.F. (2008). The Link Between Offline Brand Attributes and Corporate Brand Image In Bookstores, *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, vol. 17, no. 3, pp. 175-187
- Davies, G. and Chun, R. (2002). Gaps Between the Internal and External Perceptions of the Corporate Brand, *Corporate Reputation Review*, vol. 5, nos. 2/3, pp. 144-158
- Fischer, M. (2012). Retail Rage, Available online: <https://hbr.org/2012/01/retail-rage> [Accessed 10 April 2015]

- Flood, A. (2015). David Nicholls: Browsing bookshops then buying online is a ‘genteel form of shoplifting’, *The Guardian Online*. Available online: <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/apr/14/david-nicholls-decline-indie-bookshops-london-book-fair> [Accessed 14 April 2015]
- Foster, C., Punjaisri, K. and Cheng, R. (2010). Exploring the Relationship Between Corporate, Internal and Employer Branding, *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, vol. 19, no. 6, pp. 401-409
- Fox, P. (2004). The Day the Music Stores Died, *Computerworld*, vol. 38, no. 21, pp. 16-17
- Geertz, C. (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books
- Hatch, M.J. and Schultz, M. (2001). Are the Strategic Stars Aligned for Your Corporate Brand? *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 79, no. 2, pp. 128-134
- Hatch, M.J. and Schultz, M. (2009). Of Bricks and Brands: From Corporate to Enterprise Branding, *Organizational Dynamics*, vol.38, no. 2, pp. 117-130
- Hu, H. and Jasper, C.H. (2006). Social Cues in the Store Environment and their Impact on Store Image, *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management*, vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 25-48
- Järventie-Thesleff, R., Moisander, J. And Laina, P-M. (2011). Organizational Dynamics and Complexities of Corporate Brand Building – a Practice Perspective, *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, no. 27, pp. 196-204
- Kahn, B.E. (2013). Understanding the stages of Retail, *Harvard Business Review*, Available Online: <https://hbr.org/2013/03/understanding-the-stages-of-retail> [Accessed 10 April 2015]
- Leinwand, P. and Mainardi, C. (2010). The Coherence Premium, *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 88, no. 1, pp. 86-92
- Leitch, S. and Motion, J. (2007). Retooling the corporate brand: A Foucauldian perspective on normalization and differentiation, *Brand Management*, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 71-80
- Lu, Y., and Seo, H-B. (2015). Developing Visibility Analysis for a Retail Store: a Pilot Study in a Bookstore, *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design*, vol. 42, no. 1, pp. 95-109
- Mitchell, C. (2002). Selling the Brand Inside, *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 80, no. 1, pp. 99-105.
- Neal, J.W., Neal, Z.P., VanDyke, E. and Kornbluh, M. (2015). Expediting the Analysis of Qualitative Data in Evaluation: A Procedure for the Rapid Identification of Themes from Audio Recordings, *American Journal of Evaluation*, vol. 36, no. 1, pp. 118-132

- Nowell, J. (2015). Children's Book Sales Buck the Trend, Publisher's Weekly, Available Online: <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-industry-news/article/66291-children-s-print-book-sales-buck-the-trend.html> [Accessed 23 April 2015]
- O'Callaghan, E. (2013). Internal Brand Commitment, A Multidimensional Construct? Case Study Evidence Within A Collaborative Independent Retail Network Context, *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, vol. 23, no. 5, pp. 478-492
- Olsson, L. (2015). En studie av allmänbokhandeln i Sverige våren 2015. Available online: <http://svenskabokhandlareforeningen.se/intressant-lasning-om-bokhandelns-nuvarande-tillstand-och-omfattning/> [Accessed 14 May 2015]
- Pennewand, K. (2013). Retail Internationalization in Emerging Countries, [e-book] Wiesbaden: Springer Science & Business B.V. Available online: [http://download-v2.springer.com/static/pdf/918/bok%253A978-3-8349-4492-4.pdf?token2=exp=1431939098~acl=%2Fstatic%2Fpdf%2F918%2Fbok%25253A978-3-8349-4492-4.pdf\\*~hmac=4af91ec1bb7aef502026326858c73fbc4063cccf892d5c6b460a68415e870a06](http://download.v2.springer.com/static/pdf/918/bok%253A978-3-8349-4492-4.pdf?token2=exp=1431939098~acl=%2Fstatic%2Fpdf%2F918%2Fbok%25253A978-3-8349-4492-4.pdf*~hmac=4af91ec1bb7aef502026326858c73fbc4063cccf892d5c6b460a68415e870a06) [Accessed 11 May 2015]
- Pettersson, J-E. (2013). Litteraturstöd – från kvalitet till behov? Svenska Förläggarföreningen. Available Online: <http://www.forlaggare.se/sites/default/files/Litteraturstodet%20UPPDATERAD%20web.pdf> [Accessed 14 May 2015]
- Punjaisri, K. & Wilson, A. (2007). The Role of Internal Branding in the Delivery of Employee Brand Promise, *Journal of Brand Management*, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 57-70
- Rigby, D.K. (2014). Digital-physical Mashups, *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 92, no. 9, pp. 84-92
- Shy, O. (2013). Window Shopping, The Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, Available Online: <https://www.bostonfed.org/economic/wp/wp2013/wp1304.pdf> [Accessed 10 April 2015]
- Syed Alwi, S.F. and Da Silva, R. V. (2007). Online and Offline Corporate Brand Images: Do They Differ? *Corporate Reputation Review*, vol. 10, no. 4, pp. 217-244
- Svenska Bokhandel (2015). Debatt. Available Online: <http://www.svb.se/debatt> [Accessed 14 May 2015]
- Swoboda, B., Pennemann, K. and Taube, M. (2011). Branding In a Tumultuous Economy: Feedback Loops Between Corporate and Retail Store Image: Corporate Dominance and Evaluation Approach as Moderators, *AMA Summer Educators' Conference Proceedings*, vol. 22, pp. 389-390

- Szenberg, M. and Ramrattan, L. (2015). Distribution Channels of the American Book Industry: A Play of Digital Technology, *The American Economist*, vol. 60, no. 1, pp. 1-8
- Söderling, F. (2009). Fast Pris Delar Bok-Sverige. Available Online: <http://www.dn.se/dnbok/fast-pris-delar-bok-sverige/> [Accessed 20 April 2015]
- Talja, S. Analyzing Qualitative Data: The Discourse Analytical Method, *Library and Information Science Research*, vol. 21, no. 4, pp. 459-477
- Tatli, A. and Özbilgin, M.F. (2012). An Emic Approach to Intersectional Study of Diversity at Work: a Bourdieuan Framing, *International Journals of Management Reviews*, vol. 14, p. 180-200
- Tojo, R. and Matsubayashi, N. (2011). Competition Between Online And Physical Stores: The Implications Of Providing Product Information By Pure-Play E-tailer, *Managerial and Decision Economics*, no. 32, pp. 281-292.
- Vallaster, C. and Lindgreen, A. (2012). The Role of Social Interactions in Building Corporate Brands: Implications for Sustainability, *Journal of World Business*, vol. 48, no. 3, pp. 297-310
- Van Marrewijk, A. and Broos, M. (2012). Retail Stores as Brands: Performances, Theatre and Space, *Consumption Markets & Culture*, vol. 15, no. 4, pp. 374-391
- Van Riel, C.B.M. and Balmer, J.M.T. (1997). Corporate identity: the concept, its measurement and management, *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 31, nos. 5/6, pp. 340-355
- Varley, R. (2005). Store Image As Key Differentiator, *European Retail Digest*, no. 46, pp. 18-21
- Wikberg, E. (2015). Boken 2015 – Marknaden, Analyser och Trender, Svenska Bokhandlareföreningen och Svenska Förläggareföreningen. Available Online: <http://svenskabokhandlareforeningen.se/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Boken-2015-web.pdf> [Accessed 13 April 2015]
- Yohn, D.L. (2014). Why Retail Sales Associates Still Do Better Than Websites. Available online: <https://hbr.org/2014/12/what-retail-sales-associates-still-do-better-than-websites> [Accessed 10 April 2015]
- Zhang, J., Farris, P.J., Irvin, J.W., Kushwaha, T., Steenburgh, T.J. and Weitz, B.A. (2010). Crafting Integrated Multichannel Strategies, *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, no. 24, pp. 168-180

# Appendix A

## Interview guide: topics

1. Role and responsibilities of the interviewee
  - a. Within the store and within the company as a whole
2. Physical bookstore, what does it/should it convey:
  - a. Campaigns
    - i. External communication
  - b. Consumers and/vs Staff
  - c. Challenges
  - d. Other local strategies
    - i. Geographical, audience, partners
3. Use of IT and similar tools
  - a. Among customers
  - b. Among staff (yourself)
  - c. In the store, in the company
    - i. Internal communication
    - ii. Dual/omni-channel
4. Future of bookstores and retail in general