The Role of Concept Stores

Consumer Perception of the Intended Brand Image

by

Petra Ohlson & Emma Stenkil

May 2024

Master's Program in International Marketing and Brand

Management

Abstract

Title: The Role of Concept Stores: Consumer Perceptions of the Intended Brand Image

Seminar date: 2024-05-30

Course: BUSN39, Degree Project in Global Marketing, Business Administration: Master Level

Authors: Petra Ohlson & Emma Stenkil

Supervisor: Ulf Johansson

Research question: Why are fashion manufacturing brands opening concept stores? How does consumers' perception of the concept stores' image differ from the fashion manufacturing brand's intended image?

Purpose: The study aims to explore the intentions behind the establishments of concept stores and examine the variance between consumer's perception of these stores' image and the intended brand image. It aims to provide insights into the effectiveness of concept stores in conveying brand image and to enhance understanding of concept store phenomenon from both a management and consumer perspective.

Theoretical perspectives: This study is based on a theoretical framework of store format development, experience-based store formats, concept stores, store image and brand image. This framework was applied to guide and answer the research questions.

Methodology: A qualitative study with an abductive approach, utilizing a multiple case study design. The research is based on semi-structured interviews with 6 managers and 13 customers from Norrøna, Hestra and Peak Performance, in Gothenburg, Stockholm and Copenhagen.

Conclusion: Concept stores are established primarily for four reasons: brand building & control, strategic planning & financial motivations, consumer trends & brand adaptations, and support for online sales. Despite their intention to create a strong brand image, significant discrepancies exist between customer perception of the store image and the intended brand image. The success of these stores depends on effectively aligning these perceptions to accurately convey the brand's image.

Key words: Concept stores, Experiential Stores, Brand Image, Store Image

Acknowledgements

Lund, May 2024

_____   _____

Petra Ohlson   Emma Stenkil

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

1. Introduction

This chapter provides a thorough exploration of the study's background followed by a nuanced problematization of the subject matter. Additionally, the research objectives are established and the central research questions that will guide this study.

1.1 Background

The structural transformation of commerce has been significantly influenced by the current context, especially in the light of the emergence of the covid-19 pandemic (Deb, 2023; Zwanka & Buff, 2021). The pandemic acted as an accelerant for the ongoing digital transformation within commerce, resulting in a faster transition to e-commerce from both traditional brick-and-mortar retail and a gradual process of digitization (Kotler et al., 2021; Post- och telestyrelsen, 2021). The effects of this transition became particularly evident through altered consumption dynamics, wherein substantial portions of purchasing activity have shifted from physical stores to digital platforms (Ramadan et al., 2023; Unni et al., 2023). This transition has sparked conversations about the potential disappearance of the physical retail space, a phenomenon often described as "the death of retail" (Berman, 2019; Chun et al., 2023; Corkery, 2017).

However, despite the rise of e-commerce, future forecasts predict that the relevance of the physical retail space will persist (e.g. Daniel & Hernandez, 2024). This trend is evidenced by the increasing number of online retailers opening physical stores, while many long established retailers are experimenting with innovative store formats (Brown, 2010; Hultman et al., 2017; Reynolds et al., 2007). Such developments underscores the importance of physical stores as crucial touchpoints where customers can inspect products, assess quality (ŞTIR, 2018), and engage in social interactions that build relationships (Bustamante & Rubio, 2017). This indicates that physical stores are not disappearing but are instead assuming a new role and function within the customer journey (Egan-Wyer et al., 2021).

1.2 Problematization

In today's rapidly evolving retail landscape, retailers are actively seeking innovative strategies to diversify their business approach. One such strategy involves the development and implementation of unique store formats, which serve as an important tool for growth (Dawson, 2000; González-Benito, 2001; Verhoef et al., 2015). According to Reynolds et al. (2007), retail formats are defined as "the physical embodiment of a retail business model: the framework that relates the firm's activities to its business context and strategy". These store formats enable retailers to differentiate themselves from competitors, while simultaneously attracting both existing and new target markets (González-Benito et al., 2018). Over time, the evolution of retail formats has been significant, with earlier approaches driven by factors such as size or

product lines, each catering to different consumer needs, whether in terms of ambiance or cost efficiency (Azeem & Sharma, 2015; Gauri et al., 2021).

However, in recent years, retailers have been establishing stores that differentiates more distinctively compared to their existing formats within their retail portfolio (González-Benito et al., 2018; Reynolds et al., 2007). This trend is underscored by the growing importance of customer value-based segmentation, wherein considerations of quality and price alone no longer suffice as determinants for consumers when selecting store formats (Floor, 2006; Gauri et al., 2021). Thus, format development is being adopted as a growth strategy because it can create future competitive advantages by promoting positive customer experiences in-store (Beckman & Michélsen, 2019; Gauri et al., 2021).

Experiential stores, including flagship stores, and pop-ups, represent a distinct manifestation of this evolution. These formats offer unique and immersive shopping experiences that engage customers on a deeper level than traditional retail (Huber et al., 2013; Picot-Coupey, 2014; Triki & Hakimi, 2017). These stores are designed to create memorable and interactive shopping experiences that cannot be replicated online or in regular stores (Pape & Toporowski, 2023). For instance, in a flagship store, the emphasis lies on reinforcing the brand (Kozinets et al., 2002), while a pop-up store focuses on enhancing the brand (Robertson et al., 2018), communication (Surchi, 2011), and generating demand (Picot-Coupey, 2014). A notable characteristic shared by these experiential stores is their departure from conventional sales generation methods, where immediate direct sales are not necessarily the primary objective (Egan-Wyer et al., 2021; Klein et al., 2016; Reynolds et al., 2007; Shi et al., 2018). Instead, by telling stories and providing interactivity, experiential stores aim to emotionally connect consumers to the brand, foster long-term loyalty, and generate word-of-mouth marketing (Dolbec & Chebat, 2013; Jahn et al., 2018; Klein et al., 2016; Pape & Toporowski, 2023).

However, with the evolving landscape of retail, a new type of experience-based store format has emerged, commonly known as concept stores (Egan-Wyer et al., 2021). The concept store, akin to flagship and pop-up stores, diverge from traditional retail formats by prioritizing intangible benefits over direct sales. Similar to flagship and pop-up stores, the concept store emphasizes softer values such as inspiration, availability, image and presence. Positioned as a channel for fostering customer-retailer relationships, it facilitates everyday tasks through strategic design and location choices. However, unlike other experiential retail formats that prioritize drama and excitement (where customers are drawn by the allure of exclusive, exceptional experience), concept stores provide a more mundane, yet essential shopping experience characterized by convenience, accessibility, and reassurance. Consequently, concept stores offer a distinct and less intense experience compared to other experience-based stores (Egan-Wyer et al., 2021).

Recently, we have observed a trend where fashion brand manufacturers of high-involvement products are shifting from indirect to direct sales models and are increasingly choosing to open concept stores. However, a notable gap exists in current research regarding the underlying reasons for why they have chosen to embrace this concept store trend. Existing research on

concept stores has primarily focused on brands exclusively utilizing direct-to-consumer sales models in the home furnishing industry (Beckman & Michélsen, 2019; Egan-Wyer et al., 2021). Consequently, there is a pressing need for research to explore fashion brand manufacturers intentions behind establishing this store format. By understanding the underlying reasons, managers can make more informed strategic decisions. This understanding allows them to assess whether investing in concept stores aligns with their brand identity and overall business objectives.

Furthermore, the communication of a brand is profoundly influenced by the concept and design of its retail outlets (Kotler, 1973), a principle that holds true across various experience-based store formats. Even though there is plenty of research confirming that experiential stores are used to create brand image (e.g. Hollenbeck et al., 2008; Kozinets et al., 2002), there is limited research exploring whether the intended image through experiential store formats aligns with the one perceived by customers (Blazquez et al., 2019; Ye et al., 2023). However, there is even less research examining this alignment in the context of concept stores. Given that the experience offered in a concept store diverges from other experiential formats, it is important to understand how this unique format impacts the alignment of brand image. This can provide valuable insights for marketers and brand managers, as it can help refine store designs, enhance customer experience, and ensure the brand's intended image is effectively communicated and received. By addressing this research gap, we can better understand the influence of concept stores on brand perception and overall customer satisfaction. Furthermore, by analyzing concept stores through the lens of brand image theory, we aim to contribute with insights on its usefulness and relevance in the context of experiential stores. This serves to strengthen and expand the applicability of the theory.

1.3 Research Purpose

The aim of this study is to explore the intentions behind the establishments of concept stores and examine the variance between consumer's perception of these stores' image and the intended brand image. By delving into these aspects, this study aims to provide valuable insights into why fashion manufacturing brands choose the concept store format and deepen our understanding of the capabilities and limitations of concept stores as mediators of brand image. Furthermore, the research endeavors to foster an increased understanding of the concept store phenomenon, from both a management and consumer perspective.

1.4 Research questions

RQ1: Why are fashion manufacturing brands opening concept stores?
RQ2: How does consumers' perception of the concept stores' image differ from the fashion manufacturing brand's intended image?

1.5 Delimitations

This study is delimited to examining experience-based store formats such as concept, flagship, and pop-up stores. Furthermore, the analysis is restricted to enterprises founded in the Nordic countries, with a specific focus on their operational presence within the Swedish and Danish market. This delimitation allows for a focused exploration of targeted retail strategies and market dynamics in a defined geographical and sectoral context.

1.6 Outline of the Thesis

1. Introduction: Includes background and problematization with key theoretical insights regarding the phenomenon of research. Furthermore, it introduces the purpose, research questions, and delimitations of this study.

2. Literature/theoretical review: Presents a summary of previous research of relevant areas of the research phenomenon. The literature review focuses on previous research on store format development, experiential stores and concept stores, brand image and store image.

3. Methodology: Discusses the philosophical and methodological stances this thesis takes to address the purpose and to answer the research question.

4. Findings: Introduces the three case companies under study in the research, i.e Hestra, Norrøna and Peak Performance. Further, the chapter includes the findings from the empirical data collected from the interviews including both managers and consumers and the alignment of perceptions.

5. Analysis and discussion: The empirical findings are analyzed and theorized to meet the study's purpose and research questions. This chapter is structured into two different sections where every section refers to a specific research question.

6. Conclusion: In this final chapter, the aim, purpose, and research questions of the study are revised to examine whether the study fulfills and answers them. Furthermore, theoretical implications and managerial implications are discussed and followed by limitations and suggested future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

The aim of this study is to explore the intentions behind the establishments of concept stores and examine the variance between consumer's perception of these stores' image and the intended brand image. In order to understand the managerial objectives of the concept store, it is relevant to investigate previous research on store format development, experiential store formats and concept stores. Other store formats (e.g. hyper stores, convenience stores, and department stores) were excluded due to their lack of relevance to the unique characteristics and objectives of concept stores. Furthermore, the theory of brand image and store image is considered relevant in order to understand how concept store's different elements are conveyed to the customer. The store image theory allows for exploration in the realm of the retail sector, from both manager and customer perspective. Other theories have also been considered, for example the consumer-brand relationship theory (Fournier, 1998) and customer experience theory (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). However, neither of these reflects the retail store elements inherent in concept stores as efficiently as store image and is therefore excluded from further consideration. Thus, the following chapter will provide a literature review of prior research on store format development, experiential stores, concept stores, as well as brand image and store image theory. This literature review will serve as a foundation for collecting and interpreting the empirical data to achieve the study's purpose.

2.1 Literature Review on Experiential Stores

The following sections present the development in the field of retail formats, specifically experiential stores and concept stores. However, due to the dearth of research on the phenomenon of concept stores, with only a few exceptions, similar experiential stores (flagship stores and pop-up stores) are presented, in order to delineate the characteristics of a concept store.

2.1.1 Development of New Store Formats

During the past two decades, the retailing field has dramatically changed due to the advent of online channels and digitalization, and an increasingly heterogeneous and demanding market (González-Benito, 2001; Verhoef et al., 2015). Despite the current digital era, the physical store is still essential for the success for many businesses, as it represents "the key nodes" of its omnichannel operations (Grewal et al., 2023). This growing heterogeneity and deep transformation of retailing has forced retailers to rethink their business model, the store formats and their composition of offerings (Hultman et al., 2017). Thus, although not visible, the retail formats are in a continuous process of innovation and development (McGoldrick, 2002a), and has led to a significant diversification of retail offers, both evolving existing store formats but also prompting new store formats to evolve (González-Benito, 2001). Retailers utilize new retail formats to set themselves apart from competition, appeal to current target markets and attract new markets (González-Benito et al., 2005; Levy et al., 2014). Furthermore, new retail

formats may offer a geographically convenient (Jaravaza & Chitando, 2024; Jones et al., 2003) or emotionally accessible (de Lassus & Anido Freire, 2014) store location to customers which affects their repurchase intentions, and spontaneous shopping trips and purchases (Léo & Philippe, 2002). However, the changing lifestyles of consumers have simultaneously shortened the longevity of store formats (Floor, 2006), presenting further challenges for managers, considering the large investments incurred in store format decisions (Bonfrer et al., 2022). Previous research has defined retail formats as "the physical embodiment of a retail business model: the framework that relates the firm's activities to its business context and strategy" (Reynolds et al., 2007).

According to Gauri et al. (2021), different types of retail formats entail different levels of service characteristics that differentiate them from other store formats. McGoldrick (2002a) explains these differences as the following: single/group of stores, in/out of town, proximity/destination, small/large, mature/innovative, mainly food/non-food, specified/generalized, niche/commodity, high added value/functional, store based/home based. Furthermore, no consensus exists to specify characteristics of specific store formats, and the boundaries between different store formats are becoming increasingly blurred (McGoldrick, 2002a). However, the previous store format development seems to have offered customers one of two things: 1) differences in scale or 2) product lines offered (Egan-Wyer et al., 2021). According to Gauri et al. (2021), the "wheel of retailing" is soon closing, highlighting the evolution from smaller, traditional store formats to the rise of superstores, and now a trend moving towards smaller and more convenient formats.

However, consumers are no longer only looking to find a certain product, and are not satisfied with only considering quality and price in choosing between retail formats (Gauri et al., 2021). Today, the customer is looking for a store experience, searching to become emotionally involved when shopping (Floor, 2006). According to Gauri et al. (2021), the retailers are able to accommodate these new customer demands either by reducing friction in the shopping process, or by enhancing the shopping experience for their customers. Furthermore, the authors predict the digital-first and physical-first will continue developing customer-centric formats.

2.1.2 Experience Based Store Formats

The new emerging store formats constitute a diversified retail store portfolio, creating unique customer expectations and determinants distinct from those associated with traditional store formats, which currently serve as the benchmark for customers. These experience-based store formats are characterized by their innovative approach to retail, aiming to enhance the customer experience beyond traditional sales-focused models (Huber et al., 2013; Picot-Coupey, 2014; Triki & Hakimi, 2017). Experiences elicit a diverse range of emotions, thoughts, physical sensations, and spiritual reactions (Mossberg, 2007; Schmitt, 1999). In contrast to conventional retail settings where decisions are typically rational, shopping in experiential stores is more immersive, leading to impulsive behavior influenced by factors including lighting, product arrangement, aesthetics, sound, and scents (Spence et al., 2014). These stores emerge as retailers adapt to changing consumer behaviors (Bagdare & Jain, 2013; Verhoef et al., 2009),

prioritizing emotions such as excitement (Kozinets et al., 2002), engagement (Fontana, 2023) and connection (Dolbec & Chebat, 2013). Experience-based store formats, characterized by their distinctive offerings such as immersive brand experiences, serve as a strategic tool for brands aiming to differentiate themselves within competitive markets (Jahn et al., 2018; Klein et al., 2016; Robertson et al., 2018). These formats play a crucial role in building brand image (Manlow & Nobbs, 2013; Ye et al., 2023) and cultivating customer relationships (Borghini et al., 2009; Egan-Wyer et al., 2021; Nierobisch et al., 2017; Warnaby & Shi, 2018) through in-store experiences.

Flagship and pop-up stores represent two prominent experiential retail formats, each characterized by distinct features and functions. Flagship stores represent a strategic approach to market entry (Moore et al., 2010) and intended as permanent additions to the retail portfolio (Egan-Wyer et al., 2021; Robertson et al., 2018). They are, much like pop-up stores, typically located in high-traffic urban shopping areas (Egan-Wyer et al., 2021; Moore et al., 2000; Surchi, 2011) but notably larger than other store formats operated by retailers (Moore et al., 2010). The expanded size enhances the perceived status of the brand, conveying a sense of significance and imposing. The ample space allows for optimal product display and customer flow, enhancing the luxury brand experience (Moore et al., 2010). Furthermore, this format aims to provide engaging experiences through extremely curated and often spectacular design, coupled with a wide product range, thereby attracting customers and fostering loyalty (Arrigo, 2015; Fontana, 2023; Nobbs et al., 2012). Conversely, pop-up stores are described as temporary and innovative retail spaces (Henkel & Toporowski, 2023; Niehm et al., 2006), serving as experiential environments for exploring evolving consumer behavior patterns (Robertson et al., 2018). Additionally, they enhance brand-consumer interaction through unique design, exclusive events and limited product offerings (Haas & Schmidt, 2016; Henkel & Toporowski, 2023; Spena et al., 2012; Warnaby & Shi, 2018).

Furthermore, by creating an exciting brand experience, experience-based stores target recreational (Kaltcheva & Weitz, 2006) or experiential (Verhoef et al., 2009) shoppers who actively seek excitement. For instance, flagship stores prioritize the delivery of dramatic and memorable shopping experiences (Dolbec & Chebat, 2013; Moore et al., 2010) while pop-up stores offer a more exclusive atmosphere (Marciniak & Budnarowska, 2010). Consequently, they often serve as a marketing tool, generating buzz and word-of-mouth promotion to enhance brand awareness (Klein et al., 2016; Marciniak & Budnarowska, 2010; Picot-Coupey, 2014).

2.1.3 Concept Stores: A New Retail Experience

Within the domain of experience-based store formats, a new kind of format has emerged, known as a concept store. The term "concept store" refers to a store format that lacks a scientific definition, but which can be described by its aspects and areas of application. Notably, it integrates innovative store elements, complemented by curated assortment of private label items (Triki & Hakimi, 2017). However the primary objective of a concept store, in contrast to traditional stores, is not necessarily to generate direct sales (Huber et al., 2013; Triki & Hakimi,

2017). Instead, similar to flagship and pop-up stores, concept stores are oriented towards providing "softer" values such as inspiration, availability, image and presence. Consequently, concept stores play a vital role in fostering a relationship between the customer and retailer (Egan-Wyer et al., 2021). While they resemble other experience-based store formats, concept stores distinguish themselves by focusing on the facilitation of everyday tasks for customers through their design and strategic locations, rather than aiming to create a dramatic and exciting place (Dolbec & Chebat, 2013; Egan-Wyer et al., 2021; Marciniak & Budnarowska, 2010). Furthermore, concept stores, like other experience-based store formats, also aim to increase brand awareness and positive brand associations but represent a broader effort in format development to support or supplement the overall retail portfolio compared to flagship stores (Egan-Wyer et al., 2021; Kozinets, 2002). They are intended as a permanent addition to the retail portfolio, in contrast to pop-up stores, offering a simpler and more accessible shopping experience in city center and high street thus reducing friction in the customer experience (Egan-Wyer et al., 2021; Henkel & Toporowski, 2023). These findings hold theoretical significance because, while pop-up and flagship stores prioritize immediate brand excitement and "buzz", concept stores necessitate sustained validation over time, regardless of immediate sales impact. A pop-up store's cost is a one-off marketing cost, while a concept store must prove its value in the retail lineup, even if it doesn't solely rely on direct sales at the location (Egan-Wyer et al., 2021).

Table 1. Egan-Wyer et al. (2021) Definition of Concept Store

Store Format	Aims to…	Type of customer	Duration	Assortment	Direct Sales?	Location	Atmosphere	Aims for profit?
Concept Store	Inspire	Task-oriented	Permanent	Limited selection of own-brands	No	Accessible	Ordinary	No
Flagship Store	Entertain	Experiential	Permanent	Extensive selection of own- brand	Yes	Desirable	Extra-ordinary	No
Pop-up Store	Buzz or gather market intelligence	Experiential	Temporary	Limited selection of own-brands	Yes	Variable	Ephemeral	Yes

2.1.4 Experience-Based Store Formats Impact on Brand Image

Building upon the foundation of innovative retail formats discussed in previous sections, including the unique positioning of concept stores, the discussion shifts towards the profound impact these formats have on brand image. Each format, with its distinct approach to engaging customers by using in-store brand experience, not only serves to differentiate the brand within a competitive market (González-Benito et al., 2018; Hultman et al., 2017) but also serve as a tool to enhance and sustain a desired brand image (Hollenbeck et al., 2008; Kozinets, 2002). However, there is limited research exploring whether the intended image through experiential

store formats aligns with the one perceived by customers. Some studies indirectly address this concern (Dolbec & Chebat, 2013; Henkel & Toporowski, 2023; Klein et al., 2016; Manlow & Nobbs, 2013), but direct examination is less common, with notable examples found in the work of (Blazquez et al., 2019; Ye et al., 2023).

In the context of pop-up stores, Klein et al. (2016) explores the effectiveness of pop-up stores in luxury retail, finding that their unique characteristics increase brand experience and stimulate positive word of mouth, which strengthens their image. Furthermore, Henkel & Toporowski (2023) examine how pop-up stores influence consumer behavior and brand perception. They found that the ephemeral nature of these temporary stores significantly enhances brand experience and an increased word-of-mouth, especially for consumers with a high need for uniqueness (NFU). Transitioning to flagship stores, Manlow & Nobbs (2013) explores the function and form of luxury flagship stores, illustrating how their strategic design and aesthetic representation significantly align with consumer perceptions, serving as a physical embodiment of the brands identity and enhancing the customer experience. Additionally, Dolbec & Chebat (2013) examine luxury flagship stores, showing that compared to regular brand stores, flagships significantly enhance brand experience and impact brand attitude, brand attachment and brand equity by engaging consumers' emotions, senses and cognitions more effectively.

In the more direct examinations, Ye et al. (2023) delves into the effectiveness of various design strategies in pop-up retail settings through a mixed-methods investigation. The authors identify three dimensions of pop-up store design - the sign, style, and layout elements - that positively influence consumer behavior by enhancing the store's image, thereby improving brand attitude and purchase intentions. Blazquez et al. (2019) explores how atmospheric cues in luxury flagship stores impact consumers' impressions of the brand (perceived brand image) and their impulse and planned purchasing behaviors, finding that *customer service, product displays*, *store layout*, and the design of *fitting rooms* are the most influential factors.

Based on the information provided, the body of research examining alignment between intended and perceived brand images within these retail formats is sparse, and with concept stores being a newer format, there is even less direct research on them. As concept stores differ from other experience stores, offering less exciting customer experience (Egan-Wyer et al., 2021), the deviation in store format may risk misaligning the actual customer experience with the intended brand image (Kotler, 1973). This raises pivotal questions about the effectiveness of such formats in consistently communicating the core brand identity to consumers. Consequently, the next section will delve into brand image and store image, including their defining components.

2.2 Literature Review on Image

The following section will discuss the retail branding literature. In order to understand the retail brand image in relation to concept stores, the store image and its attributes are utilized.

Furthermore, consumer perceptions and management intentions are discussed. While researching brand image and image, it was recognized how much of the research has been relatively unchanged for several decades, and still consists of the original pioneer studies of store image from several decades ago. These sources are still referenced in current research on store image, as the conceptualization and related store attributes are referenced in current literature, supporting its relevance and credibility. Thus, based on the assumption that old research is still applicable and accepted, these sources are used in order to understand the store image.

2.2.1 Brand Image

Brand identity significantly contributes to providing direction, purpose and meaning for the brand. It constitutes a set of brand associations that the brand strategist endeavors to establish or sustain. These associations represent the core values and principles of the brand and signify an organizational promise to its customers (Aaker, 1995). However, it is essential to recognize that the brand's identity may not always align with its image (Agndal & Axelsson, 2019), which is how customers perceive the brand i.e. brand associations held in consumer memory (Keller, 1993). A brand creates value when consumers form *strong, favorable* and *unique* associations with it (Keller, 1993). These associations can be classified into three categories: *attributes* (product or service-related descriptive features linked to the purchase and/or consumption), *benefits* (personal value consumers attach to brand attributes), and *attitudes* (consumer's overall evaluation of the brand). To attain a high brand value, it is essential that all three criteria are fully met (Dahlén et al., 2017).

Understanding the market perception of a company's products or services is a fundamental starting point for strategic marketing efforts. Building a strong brand is an extensive process that represents significant economic value (McGoldrick, 2002a). For example, brand image is a crucial component of brand equity, creating value for companies in five ways: 1) helps consumers retrieve and process information, 2) provides a basis for differentiation and positioning of a product, 3) involves product attributes and customer benefits that give the customer a reason to buy or use the brand, 4) creates associations that evoke positive attitudes and feelings which is transferred to the brand, and 5) lays the foundation for repeat purchases by creating a sense of brand-product congruence (Aaker, 1991). Appropriately leveraged, this value can translate into growth and profitability (Dahlén et al., 2017). Consequently, many companies strive to manage and control their brand image (Agndal & Axelsson, 2019) .

This strategic emphasis on brand image naturally extends into the realm of retail marketing, where the traditional marketing mix is adapted to include not only the product for sale but also a complex product/service proposition (Burt & Sparks, 2002). As the academic discussion has shifted from viewing products as brands to considering stores as brands, retailers have progressed from mere merchants to retail brand managers. This transformation underscores the introduction of the retailer as a brand on its own (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004; Burt & Davies, 2010). By adopting the store-as-a-brand strategy, the retailer can sustain competitive advantage

by introducing both rational and emotional relationships with consumers, thereby establishing themselves as distinctive brands in the marketplace (Kumar & Kim, 2014; Virvilaite & Dailydiene, 2012). Discussions on retail image often implicitly make reference to store image to grasp the complexity of the retailer's image. Consequently, the store becomes an important factor for retailers in generating and communicating image (ed. Burt et al., 2010).

2.2.2 Store Image

Store image is a complex and multidimensional construct that has been the subject of extensive academic research (e.g. Bloemer & De Ruyter, 1998; Lindquist, 1974; Martineau, 1958). It refers to the consumer's perception of a store, based on a set of salient attributes (Baker et al., 1994; Bloemer & De Ruyter, 1998; Faircloth et al., 2001; James et al., 1976; Jin & Kim, 2003; Osman, 1993). Martineau (1958, p.47) defines it as "the way in which the store is defined in the shopper's mind, partly by its functional qualities and partly by an aura of psychological attributes". Key elements that make up a store image in the mind of consumers include, for example, architecture, color schemes, advertising, sales people and crucially, the actual product and its quality (Baker et al., 1994; Martineau, 1958). This concept is crucial in retail marketing, directly influencing where consumers shop (Mazursky & Jacoby, 1986; McGoldrick, 2002a). For each retail store, a distinct image may exist within consumers' minds (Bloemer & De Ruyter, 1998). However, consumers tend to select retail stores that offer a unique atmosphere or setting (Baker et al., 1994), or those whose image correlates closely with their own self-image (McGoldrick, 2002a). A positive store image can significantly enhance the overall brand image, particularly in the context of private brands (Alić et al., 2017; Kremer & Viot, 2012; Virvilaite & Dailydiene, 2012).

Consequently, retailers actively engage in efforts to shape and improve their store image in order to better align with customer expectations and strengthen their brand (Gilmore et al., 2001; Mazursky & Jacoby, 1986). This process involves a careful consideration of both tangible (e.g. price) and intangible attributes (e.g. atmosphere) of the store (Martineau, 1958). By cultivating a valued perception through the in-store shopping experience, retailers aim to enhance customer patronage decisions, increase satisfaction during store visits, and impact purchase intentions (Kerin et al., 1992). However, single-brand apparel retailers distinguish themselves from general retailers by cultivating a unique image through strategic merchandise selection and marketing efforts. These efforts include the creation of distinct store atmospheres and tailored shopping experiences (Kumar & Kim, 2014) ultimately creating long-lasting customer loyalty (Kim & Jones, 2011).

2.2.2.1 Store Image Attributes

Despite numerous attempts, there is currently no generally accepted definition or clear delineation of the dimensions of store image (Alić et al., 2017; Anselmsson et al., 2017; Martineau, 1958; McGoldrick, 2002a). McGoldrick (2002a) argues that the relevance of attributes constituting store image varies across different markets, areas, competitive situations and customer segments. However, several researchers have attempted to outline a comprehensive list of characteristics. In his seminal study on store image, Martineau (1958)

presents four key personality variables which shape store image: *layout and architecture*, *symbols & colors*, *advertising & sales personnel*. Similarly, Lindquist (1974) concluded that there are nine attribute groups that contribute to the formation of store image or the development of favorable or unfavorable consumer attitudes towards various retail outlets. These attributes include *merchandise*, *service*, *clientele*, *convenience*, *promotion*, *store atmosphere*, *institutional attributes,* and *post-transaction satisfaction*. Later research also highlighted the importance of atmosphere and the "pleasantness of shopping" (e.g. Donovan & Rossiter, 1982). In accordance with this, Mazursky & Jacoby (1986) noted that the most significant components of store image include *merchandise-related aspects* (e.g quality, price and assortment), *service-related aspects* (general quality and salesperson's service), and *the overall pleasantness* of the shopping experience. More recent literature has identified the key attributes in store image as: *atmosphere*, *service quality*, *product quality*, *pricing, convenience & accessibility* (Anselmsson et al., 2017; McGoldrick, 2002a; Virvilaite & Dailydiene, 2012).

Table 2. Composition of Previous Research's Components of Store Image

Author/Attributes	Merchandise	Service Quality	Pricing	Atmosphere & Layout	Convenience & Accessibility
Martineau (1958)		x		x	
Lindquist (1974)	x	x	x	x	x
Mazursky & Jacoby (1986)	x	x	x	x	
Anselmsson et al. (2017)	x	x	x	x	x
Baker et al. (1994)	x	x		x	
Virvilaite & Dailydiene (2012)	x	x	x	x	x
Thang & Tan (2003)	x	x		x	x
Gilmore et al. (2001)	x	x		x	x
McGoldrick (2002a)	x	x	x	x	x
Hultman et al., (2017)	x	x		x	x

Merchandise

Lindquist (1974) was the first to acknowledge the importance of merchandising in store image. According to the author, merchandise consists of *quality*, *selection and assortment*, and *styling or fashion*. It is central to the retailer's offer, often referred to as the merchandise mix. According to Thang & Tan (2003), a merchandise mix provides consumers a variety of products and services, helping them to fulfill their needs and wants. Retailers with superior

merchandising are likely to be preferred by the consumers. Hultman et al. (2017), explain that if consumers like a retailer's products, they are likely to have a positive perception of the retailer as well, making merchandise an important factor in customer satisfaction. According to Kumar & Kim (2014), merchandise is especially important to single-brand apparel retailers, as it is unique to that particular retailer and thus creating an indispensable part of the overall store image. Carrying unique merchandise is one of the key dimensions for retailers to attract customers, and its exclusivity should be leveraged to the retailers' advantage (Kumar & Kim, 2014).

Service Quality

Martineau (1958) argues that perhaps the most important factor on store image is the sales personnel. The service process is key to exceeding customer expectations. The knowledge, helpfulness and friendliness of sales personnel enhance consumers' responsiveness, assurance, and empathy during the retail experience (Samli et al., 1998; Kumar & Kim, 2014). According to McGoldrick (2002a), a good relationship between customers and the store's personnel can improve loyalty, word-of-mouth recommendations and expenditure levels. However, Lindquist (1974) argues that there is more to service than just the sales personnel. According to the author, the attribute area regards service-general, sales-clerk service and presence of self-service, and after sales activities (returns, delivery, and credit policies). According to Mazursky & Jacoby (1986), the most important cues when forming service quality are: 1) number of sales people per department 2) number of cashiers per department 3) merchandise return policy and 4) number of fitting rooms.

Pricing

Although some authors treat pricing as part of the merchandise attribute (Lindquist, 1974; Martineau, 1958), recent research has recognized pricing as an individual, significant attribute contributing to retailers' store image. Beneke et al. (2015) discusses how price, risk, quality and value perceptions relate to the propensity to purchase merchandise. Thus, perceived product value is characterized by the exchange between perceived benefits and associated expense of acquiring those benefits (Beneke et al., 2015; Snoj et al., 2004; Sweeney et al., 1999). This value reflects what the consumer stands to gain from their purchase. Furthermore, the perceived relative price (the consumer's perception of the product price compared to other brands of the same product with similar specifications) has a significant effect on consumers' willingness to purchase (Sweeney et al., 1999). Interestingly, the overall store environment is used by consumers as a frame of reference to predict prices. When purchasing goods from an upscale store, customers are prepared to pay more even before they are aware of the actual prices (Baker et al., 2002).

Atmosphere & Layout

According to Lindquist (1974), the atmosphere of a store encompasses the customer's feelings of warmth, acceptance, or ease. Kotler (1973) argues that the store atmosphere can be more influential than the product itself in customer purchasing decisions, although it often tends to be neglected by managers. The author further describes atmosphere as "the effort to design

buying environments to produce specific emotional effects in the buyer that enhance his purchase probability" (Kotler, 1973, p.50). The atmospheric attribute relates to visual (*lighting* and *color*), aural (*music* or *noise*), olfactory (*smell* and *scent*) and tactile dimensions (*softness* and *temperature*), i.e. the non-visual background conditions in the environment important in store image (Baker et al., 1994; Kotler, 1973; Kumar & Kim, 2014). According to Kotler (1973), atmosphere can have an effect on purchase behavior, by serving as an attention-creating medium, a message-creating medium and an affect-creating medium.

In addition to these ambient factors, Baker et al. (1994) emphasize the importance of functional factors of the store, such as *layout*, *comfort*, *privacy* and *architecture*. The store layout can also include the facilities offered, such as washrooms, elevators, and width of aisles (Lindquist, 1974; Thang & Tan, 2003). These functional design factors are more visual in nature. According to Hultman et al. (2017), making most of the space available by adjusting its store design to the target group can have a significant effect on impulse purchases. According to Kumar & Kim (2014), design elements within a store can affect customers' cognitive evaluations, including perceived merchandise and service quality, perceived price and perceived efficiency. Furthermore, purchasing merchandise from an upscale store, as opposed to a store with a discount design, can lead customers to perceive the same products as being of higher quality.

Convenience & Accessibility

Another important attribute of the store image is the convenience and accessibility of the store, often relating to the location in which the store is placed (Gilmore et al., 2001). Virvilaite & Dailydiene (2012), notes that when a store location is chosen, the environment for work is also chosen, in terms of *potential buyers*, *rivals* and *accessibility*. According to Hultman et al. (2017), store location is critical for attracting a retailer's target market, and, when well chosen, it can provide a long-term competitive advantage as a unique element in the marketing mix. Lindquist (1974) identifies three different elements of convenience: convenience-general, locational convenience, and parking. All else being equal, consumers are likely to prefer stores with good accessibility, including *ease of transportation*, *parking* and *short travel times* (Gilmore et al., 2001; Thang & Tan, 2003).

2.2.3 Comparison of Store Image Perceptions

There has been an important shift from the notion that management holds complete power over the branding process and is successful in conveying their envisioned brand image to the consumer market. Instead, the consumer increasingly plays a role as co-constructor of the store's image (ed. Burt et al., 2010). Previous research has emphasized discrepancies between store managers' perception of their stores and the actual consumer perspective (Gilmore et al., 2001). This incongruence can be manifested in two distinct ways: either through managers underestimating or overestimating consumer evaluations of specific store dimensions (Samli et al., 1998). Predominantly, managers tend to overestimate the appeal of the stores compared to customer evaluations (Samli et al., 1998). Such disparities often occur as retailers provide

stimuli that inadvertently hinder the development of favorable consumer perceptions, consequently driving customers towards competing stores, against the intention of the retailer (Gilmore et al., 2001). However, successful retailers generally exhibit minimal discrepancy between managerial and consumer perceptions regarding all elements of store image (Samli et al., 1998).

Consequently, it is important that retailers comprehend consumer perceptions to effectively refine their value propositions (McGoldrick, 2002a). When there is congruence between how consumers and management perceive the store environment, it increases the likelihood that consumers will select that particular retailer for their purchases (Gilmore et al., 2001). This alignment not only influences customer choice but also strengthens the overall brand image (Kremer & Viot, 2012). To achieve such alignment, it is essential to compare images, not only between retail to retail but also retail to customers. This comparison requires simultaneous assessments, ideally conducted over time (McGoldrick, 2002a). Measuring congruence between retailer perspectives and customer perceptions thereby serve as a feedback tool for refining retailers' trading strategy (Osman, 1993). This methodical approach allows retailers to align their internal perceptions with external expectations, thereby enhancing their market positioning (Gilmore et al., 2001).

2.3 Chapter Summary

The literature review explores the shift towards experience-based retail, with a particular focus on concept stores. This emerging store format is distinguished from traditional retail by offering more than just products, aiming to engage customers with innovative elements and a curated assortment. Unlike flagship and pop-up stores that focus on temporary, dramatic experiences, concept stores strive for a more sustained interaction with consumers, providing inspiration and facilitating everyday tasks through strategic design and location. By offering a unique in-store experience, concept stores, similar to pop-up and flagship stores, significantly impact brand image. However, it remains to be determined whether consumers indeed perceive this image as intended. Consequently, an in-depth exploration of brand image theory is undertaken.

Brand image is defined as "perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory" (Keller, 1993, p.3), and this image can in turn be influenced by store image. As previously discussed, there is no strong agreement regarding the critical attributes in store image analysis. However, by reviewing many previous studies on store image and identifying the mutual understanding between defined attributes, it is evident that various attributes are recurring over several studies and overarching different industries. Based on Anselmsson et al. (2017) defined attributes, the selected list of attributes for this research therefore are: *merchandise*, *service quality, pricing, atmosphere & layout* and *convenience & accessibility.* Simultaneously, attributes excluded are attributes such as *post-transaction satisfaction*, *institutional attributes*, *reputation*, *clientele*, *brand trust and parking*. It should also be noted that these proposed attributes do not exhaustively explain the store image of a

concept store, however, build a foundation for the empirical data collection and may be altered after data collection.

The traditional notion of management having complete control over brand image is shifting, with consumers increasingly co-constructing the store image. Research indicates a significant disparity between management and consumer perceptions of store image elements, with successful retailers expected to have minimal discrepancies. Simultaneously, incongruence can lead to customers choosing stores contrary to retailer's intentions. Previous research notes how store image influences the overall brand image, and aligning store image with customer expectations is therefore crucial for retailers. Comparing store images, hence, is significant in understanding and improving the value proposition to customers.

3. Methodology

The aim of this study was to explore the intentions behind the establishments of concept stores and examine the variance between consumer's perception of these stores' image and the intended brand image. To achieve our aim, it was essential to collect specific data to address our research questions. We believe that utilizing multiple sources was necessary to effectively achieve this aim. Accordingly, relevant case companies were selected, and knowledgeable representatives were chosen to align with our specific aim. Furthermore, to contrast perspectives, we believed data from the customer perspective was needed to evaluate the effectiveness of management intentions and implementations. By collecting this type of data, we sought to deepen the understanding of concept stores and their store image. The following chapter will therefore further discuss the philosophical, methodological, and method choices in depth, and provide justification for these choices to facilitate the exploration of the subject area and the collection of the right data to answer the research questions.

3.1 Research Philosophy

Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of research philosophy, as it reveals important assumptions on how the researchers think of the world. Therefore, it is essential to discuss what view on knowledge this research takes, as it determines the following sections, including research methods, research strategy, and how the results are interpreted (Saunders et al., 2019). Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) further discusses the importance of research philosophy when conducting research, as it has potential to increase creativity, and the overall quality of the research.

3.1.1 Ontology: The Nature of Reality

Ontology is the fundamental assumption the researchers make regarding the nature of reality and existence, answering the central question of what reality is and what is there to know about it (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Ontological assumptions span a spectrum, including *realism*, *internal realism*, *relativism,* and *nominalism*, all representing different perspectives on the discussion on the nature of reality. When studying the phenomenon of concept stores, we believe that there is no single truth; rather we seek to understand perceptions from different perspectives of individuals of which reality is observed. Therefore, this research adopts the relativist view, which suggests that reality is created by people, and depends on the perspectives from which it is observed (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021, p.72). We believe that the phenomena of concept stores and its store image depend on subjective perspectives, where the truth varies depending on the individual who describes it. We believe the perceptions of customers and managers will yield different insights on the perceived image of the concept store, supporting the relativism assumption that there is no single truth. Hence, the observer's point of view determines the facts, and the 'truth' can change over time and from place to place (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

3.1.2 Epistemology: The Nature of Knowledge

Epistemology is the study of knowledge. It regards questions related to the inquiry of knowledge, what knowledge is and what is accepted as truth within a subject area, essentially asking, 'How do we know what we know?' (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Based on the research questions and in alignment with the relativist ontological view, the research follows a social constructionist epistemology. We focus on what individuals experience and perceptions of the concept store in regards to its store image, and how they think and make sense of the experience related to the concept store. The social constructionist approach describes reality as neither objective nor exterior, but rather socially constructed, gaining meaning by people in their interactions with others (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Accordingly, we believe the phenomenon of concept stores is created and given meaning by people (consumers and managers) in their interactions, rather than it being an objective phenomenon as an external entity which is outside their influence or control. According to social constructionists, people try to make sense of the world in which they work and live, forming subjective interpretations of their experiences and attaching meanings to particular objects (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Due to the multiplicity and diversity of these meanings, we seek to understand the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas. The aim of this study was to explore the intentions behind the establishments of concept stores and examine the variance between consumer's perception of these stores' image and the intended brand image. Therefore, we appreciate both the differences and similarities in the statements regarding consumers' and managers' perceptions, and the social constructionism view corresponds with our research.

3.2 Research Approach

This study adopts an abductive approach. According to Dubois & Gadde (2002), the abductive approach is a "systematic combining", a process wherein theoretical framework, empirical fieldwork and case analysis evolve simultaneously. According to the authors, the preliminary analytical framework in abductive approach consists of articulated preconceptions, which develops over time according to the findings in the empirical fieldwork, analysis and interpretations (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). In this research, the choice of theoretical foundation was predetermined before initiating data collection, drawing on previous research on store format development, experiential stores, concept stores, brand image and store image. This foundation created the foundation for the problematization and framed the data collection process. The theory of store format development, concept stores, brand image and store image thereafter created the foundation for guiding our interviews with business managers and customers. Moreover, the abductive approach allows for expanding the understanding both for the theory and empirical phenomenon by allowing for exploration beyond mere testing of existing theories (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). Similarly, the initial theoretical framework used in this research was later revised after the collected data was analyzed, in order to explore the intentions behind the establishments of concept stores and examine the variance between consumer's perception of these stores' image and the intended brand image. Consequently, the theoretical foundation was adjusted post-data collection in order to assess the fit of existing

theories to the context of the current study and the phenomenon of the new store format, thus contributing to the theoretical research on the phenomena.

3.3 Research Strategy

In contrast to the quantitative research method which emphasizes the relationship between variables and testing hypotheses, the qualitative research method involves gaining in-depth understanding of a concept, context or phenomena, and how individuals behave and act in relation to it (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Our research is exploratory in nature and does not aim to make objective generalizations to the larger population. Instead, we are interested in understanding how individuals experience and interpret their social reality through the interviewees' eyes. We aim to explore the intentions behind the establishments of concept stores and examine the variance between consumer's perception of these stores' image and the intended brand image. Based on the problematization and the aim of this research, a qualitative research approach is conducted and considered appropriate. According to Bryman & Bell (2017), a qualitative research method is suitable when researchers seek rich and detailed information to interpret, understand and analyze a certain phenomenon. It is characterized by providing detailed descriptions of participants' experiences (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Through the qualitative research method, we aim to make sense and interpret the meanings that both customers and managers attribute to the concept store, thereby understanding how the intended image by managers differs from customer perceptions. Due to the purpose of this research, the qualitative research approach was chosen over a quantitative approach due to its ability to offer deeper insights and reveal robust data, allowing for an in-depth understanding of image perceptions and objectives of the concept store from the perspective of both managers and customers. Furthermore, our ontological and epistemological orientations support this choice, creating coherence throughout the research (Bryman & Bell, 2017; Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

3.4 Research Design

The aim of this study was to explore the intentions behind the establishments of concept stores and examine the variance between consumer's perception of these stores' image and the intended brand image. In connection with the qualitative research strategy, this research adopted a comparative design in the form of a multiple case study. The multiple case study aimed to analyze and compare various cases, for example people, organizations, or situations (Bryman & Bell, 2017). According to Dubois & Gadde (2002), the best way to comprehend how a phenomenon interacts with its environment is through in-depth case studies. Therefore, we aimed to compare different fashion manufacturing brands which have opened concept stores, as well as comparing and analyzing customer and management perspectives of the store image. The multiple case study allowed for an exploration of both alignments and misalignments, providing a deeper understanding of a phenomenon from different cases and perspectives (Bryman & Bell, 2017), rather than merely measuring variables and generalizing findings

(Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). The multiple case study comparison enabled us to contrast the results from different perspectives, such as organizations and individuals, assessing what findings are unique for a specific case and what were common phenomena overarching all cases. Hence, the multiple case study often promotes theoretical reflection on the results (Bryman & Bell, 2017). Furthermore, the multiple case study allowed us to establish under which conditions the theory holds in the specific context, and when it did not (Bryman & Bell, 2017). Thus, through the comparison of both different case companies and different individual perspectives, the multiple case study enables us to evaluate how the store image theory applies to the new store format of concept stores to explain the phenomenon.

3.4.1 Selected Case Companies

The aim of this study was to explore the intentions behind the establishments of concept stores and examine the variance between consumer's perception of these stores' image and the intended brand image. An industry where the concept store format has become increasingly significant is the outdoor industry. This trend is evidenced by the growing number of fashion manufacturing companies opting to open such stores. Notable examples include Norrøna, Hestra, Peak Performance, Arc'teryx, and The North Face, all of which have embraced the concept store format (Norrøna, n.d.a; Rivett, 2022; Sajonas, 2018; Sitoo, 2020; Toneguzzi, 2023). To this end, we have selected three prominent companies in the outdoor industry, operating on the Nordic market: Norrøna, Hestra and Peak Performance. Each of these companies have established concept stores, making them suitable for our research. According to Bryman (2017) the choice of cases should primarily be based on what can be learned from the study, and the researchers should therefore choose cases where their learning can be as good as possible.

According to Egan-Wyer et al. (2021), a concept store is a type of experiential retail format that does not necessarily focus on direct sales. Instead, concept stores offer a range of "softer" values such as inspiration, accessibility, and brand image. The purpose of the concept store is to serve as an accessible touchpoint in the customers journey, reducing friction and attracting new and latent customers. These stores differ from other experiential retail formats by being practical and accessible rather than dramatic or exciting. Additionally, for a store to be classified as a concept store in this industry, it must meet the following criteria: 1) aim to inspire, 2) task-oriented customers, 3) permanent duration, 4) accessible location 5) ordinary atmosphere.

Norrøna, a Norwegian brand specializing in high-performance outdoor gear, has a permanent concept store in Gothenburg, Sweden, that clearly meets the criteria of a concept store. The store is designed to reflect Norrøna's commitment to innovation and environmental consciousness. However, it differs from their other stores, particularly their flagship stores, in terms of size, product range, and dramatic design elements. However, it does offer an experience that transcends traditional retail by incorporating elements as storytelling, and lounge areas. The store is located in the city-center and provides a curated selection of products, creating a practical and easily accessible shopping experience.

Hestra, renowned for its high-quality gloves, has a permanent concept store in Stockholm, Sweden, that focuses on craftsmanship and quality, central to the brand's image. Unlike a flagship store (Fontana, 2023), this store is smaller in size and lacks dramatic design elements, featuring curated selection of products. However, it offers a unique customer experience compared to traditional stores eg. by showcasing the production process and material selection innovatively. Additionally, it is centrally located to serve as an accessible touchpoint.

Peak Performance has established several permanent concept stores, including a notable one in Copenhagen, Denmark. This store is meticulously designed to reflect the brand's identity as a leader in functional and stylish sportswear. Unlike a flagship store (Fontana, 2023), it is smaller in size, lacks dramatic design elements, and features a curated assortment of products. However, compared to traditional stores, it still provides an experience-based shopping environment (eg. large seating area) and is centrally located in the city, making it very accessible.

3.5 Participation Criterion & Sampling

Due to the fact that this research includes different individuals' perspectives, the specific criterion for participation depended on the source, which will be discussed more in depth below. All participants, however, were chosen through a non-probability sampling, i.e they were strategically selected due to their characteristics and the insights they possess (Bryman & Bell, 2017). That included individuals with relevant strategic knowledge and experience of the concept store format, individuals with first-hand operational knowledge of the concept store's components, and individuals with insights from having experienced the concept store as consumers.

3.5.1 Managers

In order to gather the primary data for this research, purposive sampling has been used for this study in order to select knowledgeable managers within the case companies. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique which intentionally selects participants based on characteristics and criteria needed to gain insights answering the research question (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). The purpose of this sampling technique is to sample participants in a strategic way, so that the sampled participants are relevant to the research question (Bryman & Bell, 2017). Hence, participants were not selected randomly.

Business managers were selected as we wanted to investigate how they manage store format development, how the concept store format is intended to mediate the brand image through the concept store's store image. These managers were chosen due to their knowledge on retail format development and insights on different aspects of the concept store, i.e. the selection was based on their conceivable ability to contribute to a theoretical understanding (Bryman & Bell, 2017). The participants' insights were later analyzed in comparison with the customers' perspectives. The managers participating in the research consist of representatives from

Norrøna, Hestra & Peak Performance, and were required to have direct experience of working with the new store format of concept stores.

Furthermore, when sampling the managers, it was important for us to investigate different levels of management. We anticipated higher levels of management to have insights on strategic perspectives of the concept stores and the intended store image, while management in-store to have more practical and operational insights on how these intentions are implemented and communicated to the consumer through the store image. Hence, we purposely sampled both higher-level management in charge of the strategic store format development and the store managers implementing the store image on ground-level directly facing customers.

The managers were interviewed about a specific concept store to enable a true comparison between management perspectives and the customers perspectives of the same store location, i.e Hestra Stockholm, Norrøna Gothenburg, and Peak Performance Copenhagen. In total, we conducted 6 management interviews with managers from the case companies Norrøna, Hestra & Peak Performance, where the interviews on average lasted for 46 minutes, and aimed at illuminating the managers' perspectives. Specific details of the managers interviewed for each concept store is illustrated below.

Table 3. Overview of Manager Interviews

Brand	Interviewee	Title	Interview format	Date	Time
Norrøna	Bård Kvamme	Retail Director	Microsoft Teams	24/4	00:59:13
Norrøna	Isabell Karlsson	Store Manager (Gothenburg)	Microsoft Teams	29/4	00:29:12
Hestra	Jeanette Arvidsson	Marketing & Communication Manager	Microsoft Teams	24/4	00:50:22
Hestra	Viktor Östrup	Retail Operations Manager (all store locations)	Microsoft Teams	26/4	00:31:26
Peak Performance	Robert Runfors	Customer Experience Manager	Microsoft Teams	25/4	01:12:01
Peak Performance	Emil Nord	Store Manager (Copenhagen)	Microsoft Teams	16/5	00:34:13

3.5.2 Customers

We believe that it is essential to assess whether the consumer perceptions of the store image align with the brand's intended image. Hence, asking for consumer perspectives and customer experiences of the store image play a major role in evaluating the execution of management's

intended image. In order to gain insights on the consumers perspective of the concept store and its image, it is important to interview consumers who have first-hand experience of the concept store.

The selection of customers was conducted through convenience sampling, selecting sample units on the bases of how easily accessible they are (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Customers who had visited the store and were available for an interview were selected. Despite the convenience sampling, we ensured that our sample consisted of individuals who had experience with the concept store format. Hence, our sampling of customers could be argued to be a combination of convenience sampling and purposive sampling, as the customers were selected conveniently but filled the criteria needed and insights required to answer our research question.

Furthermore, we were interested in capturing customers with different levels of involvement with the brand to gain multiple dimensions and perspectives of the perceived concept store image. The convenience sampling method allowed this by selecting participants both being existing customers and loyal to the brand, but also participants with less experience and pre-existing perceptions of the brand image. The customer interviewees visited the same locations as those interviewed in the management interviews, to capture the alignments, misalignments and disparities in customer and management perceptions. This approach allowed for an in-depth analysis of the concept store's image.

A total of 13 interviews were conducted with consumers, with an average interview time of 29 minutes. Specific details of the consumers interviewed for each concept store is illustrated in table 4. While we believe the interviewees were able to provide valuable insights on their perceptions on the concept store's store image, we acknowledge the complexity of research saturation in a small sample size, and that a larger sample of participants could illuminate the findings further.

Table 4. Overview of Customer Interviews

Concept Store	Interviewee	Age	Occupation	Interview format	Date	Time
Norrøna	Felicia N	25	Student	Microsoft Teams	6/5	00:25:01
Norrøna	Eva	71	Retired	Microsoft Teams	7/5	00:38:23
Norrøna	Jacob	30	Sales Representative	Microsoft Teams	6/5	00:18:35
Norrøna	Maggi	71	Retired	Microsoft Teams	13/5	00:29:57
Hestra	Alexandra	25	Coordinator	Microsoft Teams	12/5	00:19:04
Hestra	Mikael	59	Sales Executive	Microsoft Teams	11/5	00:22:29

Hestra	Melina	32	Senior Manager	Microsoft Teams	5/5	00:23:11
Hestra	Christoffer	35	Manager	Microsoft Teams	15/5	00:23:07
Hestra	Felicia B	34	Consultant	Microsoft Teams	7/5	00:22:59
Peak Performance	Ida	24	Student	Microsoft Teams	12/5	00:25:46
Peak Performance	Gustav	26	Student	Microsoft Teams	12/5	00:49:42
Peak Performance	Johanne	25	Student	Microsoft Teams	12/5	00:39:48
Peak Performance	Sam	27	Student	Microsoft Teams	13/5	00:51:25

3.6 Data Collection Method

The data collection process is a crucial component of this research as it forms the foundation upon which the study's findings, analysis and conclusions are built. This section outlines the approach undertaken to gather the necessary data in order to address the research question effectively. This research includes both primary and secondary data that has been collected for the purpose of answering the research question. The primary data regards new information from data collected in order to provide answers to the research at hand (Bryman & Bell, 2017). The primary data hence includes the 19 interviews with both managers and customers along with complementary data sources providing company information. The secondary data, however, involves research conducted for the purpose of another research and which is already available (Bryman & Bell, 2017). This includes previous academic research outlined in chapter 2. While the secondary data is neither comprehensive nor objective, secondary data remains relevant for the current research by its capacity to provide a historical perspective, helping shape research questions and aim, and to enrich and supplement the primary data (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

3.6.1 Semi-Structured Interview Method

Given our interest in exploring the phenomenon of concept stores and understanding the perspectives of both manager and consumer, rather than merely measuring tendencies, we deemed the interview method as a sufficient data collection method in order to answer the research questions. According to Easterby-Smith et al. (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021), interviews are structured discussions centered on questions central for the selected subject area, and allows the researcher to obtain comprehensive details about a phenomenon and its context. The method hence captured rich and detailed qualitative data which might not have been fully captured through quantitative methods alone. Furthermore, we believe the interview method produced

further in-depth and rich data compared to focus groups. Hence, the interview method was chosen for this study.

The interview method stood as a central research technique in exploring the store image perceptions, encompassing both manager and consumer perspectives within the context of concept stores. In this research, semi-structured interviews were employed to delve into the multifaceted dimensions of store image perceptions, capturing nuanced viewpoints of both managers and consumers. Semi-structured interviews further provides a flexible yet focused approach, allowing for the exploration of key themes, and is relevant in multiple case studies, where a certain amount of structure is needed to enable a comparison and contrasting between the different cases (Bryman & Bell, 2017).

The semi-structured interview method allowed for a comparison of the cases, while also enabling participants to freely discuss and give in-depth statements of their experiences and perspectives of the concept store phenomenon. By engaging directly with managers and consumers, this method facilitated the clarification of factors shaping store image perceptions and shedded light on the intricate interplay between organizational strategies and consumer perceptions. Thus, through semi-structured interviews, we endeavored to contribute to a deeper understanding of the objectives of concept stores and understanding the dynamics shaping store image perceptions in the context of concept stores.

3.6.2 Interview Implementation

The method of contact depended on the interviewee group. The higher-level managers were contacted through email, and the store managers were contacted through phone calls to the store locations. Thereafter, we sent out official information letters and requests for participation in the research study via e-mail (Appendix A). Furthermore, the consumers were contacted through various communication platforms. Once agreeing on an interview, a time for the interview was established. Due to a large geographical distance between the researchers and the interviewees, interviews were conducted through Microsoft Teams, to save time and money on trips and to accommodate all parties' time schedules, and therefore making it a convenient alternative to face-to-face interviews. Additionally, due to the geographical diversity of the three concept stores, Microsoft Teams enabled us to interview a variety of customers located in proximity to the different concept stores. Furthermore, the benefit of Microsoft Teams interviews in comparison to phone interviews is that the visual element is still present (Bryman & Bell, 2017).

To ensure that the material collected from the interviews correlated with our purpose and minimize the risk of missing out on relevant information, the interviews were prepared through interview guides (Appendix B, Appendix C and Appendix D). The interview guides were created on the basis of the literature review on store format development and the selected store image attributes established relevant for this research through the theories presented in chapter 2. These guided the themes discussed in the interviews. However, the interviews also allowed

the interviewees to reflect freely on several occasions. Consequently, the interviews followed the direction of the interviewee's answers and were adapted to address important questions that arose during the interviews. This approach facilitated the development of new insights to advance the current field of research, rather than merely accepting or falsifying existing theories.

Furthermore, the questions were slightly altered depending on the interview group. During the interviews with higher-level managers, emphasis in the interviews regarded the store format development and concept store image intentions to capture their strategic expertise. However, great focus was given to the concept store image attributes throughout the store-manager interviews to capture their operational knowledge. Similarly, the customer interviews were altered to understand the perceived store image, and hence, emphasis was placed on the store visit and the concept store attributes experienced during their concept store visit. It has been of great importance for us to formulate clear and objective questions to minimize bias or pointed questions. Hence, the interview questions have been discussed with our supervisor to ensure suitability for the research, and to enable potential rephrasing and including additional but essential questions.

We initiated all interviews with a short introduction of the subject and the interview's purpose, followed by introductory questions related to the interviewee's background. This approach ensured that our participation criteria were met and aimed to build a relationship of trust to achieve an open exchange of information. Open-ended questions from the interview guides were varied with follow-up questions, probing questions, and clarifying questions (Bryman & Bell, 2017). The interviews were conducted in the native language that best suited the participant in order to capture all nuances of their communication. Participation tends to be more relaxed in the language in which the interviewee is most comfortable. Speaking in that language allows participants to express themselves fully, resulting in more detailed and elaborated answers (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). During the interviews, one researcher asked the questions whereas the other registered their body language and asked relevant follow-up questions and clarifying questions. The interviews ended with a concluding question of "is there any information you would like to share with us that you have not already or is there anything we should have asked about but did not?" in order to diminish the risk of missing any insights or new perspectives from the participants.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed so that we could later retrieve detailed information during data analysis and better familiarize ourselves with the interviewee's responses. This was enabled by utilizing Microsoft Teams transcribing and recording tools. Besides the tool being time saving, it also enabled correct transcribing of the interviewees' responses. However, the transcripts were revised in order to ensure that the interviews were transcribed correctly. Furthermore, by transcribing the interviews, the researchers can respond to allegations regarding subjective assessments of the data (Bryman & Bell, 2017).

3.7 Data Analysis

In our data analysis, we followed the principles and methods outlined by Rennstam & Wästerfors (2018) to ensure a systematic and well-founded analytical process. We began by addressing *the problem of chaos*, which relates to the inevitable unorganized and disordered characteristics of qualitative data (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). To counteract this issue, we employed a systematic approach, guided by our research questions and theoretical frameworks. First, we engaged with the material to understand its details and distinguish relationships across different themes. We then conducted initial coding, marking parts of the data that appeared relevant to our research questions. For our first research question, which aimed to understand the intentions behind the establishment of concept stores, we created the category "*intentions behind concept stores*". This involved sorting the data based on recurring motivations identified in the material. For our second research question, which examined the variance between consumers' perceptions of store image and the intended brand image, we used the theoretical framework of store image, focusing on its key attributes: *merchandise, service quality, pricing, atmosphere & layout* and *convenience & accessibility*.

To organize the data systematically, we combined thematic sorting with structural sorting. This dual approach allowed us to capture both the *"what"* and the *"how"* of the data, leading to a richer and more nuanced understanding of the qualitative material. Thematic sorting involved categorizing the data on recurring themes (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). For instance, we identified words like "*tables*", "*minimalist*" and "*sofa*", which were categorized into the attribute *atmosphere & layout* as they reflected elements of the store's environment. Structural sorting focused on how these themes were discussed within the data, noting that conversations about design often followed by comments on satisfaction.

Furthermore, as the analysis progressed, additional categories emerged. Firstly, we identified categories that were not directly related to the initial research questions or theoretical categories. These included broader categories such as *background information, identity & associations, definition,* and *perception & alignment.* Secondly, we identified four subcategories within the main category "*intentions behind concept stores*", including *brand building & control, strategic planning & financial motivations, consumer trends & brand adaptation* and *support for online sales.* Thirdly, we found results related to the category's atmosphere and service quality that did not fit well within the existing theory. Therefore, we renamed these attributes to *"Atmosphere & Layout: A New Perspective"* and *"Service Quality: A New Perspective"* to better reflect the new insights.

To tackle *the problem of representation*, which is the challenge of being unable to reproduce all the material, we utilized both categorical and illustrative reduction. Categorical reduction refers to the exclusion of certain categories identified in the material to create a more manageable and theoretically set of data (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). To answer our research questions effectively, we prioritize certain categories based on our own knowledge and experience of the subject. Consequently, we excluded the categories of *background*

information, *identity & associations, definition, perception & alignment*. The remaining categories were structured to address our research questions. For the first research question, the main category is: *intentions behind concept stores* with subcategories including *brand building & control, strategic planning & financial motivations, consumer trends & brand adaptation* and *support for online sales*. For the second research question, the main category is *store image* with subcategories including *merchandise, service quality, pricing, atmosphere & layout* and *convenience & accessibility*. Additionally, after categorical reduction, we applied illustrative reduction to further refine the data. This process involved identifying specific excerpts that demonstrated key processes or features within the selected categories (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018) For example, within the subcategory service quality, we emphasized decisive processes including staff training programs. One excerpt described training manuals to ensure consistent and high-quality service across all stores, an important component of the overall service perception.

To address *the problem of authority,* which concerns the credibility and legitimacy of the researchers' interpretations, we utilized argumentation (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). A crucial aspect of our analytic work was theorizing, which involved constructing arguments based on empirical facts. This process commenced with the collection of data through interviews with managers and customers to ensure the resulting theory was grounded in reality. Through reflection and analysis, we then identified patterns and relationships within the data, to understand the underlying mechanism of the phenomenon of concept stores. For instance, we found that companies often open concept stores to improve brand building and gain control. Additionally, we created logical and coherent explanations based on our findings using existing literature on experiential stores and store image theories. Furthermore, maintaining a critical perspective throughout this process was important. This included questioning our own interpretations, alternative explanations, and revising our conclusion in light of new information. Ultimately, theorizing contributed to more knowledge on the concept store format, contributing to both existing and future research (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018).

3.8 Data Quality

Due to the connotation with quantitative research and measurement with the terms validity and reliability, the terms create limited application in qualitative studies (Bryman & Bell, 2017). Instead, the data quality of qualitative studies should be evaluated and assessed according to alternative criteria: trustworthiness (including *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability* and *conformability*) and authenticity (including *fairness*, *ontological authenticity*, *educative authenticity*, *catalytic authenticity* and *tactical authenticity*).

3.8.1 Trustworthiness

3.8.1.1 Credibility
Credibility of qualitative research is an indication of whether the study's findings are correct and accurate. To some extent, it depends on the credibility of the researchers themselves as well

as their research methods (Bryman & Bell, 2017). Our interviews were held in the mother tongue of the participants, i.e. Swedish, Norwegian and Danish. Hence, the research is subject to the possibility of translation issues, where meanings and nuances are lost in the translation between languages important to convey a message sufficiently. This could affect the credibility of our work. To address this issue, we ensured that the translation of the interviews closely corresponded to the original statements to the best of our abilities. Furthermore, respondent validation was utilized, the process whereby the researcher provides research participants with an account of their findings (Bryman & Bell, 2017). The goal of such a process is to seek confirmation that the findings and interpretations are aligned with the views of the participants.

Additionally, triangulation has been used in order to further validate the results through several sources of information. Bryman & Bell (2017) describes triangulation as the approach that uses multiple observers, theoretical perspectives, data sources and methodologies to validate the results. As two researchers, we consistently acted as multiple observers. Additionally, we supported our primary data from the interviews with secondary data from additional online sources to reinforce the statements made in the interviews.

3.8.1.2 Transferability

The nature of qualitative work, the relatively small, non-representative sample, and the context-specific research, limits the generalizability of the research. Instead, qualitative research focuses on its transferability. Transferability concerns whether the research enables the reader to evaluate whether the results can be applied to similar cases (Bryman & Bell, 2017). To enhance the transferability of this research, we have provided a thick description of the research context, including sampling strategies and contextual information. This transparent overview allows for the reader to evaluate whether the results are transferable to other contexts. Furthermore, we have included rich quotes from the interviews throughout the analysis for the reader to interpret the data. By including three different cases, we argue for an enhanced transferability and an increased understanding of the concept store in the context of the fashion manufacturing brands.

3.8.1.3 Dependability

The concept of dependability is used to provide consistency of the research process and findings. This refers to the stability and consistency of research which indicates the degree to which the findings are trustworthy and replicable (Bryman & Bell, 2017). In order to enhance the dependability of this research, we have kept complete records throughout the methods section, continuously and extensively elaborating on the process of our research. Furthermore, we have documented the selection of research participants, interview transcripts, interpretations, and other documentation to demonstrate contextual information and show that proper procedures have been followed. Thus, all steps of the research process have been clearly presented to the reader. Furthermore, the interview guide is included in the appendix in order to further enhance the dependability.

3.8.1.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is a key criteria for ensuring that the research is shaped by the data collected and the interpretations made by the researchers, rather than by the researchers' biases, preconceptions or theoretical preferences (Bryman & Bell, 2017). We are aware of the issue of researchers' bias and have aimed at minimizing it throughout the research process by being mindful of objectivity and to the best of our abilities acted in good faith.

3.8.2 Authenticity

3.8.2.1 Fairness

Throughout this study, we have tried to portray a sufficiently fair picture of the interviewee's opinions and perceptions (Bryman & Bell, 2017). In order to enhance the probability of authenticity, we have included several different perspectives. By adding different levels of management, the statements have either confirmed or refuted each other, ensuring that the results have been controlled for a fair representation. Furthermore, the picture is further justified by investigating the perceptions of customers to ensure that the comprehensive understanding and opinion regarding concept stores and its store image is portrayed fairly.

3.8.2.2 Ontological Authenticity

Ontological authenticity regards whether the research enables the participants a better understanding of their social situation and context (Bryman & Bell, 2017). The aim of this study was to explore the intentions behind the establishments of concept stores and examine the variance between consumer's perception of these stores' image and the intended brand image. The results of this study are expected to be beneficial for the case companies investigated by providing a better understanding of the phenomenon and enhancing their performance through their concept stores.

3.8.2.3 Educative Authenticity

Furthermore, educative authenticity describes how the research has contributed to participants' understanding of how other people experience things (Bryman & Bell, 2017). Through the inclusion of customer perceptions of the store image, giving management participants increased understanding of how their intended image is conveyed and interpreted. Hence, we believe the research contributes to educative authenticity.

3.8.2.4 Catalytic Authenticity

Catalytic authenticity regards how the research has enabled the participants to change their situation (Bryman & Bell, 2017). The research examines store format development of three different case companies, providing them with insights on how they can strategically use the concept store format and assist in potential future store format expansions. Additionally, by comparing these companies' intentions with their consumer's perceptions, the results can provide managers with confirmation that their brand building is successful (i.e. their consumer's

perceptions correlate with their intended store image) or indicate areas where they should improve their store image to better align with customers' expectations.

3.8.2.5 Tactical Authenticity
Finally, the tactical authenticity involves the question of whether the research has enabled the participants to take necessary action (Bryman & Bell, 2017). Due to the lack of research on concept stores, the current research aims to explore the intentions behind the establishments of concept stores and examine the variance between consumer's perception of these stores' image and the intended brand image. This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of concept stores and store images, which can be used as foundation for managers in their decision-making processes.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

When conducting qualitative research with human participants, it is essential to protect their rights in order to make sure they feel comfortable enough to provide their honest opinions during the data collection process (Nii Laryeafio & Ogbewe, 2023). We gave the interviewees in this study the choice to remain anonymous. However, none of the participants opted for anonymity. We guarantee confidentiality of the information we submit in accordance with the University's GDPR guidelines. Hence, the research will not permit any third-party access to the statements made by the participants. Both confidentiality and anonymity are frequently seen as essential components of trustworthy and valid research. This is because they offer a more secure setting in which participants can speak freely, allowing the researcher to obtain responses that are as true to the interviewees' statements as possible (Bryman & Bell, 2017). It is also crucial to remember that participants have freely consented to take part in the study and can withdraw at any moment.

3.10 Chapter Summary

The current research aims to explore the intentions behind the establishments of concept stores and examine the variance between consumer's perception of these stores' image and the intended brand image. In doing so, the research takes a *relativist* ontological view, along with the *social constructionist* standpoint regarding what reality is and what constitutes knowledge. Furthermore, the research approach is *abductive*, where the research alternates between empiricism and theory to draw conclusions about the studied phenomenon. The research follows a *qualitative research method* in order to gain in-depth insights of the concept store and its image from different perspectives and adopts a comparative design through a *multiple-case study*. The selected case included companies within the outdoor industry which have established concept stores within the Nordic countries, i.e. Norrøna, Hestra and Peak Performance.

The managers were purposely sampled based on their knowledge and expertise within the field, while the consumers were conveniently selected by having visited the store and being available

for the time of the interviews. Semi-structured interviews were held with managers from the selected case companies, in order to gain insights on the intentions behind the concept store and its store image. Furthermore, in order to fully understand the performance of the management, consumer perspectives were investigated through semi-structured interviews. In total, we interviewed 6 managers and 13 consumers in order to answer our research questions. The data analysis was conducted by applying the principles and methods outlined by Rennstam & Wästerfors (2018): *sorting, reducing* and *arguing.* Lastly, we have discussed the quality dimensions of trustworthiness and authenticity.

4. Results

This chapter presents the comprehensive findings derived from the empirical investigation. The results are divided into three parts; each part representing each individual case (Norrøna, Hestra and Peak Performance). The brands' concept store initiatives, managements' intended store image and customer actual store image perceptions are presented for each case.

4.1 Norrøna

Established in 1929 by Jørgen Jørgensen, Norrøna is a family-owned company dedicated to providing advanced solutions and products designed to offer premium, weatherproof outdoor gear. Guided by their design principle, "Loaded Minimalism" they pursue technical and functional perfection with sleek design. Norrøna's mission is for its first-class and functional products to continue being used and to inspire with integrity, innovation, and technical functionality. Their vision "welcome to nature" is conveyed through their mission to craft the world's foremost outdoor products and offer unique adventures through responsible business practices. Norrøna has several concept stores located in countries such as Sweden, Norway, and USA (Norrøna, n.d.b).

4.1.1 Concept Store Initiatives

4.1.1.1 Brand building & Control

Norrøna asserts that the concept stores serve as platforms where they can directly convey their values, history, and product range to the customer. By offering a unique customer brand experience, they can strengthen the brand's identity.

> "But what we want to do is essentially to tell stories, both the story in a way backward, but also the story forward in relation to sustainability and all sustainability goals, and to use the store and the measurements to be able to convey the brand Norrøna." (Bård)

Furthermore, having concept stores helps them gain control over how their brand is presented and perceived by customers, unlike with external retailers. This allows them to ensure that the store interior, product offerings, and customer interactions align with the company's brand identity and values, thus facilitating a consistent and effective communication of the brand.

> "Back in 2005, Norrøna was indeed 100% reliant on wholesale distribution, meaning all of Norrøna's products were sold in Norway. [...] And the story is essentially that Jørgen, who is our owner and boss, sat with a feeling that, you know, we're not showcasing the brand in a good enough manner. We're showing parts of the story, parts of the product portfolio, but it's very fragmented." (Bård)

4.1.1.2 Strategic Planning & Financial Motivations

Norrøna agrees that the concept store serves as a profitable sales channel in the long term, contributing to the company's financial objectives. Furthermore, concept stores serve as a strategic tool to strengthen or rejuvenate its market presence as well as differentiate itself within the market. By establishing concept stores in new markets, Norrøna creates strategic presence while simultaneously increasing brand awareness. This is crucial for long-term growth and expansion of market share.

> "If we are to establish a position in the USA, [...] then we are somewhat dependent on building our own retail presence in the USA." (Bård)

Norrøna's decision to open concept stores is driven by a strategic approach, where careful consideration is given to both geographical location and economic viability. This ensures not only a strong presence in key markets but also an optimized allocation of resources, maximizing both visibility and profitability. Additionally, Norrøna commonly chooses to establish concept stores as a subsequent step in their strategic framework. Initially, flagship stores serve as pionering endeavor to penetrate the market, followed by expansion with additional units in the form of concept stores.

> "For instance, if you look at the USA, we've just opened in Boston last week; Friday of the previous week. And there we already have a flagship store in New York, which has sort of, in a way, paved the way. I mean, you could say it's been the one that has paved the way. So, it's sort of entered the market and paved the way and created visibility, and then we're kind of following up with several concept stores, if you can put it that way." (Bård)

4.1.2 Concept Stores & Store Image

4.1.2.1 Merchandise

Manager perspective

Norrøna's managers describe their products as high-performance outdoor clothing (eg. ski clothes) and equipment, emphasizing sustainability and functionality, and a rich heritage. Their products are designed to withstand extreme conditions and are renowned for their aesthetic and advanced technology. By using high-quality materials and extreme testing, they aim to ensure reliability and durability.

> "We make the best products that exist, and it's not about price. It's about you having the best products, and that's why you buy Norrøna." (Bård)

Within Norrøna, there are various collections ranging from more common and commercially accessible options to exclusive, specialized products. However, in their concept store, showcasing the entirety of these collections poses challenges due to space limitations. Therefore, there's a need for prioritization, emphasizing the most commercially viable collections to optimize space utilization. Unlike flagship stores with ample space, concept

stores require strategic curation to ensure effective product presentation. However, their initial objective is always to present the entire collection.

> "You could say that concept stores have, in a way, the most important of the collections, commercially speaking; typically heavy on products like Falketind, these commercial productions. And then, in a way, the flagship store would have the extra collections, i.e. more of the special items. So, what you have in concept stores is basically the majority of it." (Bård)

Customer perspective

Norrøna's customers describe the products as high-quality merchandise tailored for skiing and outdoor activities. The products are praised for their quality construction, suitable materials, and attention to detail, indicating a commitment to functionality and performance. Additionally, they appreciate the longevity and timeless design of Norrøna's apparel, with items lasting up to 15 years, making them a worthwhile investment.

> "But when it comes to skiing, people who buy their clothes can keep them for 15 years without any problem. And that also has a lot to do with the design of the clothes. There's really no difference from year to year. There might be some detail like this or that on the zipper, but otherwise, the structure of both the jacket and pants remains the same even 10 years back. Which means that, yes, it's expensive to buy a jacket that can cost seven thousand bucks, but you can have it for 10 years." (Jacob)

Furthermore, the customers are pleased that the selection of collection offerings meet their expectations. However, a prevalent perception exists regarding the limited availability of each individual garment.

> "No, I think it's the whole collection. But, you know, not everything hangs like '20 jackets in a row and then 20 pants in a row' but more like 'There's a jacket hanging there, pants hanging there, and a vest hanging there in yellow', for example. Then there's the same one in red. So, it's not as if you were to go into a Stadium, for example." (Felicia N)

4.1.2.2 Service Quality: A New Perspective

Manager perspective

According to the managers, Norrøna places great emphasis on providing high-quality products and a service experience that extends far beyond the sale. The staff is well-trained and follows the North News guidelines, a manual used by their personnel to ensure consistent and high-quality service across all stores. Additionally, they are equipped to articulate the advantages of the materials and product quality, thus justifying their price points, and inform customers that if the collections are not available in-store, they have the option to purchase them online or have them delivered to the store.

> "Basically, we have a sort of bible called 'The North News Selling', and it's essentially our retail culture, and it's initially the same in all stores. The way we work. But there are, of course, localized adjustments." (Bård)

> "Yes, but what I mean is, we use a lot of recycled, synthetic materials. And that's also something that makes the price higher. It's something that we try to inform everyone about." (Isabell)

Furthermore, they adapt the service and sales strategies to a local level, ensuring that the personnel are knowledgeable in various activities. This enables them to provide customers with a personal and engaging experience based on real expertise.

> "But then there are, of course, localized adjustments. So, if you look, for example, at Åre, it's obviously important to have. If you're going to have credibility in the region, then you have to have people who can ski. So what we look at, even with concept stores, is that we try to match up in a way so that we have good representatives for various activities in the stores." (Bård)

Moreover, they emphasize the importance of long-term quality and sustainability, striving for customers to have their products for many years. They provide both simpler in-store repair and more complex ones, with the latter being outsourced to Stockholm where facilities are available to accommodate such needs. Additionally, Norrøna offers an extended warranty policy, surpassing competitors by offering a standard 5-year guarantee, extendable up to 7 years for loyalty members. Even after the warranty period is over, they continue to provide assistance, offering services like zipper replacements.

> "Yes, but we have as standard a 5-year warranty and if you're a loyalty member you have 7 years and that's something I need to communicate to all customers so that they know. Because everyone gets very surprised because it's a long time. It's quite unique. I don't think I know any other brand that has such a long warranty actually." (Isabell)

Norrøna enhances the shopping experience by offering complimentary coffee to customers in their stores. This gesture creates a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere, encouraging customers to linger, engage with products, and interact with staff at their own pace.

> "We have a very nice launch area right outside the fitting rooms where we have a coffee machine, where we treat customers to coffee." (Isabell)

Customer perspective

The personnel at Norrøna are described as well-educated and knowledgeable about the products. They are prompt in offering assistance and appear highly committed to fulfilling the customers' needs. For example, they take the time to explain the features and benefits of various products, as well as the captivating stories about the brand's history and commitment to sustainability.

> "But for example when we were on our way out. That's when we saw this, the wall with their trophies, a wall, you might say. And then we asked him "what is this thing?" We were on our

way out, and so we weren't even buyers but still, he took the time to tell us the story behind why they were hanging there and what they had gone through, these garments. Which made me feel as if they were very service minded. " (Jacob)

Despite no customers being offered coffee, many noted the presence of a coffee machine in the store, which still left a positive impression.

"There was a coffee machine, there were pictures, there was some sort of armchair. So I think that if you're like 'yeah, I'm going to try this one and maybe buy it,' then I think the staff is very helpful like… You can sit there and have a coffee and chat with them." (Felicia N)

4.1.2.3 Pricing

Manager perspective

Norrøna emphasizes its elevated price point while explaining that it mirrors the exceptional quality of their merchandise. This high standard of quality is attained through a meticulous and lengthy product development process, typically spanning 3-4 years from concept to finished product. The process involves prototypes, extensive testing, and feedback, ensuring that the products meet high standards and fulfill customer expectations. Hence, customers should overlook the high price point and perceive it as an investment, as it is anticipated to provide long-term pleasure and functionality.

"The prices of the products actually become a consequence of the whole process in a way that it's a. It's quite a long process, and that process ensures in a way that you get the right products, the right qualities in a way." (Bård)

"We are not a cheap brand. But we really try to convey this feeling to the customer that you get much more than just a garment." (Isabell)

Furthermore, Norrøna is positioned as a premium brand, adhering to full-price strategies without engaging in promotional activities. However, Norrøna offers their Norrøna RE initiative, advocating a more responsible, circular business practice. The products offered are either pre-owned items that have been damaged or products that have acquired flaws during production and remained unused. These items are then introduced to the market at a lower price point.

"And then we also have a range that essentially are products that have been returned by customers, and the customers have received a replacement product, so the products have been repaired a little bit at the factory. And then they are sold to customers in a way at a lower price; what we call RE. Basically just to ensure that all products have the longest possible lifespan." (Bård)

Customer perspective

All of Norrøna's customers expressed awareness of the company's high pricing. Furthermore, the customers stated that the high price point is justified by the longevity and durability of the products, distinguishing them from cheaper alternatives.

> "The quality is so high. I mean, you can probably keep the clothes for many years because I imagine they don't wear out that much. And if you've bought something and paid a lot of money for it, you might want to hold on to it even longer, right?" (Maggi)

All customers observed that there were original prices in the store. However, one discovered clothing at half price without any accompanying information, which led to confusion.

> "I found a rack where there were some base layers and other items hanging. And it turns out, they were half price because they were going to their outlet, but there was no sign about this, which I thought was a bit strange because I think this is something they might want to get rid of so they don't have to send it to the outlet. But there was no information about it until I contacted one of the salespeople there who informed me about it." (Eva)

4.1.2.4 Atmosphere & Layout: A New Perspective

Manager perspective

Norrøna's managers describe the concept store as moderately sized, covering an area of 175 square meters, with a square shape in minimalist design. The layout is strategically planned to cultivate an environment that reflects the brand's identity. Through meticulous design choices, the layout aims to communicate the message regarding their products, and the company's heritage, which is built on the same values since 1991. This is achieved by focusing on storytelling and meticulous product display, while avoiding excessive emphasis on store fixtures.

Figure 1. Norrøna's Concept Store in Gothenburg, Sweden (Visplay, n.d.)

By integrating these elements, Norrøna wants to create experiences that encourage the customers to stay longer in the store, increasing the likelihood that they will learn about the brand and build trustworthiness. For instance, there is a unique cashier counter resembling a kitchen island, with two iPads integrated into it, facilitating easy interaction with customers. This setup fosters close contact with customers, creating a hospitable atmosphere and an engaging store experience.

> "We have a rather unique cashier counter, I would say, which is essentially like a kitchen island. There's nothing on the front or back of it; it's just completely square. And there are 2 iPads on it, so it's... well, a stylish touch [...]. This makes it incredibly nice because you get such close contact with the customers." (Isabell)

Additionally, Norrøna aims to create a comfortable and relaxing atmosphere that not only fosters shopping but becomes a place where customers can unwind and socialize. Hence, there is a well-designed lounge area outside the fitting rooms, complete with a coffee machine and magazines.

> You should enter Norrøna's stores and feel like you would like to be here; it's a comfortable environment. You get a cup of coffee, there's no stress, there's plenty of time. The staff is friendly, so there's a good atmosphere in the store." (Bård)

Furthermore, Norrøna employs storytelling through visual elements to narrate the company's long history. The stores include, among other features, a "history wall" that recounts the company's journey and significant milestones, providing customers with an understanding of the brand's heritage.

"We have [...] a History Wall from 1929, when we were founded, to today, showcasing important milestones over the years. Also, when you enter the store, one of our GORE-TEX jackets, launched in the seventies, is displayed. It's a way of saying, 'This is how it looked then, and this is how it looks now,' allowing you to follow its entire evolution." (Isabell)

Customer perspective

The customers describe the atmosphere at Norrøna's store as welcoming, calm, inspiring, and recognizable. The layout features a minimalistic design with wooden and nature-inspired elements that evoke a sense of being outdoors.

"No, but a very particular feeling, minimalistic. So that's how I would describe it when you walk in there. Like, there were a few armchairs and such by the fitting rooms, and they were very sheepskin-like and, well, very wilderness-like." (Felicia N)

The store's layout felt carefully crafted to facilitate easy navigation and encourage exploration for customers. The store felt tidy and the colorful products well-organized, creating a cohesive visual aesthetic which contributed to a positive atmosphere. Furthermore, the deliberate choice to display fewer products and the lack of discount promotions created a sense of exclusivity and high quality, enhancing the perception of well-designed and advanced products. However, while the product display offered a positive experience for most customers, one customer encountered challenges with clutter, which made it difficult to navigate and engage with the products effectively.

"I haven't checked the price, but still, I get a feeling that it's more expensive just because when you're inside the store and feel the vibe. And just like I said before, there aren't so many clothes. It probably also has to do with not seeing it very often in one's surroundings. I think that also contributes to it being perceived as more expensive." (Felicia N)

"Okay, then I become confused. [...] When I enter, I don't know where to start at all. What should I begin looking at? For example, I'm searching for a ski jacket and there are a lot of signs with different names that I don't recognize at all. And it becomes quite a big job to find what I'm looking for, so then I have to preferably talk to someone in the staff. I think I have difficulty with that, myself." (Eva)

While some customers questioned the purpose of amenities like the sofa and why people were seated there, others appreciated smaller details that added to a positive customer experience, such as comfortable fitting rooms and historical imagery and product stories on the walls. These elements imbued the space with a sense of heritage and exclusivity, contributing to a curated shopping experience.

"Then there were these historical images. In some way, they give you a feeling that you're buying something more than just a regular jacket; that there's something much deeper behind it. They're right there on the wall as soon as you enter, and also on the walls where you try on your clothes. And I even think there's something there, like with every collection, that also captures your interest." (Felicia N)

Nonetheless, Norrøna's customers described how their positive interactions with the store staff significantly contributed to the welcoming atmosphere. Additionally, one observed that the staff's attire was tailored to evoke a wilderness ambiance, which gave customers the impression of expertise and endorsement of the clothing.

> "They are also dressed, if I remember correctly, to fit into this wilderness feeling. They were wearing such outdoor pants, or what you say, those kinds. ...type. And then some cool sweater with a special cap. Yes, a special cap. Well, I still get the impression that they are knowledgeable then. I don't know. It doesn't really have any connection in that way, but I still get the experience that they know the clothes and advocate for them." (Felicia N)

4.1.2.5 Convenience & Accessibility

Manager perspective

According to Norrønas managers, a concept store aims to be commercial entities. Therefore, they choose to place its concept stores in locations with high foot traffic and strong commercial activity. This includes large shopping centers and major shopping streets, where the brand can benefit from increased exposure and accessibility to loyal and potential customers.

> "Yes, that's what I think I touched on earlier, but specifically for the concept store, its commercial units, and that's the most important thing. So you could say that we typically look for, well typically in Norway, the largest shopping centers." (Bård)

Furthermore, Norrøna's managers emphasize the pivotal role of prime locations in achieving success. Comparing their previous store, which they deemed less significant and hard to locate, to their new establishment on Kungsgatan, they've observed a significant surge in foot traffic. This is particularly evident as Kungsgatan is frequented by both locals and tourists. This heightened exposure has directly translated into a notable increase in sales.

> "There's been a difference in foot traffic in the store since we opened. It's more accessible to, well, tourists, because it's one of the busiest streets. So I would say that, yes, but this is very accessible." (Isabell)

Customer perspective

Norrøna's customers describe the store's location as ideal. It is located on the pedestrian street in the city center where a large number of people are passing, accessible for its customers and close to other well-known brands in the fashion industry.

> "It's right in the heart of Gothenburg on Kungsgatan, so it's a perfect location, I imagine; but probably expensive, I would think. But it's one of the best locations they can get in Gothenburg." (Maggi)

However, despite everyone finding the store easy to locate, opinions were divided regarding the exterior design. While some found the storefront enticing, others perceived the exterior as unassuming, lacking a wow-factor.

> "Yeah, but I can say this; maybe something should be done... There's a large window space, you know. There are big windows. I don't know what you could do, but I think many people miss it. It's not like a 'Wow, I have to go in and look', it's almost too discreet. Maybe they should use these more to create that 'wow, I want to go in' feeling." (Eva)

4.2 Hestra

Hestra is a world-renowned brand in glove manufacturing, established by Martin Magnusson & Co in 1936. Run by the third and fourth generation, all products are designed and developed in Hestra, Sweden and manufactured in their own factories. For different business divisions - sport, dress & professional - Hestra develops high quality gloves that ensure warmth, protection, and fingertip sensitivity in different environments. Their values emphasize longevity, family tradition and forward-thinking business. Hestra currently has four concept stores across Sweden (Gothenburg and Stockholm), Norway and Denmark, showcasing their commitment to premium gloves for enduring performance (Hestra Gloves, 2023).

4.2.1 Concept Store initiatives

4.2.1.1 Brand Building & Control
According to Hestras manager, concept stores offer a distinctive and unique experience for customers. By providing an environment where only Hestra's products are available, the company can cultivate an atmosphere that reinforces their brand identity and sets them apart from other players in the market. Furthermore, by having their own retail channel, Hestra gains full control over their brand presentation, ensuring it aligns precisely with their vision and values. This contrasts with external retailers, where they have less influence over branding.

> "The opportunities lie in being able to control our own channel. We have a lot of retailers as well, and we can't control them in the same way. At all. So we can present the brand exactly the way we want." (Jeanette)

4.2.1.2 Strategic Planning & Financial Motivations
Hestra views concept stores as profitable ventures in the long term. While they prioritize brand-building and creating unique retail experiences, their ultimate goal is to ensure sustained profitability over time. Furthermore, concept stores serve as a storefront and a means of market presence, enhancing visibility and brand-building efforts. This underscores the strategic importance of concept stores as not just sales channels but also as platforms for enhancing brand visibility and reputation in the market.

"There are two parts to it. One is the brand-building aspect, which naturally influences sales in the long term. But of course, we also want them to be profitable. Within a reasonable time frame, so to speak." (Jeanette)

Moreover, Hestra opts to open concept stores due to their current resource limitations, preventing them from establishing a flagship store at present. Consequently, they view concept stores as an intermediary step to maintain their market presence and deliver a consistent brand experience.

"We could have a flagship store if we had 100 stores. Now we only have four, and they are all built in roughly the same way. So, we might be some small hybrid in between, I think." (Jeanette)

4.2.2 Concept Stores & Store Image

4.2.2.1 Merchandise

Manager perspective

Hestra's managers describe their gloves as high-quality and specialized for various winter and outdoor activities. The company prioritizes environmental sustainability by crafting products designed for longevity, using high-quality materials like leather, meticulous hand sewing techniques, and innovative features such as detachable liners. By committing to offering conjuring products through high quality, they aim to build brand loyalty and trust.

"We have ski gloves, winter and sports gloves. There is also cycling and running and so on, in the summer. And then we have our fashion gloves." (Jeanette)

"And with sustainability, of course, you have environmental sustainability, but also like, the sustainability of the products themselves. You work a lot with, like, removable linings in the gloves, it's becoming more and more common, and it's a way to, like, make each product last significantly longer. [...] quality products for the right area, you know." (Viktor)

Additionally, the initial objective is to ensure all products are presented in-store. However, variations in product availability may arise across different stores due to space constraints and store-specific considerations.

"Yes, but it varies a bit. Stockholm is the largest store in terms of hanging space or whatever you want to call it, so we have the greatest opportunity to bring in the most models. But unfortunately, the company's range is so large that it is not possible for us to actually buy in all models and all colors." (Viktor)

Customer perspective

Similarly, Hestra's customers described the products as high-quality gloves, suitable for various sport activities, particularly skiing with one customer emphasizing the Swedish heritage.

"Yeah, but I'm thinking of outdoor gloves. You usually have gloves outdoors. But I'm thinking of good quality, quite expensive. But otherwise, good stuff." (Felicia B)

Similarly, Hestra's customers noticed the store's comprehensive selection, including their different business divisions "sport, dress & professional". They were pleasantly surprised to discover more variations and colors than they had anticipated.

"If you go into... I don't know where they are sold, but if we say they are sold at Intersport or Stadium, then they only have a fraction of their [Hestra's] range, and they probably can't keep the whole range either. But it was very good to get to try the gloves then [in their store] because I've never seen their cycling gloves before. I don't think I would have dared to buy them online, but it was very good that I could try them on before." (Mikael)

4.2.2.2 Service Quality: A New Perspective

Manager perspective

According to Hestra's managers, their high-quality focus should be equally reflected in their service standards. For instance, they utilize a personnel handbook as a cornerstone of new employee orientation. However, it's up to the store managers to ensure their adherence, thereby maintaining uniformity in the company's service standards.

"There are employee handbooks that you naturally learn from in the beginning. But then it's really the store manager's role to maintain the service and professional help that we should provide to the employees." (Viktor)

Additionally, Hestra provides convenient tailoring and repair services in-store, employing a full-time seamstress. This includes onsite replacement of parts, such as liners.

"We also say that instead of selling a new ski glove, we should offer to replace the lining or do a repair beforehand. So, offering spare parts, you could say." (Jeanette)

Customer perspective

Overall, the personnel is described as knowledgeable, friendly, helpful and adaptable to customers' needs and preferences. They further demonstrated a non-sales-oriented, but rather supportive approach.

"I think he was very knowledgeable. The staff at a place or store like this should still be premium. And it's quite like niche products, so they need to be knowledgeable in the field and not just help pick out the right size but also guide a bit on why a product there is better or worse for a certain purpose. So he did a good job in guiding Mikael based on the properties of the cycling gloves." (Christoffer)

4.2.2.3 Pricing

Manager perspective

Pricing plays a crucial role in long-term brand building, especially when aiming to be associated with quality, craftsmanship and longevity. The higher pricing is thus reflective of the value of their products, compared to mass-produced brands that often offer lower prices. Therefore, their products should be seen as an investment rather than mere purchases.

> "Strong offers are indeed good for short-term sales, but in the long term, it's not what builds a brand. If you're going to build it around quality, craftsmanship, and longevity; then pricing is important." (Jeanette)

Hestra also has a clear strategy of consistently maintaining full pricing both in their stores and on their e-commerce platform, strengthening the association with quality and avoiding competition with retailers who have more flexibility in pricing.

> "You can't go and buy a glove on sale in our store. That's quite strong. It gives a quality association." (Jeanette)

Customer perspective

Hestra's customers regarded the prices of the products as elevated. Primarily, customers found the price justified due to the perceived quality and functionality of the gloves. However, opinions were divided when it came to fashion gloves, with some customers feeling they lacked practicality, thus questioning their value proposition.

> "There was one I squeezed that was like 2500 SEK, but I might be remembering wrong though. But for me, city gloves don't have much function or anything, so I'm like 'who buys this?'. But apparently there were 2 ladies there who were going to… There was someone there who bought one of these, you know, like a thin glove that barely provides warmth. But then maybe they thought they'd have them till they die, so maybe it's not that expensive then?" (Felicia B)

Moreover, Hestra's customers noted that only original prices were displayed, creating a sense of luxury.

> "I didn't see any offers or sales, no, nothing. It was very sparingly displayed with prices. You had to take down the glove and look at the tag to see what they cost. So it's not like they wanted to clearly disclose the prices or offers." (Mikael)

However, one customer observed that despite the store offering various experiences or benefits to attract customers to purchase products at their full, original prices, they didn't find these experiences compelling enough to justify buying in-store. Instead, they preferred to purchase the same products at discounted prices online.

4.2.2.4 Atmosphere & Layout: A New Perspective

Manager perspective

Hestra aims to establish distinctive concepts fostering a sense of consistency across its various concept stores, enabling customers to readily identify them as Hestra's stores. This design philosophy is characterized by a minimalist aesthetic, emphasizing the utilization of premium and eco-friendly materials such as limestone and timber. By selecting premium materials designed for longevity, Hestra aims to embody its sustainability strategy, a commitment reflected in the store's ambiance.

Figure 2. Hestra's Concept Store in Stockholm, Sweden (Hestra, n.d.)

"They are, in a way, very stripped-down, with a strong focus on materials, which aligns somewhat with how Hestra thinks. They use very high-quality, solid materials, but at the same time, it's very minimalistic. However, this also goes hand in hand with the fact that it's a small product, and we have a lot of products in the store. If we were to start decorating the store heavily with paintings and other items, I think it would become quite overwhelming. So, it's like... in terms of materials, it's very minimalist, I would say." (Viktor)

Moreover, while maintaining a consistent conceptual framework, each Hestra store exhibits a unique appearance due to variations in the layout and design of respective premises. Hence, considerable effort has been invested in exploring innovative approaches to showcase the full spectrum of gloves, ensuring that each store provides tailored environments for both sports-oriented and fashion-centric glove selections. This approach aims at enabling customers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the breadth of their product offerings. For instance, Hestra opts for minimalist decor due to the vast array of products, letting the gloves serve as the focal point. They are tastefully exhibited in wall-mounted cases or glass showcases, ensuring a clear presentation and fostering an aura of exclusivity.

> "And then we've also put quite a bit of effort into the product presentation. If you've seen inside the stores, the gloves are hanging in drawers upon drawers. You can pull them out, and there's storage behind. So there's a thought behind it, ensuring that we can present everything we have." (Jeanette)

In addition to the physical environment, emphasis is placed on service and interaction with customers to create an engaging and memorable store experience. Hestra's stores are characterized by a deep knowledge of gloves and strive to provide a space where customers can receive the specialized expertise they need, thus fostering a sense of authenticity.

> "And of course, the service. Ensuring that you get that genuine feeling. That you get help. That you can walk around, touch, and feel. Many people come in just to geek out and want to stand and chat. They're happy to talk about their own old gloves they bought 20 years ago and tell you how great they still are. So there's a shared interest sphere." (Jeanette)

Customer perspective

Hestra's customers described the store's design as minimalist and elegant, incorporating natural materials like stone and wood. Its bright and airy atmosphere, facilitated by large windows and an open layout, conveys a sense of exclusivity and high quality. Additionally, customers valued the clear and functional product display, organized by different business divisions, thus enhancing navigation within the store. Furthermore, they described the product placement as elegant, emphasizing elements as showcases and mannequins.

> "Minimalist design, as I said, lots of cement or concrete flooring. I think it was a glass counter, oak details, airy, high ceilings, spacious. Yeah, but it's elegant, a sense of premium, you know?" (Christoffer)

> "It was quite a large store for being a glove store. Then it was kind of a 'Less is more' vibe. Sometimes when you walk into clothing stores and you're going to buy gloves or whatever it is, it's cluttered with shelves and racks and stuff. Here, there was nothing in the middle of the store, basically, all the gloves hung on the walls around. Very, like, easy to overlook, like all the options that were available." (Mikael)

Despite some customers perceiving the atmosphere as bright and airy, some found it to be too sparse and therefore requested a more defined seating area to fill the space, along with the addition of a coffee station. However, customers noticed storytelling elements within the store, such as a display showcasing various materials or an illustration explaining the manufacturing process of the gloves.

> "And a very nice detail behind the counter where they had sort of dissected or broken down the design of a glove, or actually the entire construction of a glove, so that you could see all the components, without them being assembled. Everything from the type of thread used, to the padding, to the insulation. So basically, everything was "this is how we make a glove". It was really cool to see." (Christoffer)

Hestra's customers further praised the positive service experience, noting that the knowledgeable and friendly personnel significantly enhanced the atmosphere. Moreover, many customers noted a prevailing tranquility within the store, possibly attributed by the subdued music playing in the background. However, this sense of calm was not universally appreciated, with some finding it dull and lacking in energy. Additionally, there's a common perception that the store lacks a distinct identity. While the product itself bears the Hestra brand, the store's atmosphere fails to evoke any strong association with the brand. Instead, it's perceived merely as an aesthetically pleasing venue showcasing Hestra gloves.

> "I would probably say that a little more could have been done with it, so it was rather dull and rather still. I can't remember if I heard any music [...]. So, spontaneously, I would say that it was completely quiet in there. It felt like there wasn't much atmosphere. That's a minus. I didn't get any particular impression either. "(Melina)

> "But the brand itself was visible on some, especially ski gloves [...], but overall, I wouldn't say there was anything that made me feel like, 'This is Hestra.' [...] I didn't feel like it exuded a lot of Hestra vibes, but more like just a glove store. I might as well have been inside Lundbergs." (Alexandra)

4.2.2.5 Convenience & Accessibility

Manager perspective

According to Hestra's managers, the process of selecting a location entails meticulous preparation and thorough scrutiny. The choice of location is motivated by various factors, notably visibility, as the selected sites serve as prominent advertising platforms akin to giant billboards. Additionally, careful consideration is given to the neighboring businesses and the demographic frequenting the area, ensuring alignment with the brand's target audience. This underscores the preference for exclusive and centrally located premises.

> "Of course, we want to have the right customers in the store. And in all the locations we're in today, there are similar stores. I mean, there's a lot of outdoor stores on Norrlandsgatan, for example. So we're in a quarter of the city that's important where we know that customers are moving. And then of course it becomes marketing towards the right target audience, I would say." (Jeanette)

Customer perspective

Hestra's customers described the location of the store as central in the city, situated on a street among exclusive brands, where a clientele of high socioeconomic status is prevalent.

> "It's central in the sense that it's close to shopping streets that are premium, like Biblioteksgatan which is very nearby, and has all the luxury brands and the watch shops [...] But it's not a shopping street like Drottninggatan where all H&M and so on are [located]. But it probably aligns more with this luxury consumption a little better and that it's in a location that is directly facing an intersection where there are a lot of people passing by." (Melina)

However, despite Hestra's customers acknowledging the store's favorable location, they expressed a perception that it appears somewhat anonymous in comparison to its neighbors.

> "But I would probably say that it is easy to find, yes. Yes. Then you don't really notice it because it isn't. I don't know, it doesn't feel that hyped like it feels a bit anonymous but easy to find, definitely, and it's a good location." (Melina)

> "I probably haven't thought about it as a Hestra store, but I've checked it out and thought, 'there's like a glove store.' [...] Maybe it says on the door that it is [Hestra]. I have no idea… But it was pretty discreet, right?" (Alexandra)

4.3 Peak Performance

Peak Performance was founded in 1986 in Åre, Sweden by two passionate skiers. As a premium outdoor and sports apparel brand, it embodies the freeride spirit. Offering a diverse range of products for skiing, snowboarding, golf, and outdoor activities, the brand seamlessly combines advanced design with technical functionality (Amer Sports, 2023). Rooted in the values of togetherhood, true passion, and a winning spirit (PeakPerformance, 2019), they inspire like-minded people to explore wild and beautiful places (Amer Sports, 2023). The purpose of all products is "to empower the freedom to be adventurous and live everyday life to the fullest, 365 days a year" (Amer Sports, 2023, p.58). PeakPerformance operates multiple concept stores globally, one of which is located in Denmark (Via Ritzau, 2022).

4.3.1 Concept Store initiatives

4.3.1.1 Brand Building & Control

These stores serve as tangible manifestations of Peak Performance's brand, reflecting their values by incorporating elements of Scandinavian design, sustainability and high performance. These stores serve as more than just retail spaces; they are community hubs where like-minded individuals can come together to share their passion for outdoor adventure and exploration. Whether it's through organized events, workshops, or simply mingling with fellow enthusiasts, the concept store aims to foster a sense of belonging among its customers.

> "Thus, it's about showcasing the brand, not converting sales or conducting product trials. [...] We rather believe that it's the very best way to showcase our brand and try to engage people in the community that we want to build [...]" (Robert)

Furthermore, Peak Performance sees concept stores as an opportunity to communicate their brand and values more effectively than what's possible through e-commerce. In stores, they can interact personally with customers, allowing for meaningful conversations and conveying their "freeride spirit".

"Having our own stores is important to us because that's where we can best communicate with the customer. It's in our stores that we have the opportunity to discuss everything we want to convey in a meaningful context" (Robert)

4.3.1.2 Strategic Planning & Financial Motivations

Peak Performance chooses to establish concept stores with an emphasis on service-oriented sales rather than aggressive sales tactics. Their goal is to create a positive customer experience, which is expected to increase sales and profitability in the long run.

"We don't employ hard-selling tactics, but we do implement a service-oriented approach that must ultimately result in every store being profitable." (Robert)

The company chooses to open concept stores to leverage them as a potent marketplace and showcase their products. It serves as a large storefront, allowing them to communicate their brand and attract new customers. Furthermore, the selection of concept stores as a retail format is informed by economic and local considerations such as foot traffic, demographics, space availability, and rental costs.

"What determines what type of store it is, depends very much on the marketplace, the size of the premises and its potential." (Robert)

The findings suggest that Peak Performance strategically opens concept stores to complement their e-commerce with a physical presence. By providing a retail environment where customers can interact directly with products, concept stores offer a more professional shopping experience that can't be replicated online. Additionally, these physical stores have generated a halo effect on their e-commerce platform, driving increased online traffic and sales.

"And e-commerce also offers fantastic opportunities to talk about the brand, but retail is another level. You get both the physical space and the human interaction. You get to feel things." (Robert)

4.3.1.3 Customer Trends & Brand Adaptation

Workshop (n.d.) asserts that Peak Performance's commitment to understanding consumer trends and subsequently adjusting their brand image to modern expectations led to the development of a "future-proof yet authentic store concept". This initiative enabled them to shift towards a more sustainable, high-tech space without compromising the core essence of their brand.

4.3.2 Concept Stores & Store Image

4.3.2.1 Merchandise

Manager perspectives

Peak Performance's managers describe their products as versatile and functional, suitable for different activities and environments. To promote sustainability, the products are designed to endure frequent use, emphasizing high quality and durability.

> "We believe that we should make products that work for both outdoors and indoor use, but they are intended to be highly versatile. We create functional clothes that fit the environment where we like to be ourselves." (Robert)

Furthermore, Peak Performance offers customized collections in their concept stores, carefully tailored to align with local preferences, market demand and available retail space. Despite having a broad product range, they prioritize showcasing their most technical and high-quality products. Additionally, they seamlessly integrate e-commerce into their stores, ensuring that customers can access products online if they're not available in-store.

> "It is very important to us to showcase the most technical. We have our sort of pinnacle product when it comes to skiing, and we always make sure to have it. However, we might know that in some places, we will not sell it. They rarely have snow in Copenhagen, and skiing is not always top of mind. However, we see many Danish skiers, and then we still need to tell the story, but perhaps we don't need the entire range of ski jackets, instead it may be about showcasing them and having something else we can sell. " (Robert)

Customer perspective

All of Peak Performance's customers described the products as high quality, but placed greater emphasis on the brand's extensive range, perfectly suited for sports- and outdoor activities. This included a variety of items from technical jackets, running gear, sunglasses, and rainwear to more casual attire like hoodies, t-shirts, and sweatpants.

> "Yes, it felt like there were a lot of jackets, and in different fabrics. Then there were some shorts and pants, or, you know, hiking clothes. And then they also had some seasonal series around, some caps and some gear [...] Overall, the products were very sporty." (Johanne)

Several customers noted an absence of the full product assortment in the store. Additionally, they observed a distinct seasonal pattern in the offerings, particularly noting the lack of skiing-related products, which are strongly associated with Peak Performance. Instead, the store primarily showcased items tailored for spring and summer activities.

> "It was something that made me feel like it wasn't entirely consistent with their brand. Because I strongly associate Peak with skiing, and in the store, I felt like they had a very strong focus on summer activities. So there was no element of skiing in the store." (Gustav)

4.3.2.2 Service Quality: A New Perspective

Manager perspective

PeakPerformance's managers place high priority on setting a standard for service and customer care within the organization. They have implemented a handbook serving as a universal framework to guide staff behavior and interactions across all their stores, thereby ensuring a consistent and unified approach to customer engagement. Additionally, a staff that is well-educated can, in turn, educate customers on aspects such as how to use it and how to care for their products after purchase.

> "We've written one, we call it a Brand Ambassador Playbook, which covers all types of behaviors, from how to greet someone to how to interact with colleagues." (Robert)

Furthermore, Peak Performance adapts service and sales strategies on a local level to align with customer needs and activities, enhancing credibility. Additionally, they emphasize the pivotal role of their personnel as brand ambassadors, leveraging their expertise to offer tailored recommendations specific to the local area.

> "For us, it's been about things that help others get involved and be part of our community. It's about tips on activities where you get out and about.[...] They have a structured way of giving tips on the local area, everything from like; where should I go? Where should you try out this jacket you just bought? The waterproof one. There's a good walk to use it on." (Robert)

Peak Performance provides a multitude of services aimed at facilitating customer convenience. These encompass simpler in-store repairs, customization, and a laundry service, where customers can drop off their clothes for washing. Furthermore, if the desired collections are not available in-store, customers have the option to purchase them online or have them delivered to the store.

> "Many have trouble knowing how to wash their expensive jackets, so we actually offer to wash them. They can come in and leave them, and then we wash it. And often in Copenhagen, not everyone has a dryer; only a washing machine. So if they have bought a down jacket that needs washing, we can both wash and dry it so it's ready to use." (Emil)

Through a collaboration with Åre Chocolate Factory, they offer a specially crafted hot chocolate blend with a unique story, attracting customers and stimulating conversations. Although the sale of hot chocolate does not generate profit, they see it as an opportunity to share their story and values with customers.

> "So it should also be an experience, there should be time for it. And that's why we have made big statements by having our own hot chocolate made in Åre. We have specially designed cups that we can serve in. These also come from Åre; a small place that makes cups. So everything is connected. It gives people a taste and smell of skiing." (Emil)

Customer perspective

Customers were initially greeted upon entering the Peak Performance store, but then experienced a lack of continued interaction from the staff. While some customers preferred to explore the store on their own, most felt a lack of the expected personal service and guidance typically associated with a premium brand.

> "I expected them to want to help me but it didn't feel like they wanted to help me find a product that suited me. You know, it's a premium brand, and then you expect better service. I'm not just paying for the product, but I'm also paying to get help finding the right product that fits me." (Gustav)

However, customers who took the initiative to engage with the staff themselves experienced excellent service, characterized by knowledge and engagement. Nevertheless, one customer perceived a negative atmosphere among the staff, contributing to a general feeling of discomfort in the store. This combination of limited interaction, silence, and the peculiar atmosphere resulted in a negative overall impression for many customers.

> "She isn't even interested, she doesn't engage in the conversation herself. She hasn't moved an inch since I came in. And they weren't talking to each other before I came in either [...] And I just thought it was so weird. It felt so sterile and not inviting at all." (Sam)

> "I received assistance right away, and it was good and very easy-going, and it felt more informative than what one expects from a transactional service but more brand-building and very, as mentioned, a natural walkthrough of the store and the clothes, and he was quick to pick up on products I was drawn to. And essentially then build on with information and facts about those products so that it becomes more in-depth on what I had shown interest in." (Sam)

Moreover, several customers noted a sign detailing additional services offered, such as laundry, customization, and repair. This enhancement significantly elevated the overall experience, imbuing it with an exclusive ambiance and leaving a favorable impression of the brand.

> "Yes, but they had this thing with laundry. Apparently, they can wash your clothes. And then, the customization aspect also felt very, well, a bit exclusive, that you can really customize the product to fit you." (Ida)

4.3.2.3 Pricing

Manager perspective

Peak Performance maintains a relatively high price point compared to fast fashion brands. However, this pricing strategy is reflective of their dedication to quality. The company determines the prices for each collection at their headquarters, ensuring consistency across both their e-commerce platform and physical retail stores. Nevertheless, individual stores have the flexibility to offer certain discounts towards the end of the season, particularly if they have substantial inventory levels of specific products.

"We have quite a high price point compared to fast fashion, but that's because we don't want to be fast fashion. We make things of high quality and that costs much more to produce. So I would claim that we, we want to be... Premium is a hopeless word because it means so many different things to different people. But we really want our clothes to be premium. And then they cost accordingly too." (Robert)

Customer perspective

Peak Performance's customers describe the products as being in a higher price range, but they perceive that the high quality and stylish design justify this higher price. Additionally, they recognize that this higher price also reflects the value of the brand itself.

"But at the same time, if you have an interest in, for example, outdoor activities, then you'd want very high-quality products that can withstand what you're going to do. You wouldn't want to buy a rain jacket and end up getting wet. If the products are indeed of the high quality they claim to be, then that could justify a higher price. They are also very stylish, and personally, I think it's worth sometimes spending a little extra just for them to look nice, rather than buying a really great rain jacket that might be very ugly but a bit cheaper." (Ida)

4.3.2.4 Atmosphere & layout: A New Perspective

Manager perspective

Peak Performance strives to create a space with minimalistic, futureproof design, high-tech innovations, and sustainability principles to reflect their brand identity (Workshop, n.d.). Rooted in a profound appreciation for nature, their stores evoke an atmosphere that inspires outdoor enthusiasts, fostering an immersive experience aligned with activities like skiing and cycling. The store's interior design system is flexible and adaptable to various needs. Products are sparingly placed in the store, with more items displayed on the walls than on the floor. This allows space for storytelling and creates an engaging experience for customers as they navigate through the store.

"Yes, but what we do differently from many other stores is that we want to appear as a premium brand. And that is where we can distinguish ourselves from Intersport and Stadium, which often have the same products. The store is a bit more than 100 square meters, so it is difficult to have everything inside. But the way we solve it is by only having two of each product on display. So we only have a small and a medium for women, and a medium and a large for men, and that allows us to have everything nicely displayed with good spacing" (Emil)

Figure 3. Peak Performance's Concept Store in Copenhagen, Denmark ©2024 PeakPerformance

Peak Performance encourages customers to stay longer within the store, highlighting the significant role of staff in fostering an engaging atmosphere. Additionally, they have designed a serene space in the center of the store, featuring a large table where customers can play games and unwind. Additionally, the store serves as a community hub, offering a venue for diverse activities, including events.

> "We've also set a goal for ourselves that we want people… We like when people spend time in the store. We believe time is like the most precious thing we have today. People are busy, and if they can come to us and spend time, we think that's great. It's good for the brand, it's good for the person who hopefully learns something or gets inspired. So, those are goals that we ourselves have added." (Robert)

Customer perspective

Customers often depict Peak Performance's store layout as a blend of modern, minimalist design infused with natural and technical elements and outdoor aesthetics. The incorporation of light, earthy tones like brown and green, along with wood and stone features, contributes to a tranquil and expansive ambiance, evoking the feeling of being outdoors.

> "The shelves were brown-beige, and most of the furnishings were made of wood, I would say. Shelves, tables, and benches were also made of wood, which emphasized a clearer focus on the outdoors compared to other stores with completely white interiors." (Gustav)

While customers generally appreciated the strategic placement of products throughout the store, whether on the walls or within showcases and tables, opinions diverged regarding the quantity of items on display. While some customers perceived the abundance of products, others experienced a sense of selectivity in the display, which in turn contributed to a luxurious ambiance.

55

> "It didn't feel like it was overcrowded with products either, just a few examples of each garment on display. Which felt very organized and, well, almost luxurious." (Ida)

> "And by 'a lot,' I mean that it felt like there were many clothes and many items. Personally, I would have preferred if there were fewer items but more specific ones. It felt like there was a sea of different things, making it difficult to go through everything." (Sam)

Furthermore, the prominent central table, seamlessly integrated with the cashier section, garnered the attention of all customers. It served as a communal space where one could sit and relax, socialize, play games, and receive assistance.

> "[...] Especially the cash register in the middle of the entire store, which was at bar table height, and there were chairs around it like a table. So it was like the cash register was some sort of console in the middle that was actually a table, but it was more of an extension of the cash register. So more of a meeting place, rather. It was special." (Sam)

Furthermore, customers appreciated the clear signage in the store, particularly regarding product and collection descriptions. Some also took note of the information provided regarding laundry services and customization options, which not only simplified the shopping experience but also stimulated their curiosity. However, the display showcasing older collections and emphasizing the brand's history at the entrance was perceived by some customers as a unique and memorable introduction to the brand, while others did not perceive this experience at all.

> "[...] the picture refers to the fact that they have a bit of history behind them as a brand. It felt quite unique that when you come in, the first thing you see is of course the new clothes, but then quite quickly you see that [the old jacket] and are reminded that there's something more than just a store you're walking into. It also felt like you were walking in and getting some sort of introduction to the brand." (Sam)

Furthermore, the friendly and attentive staff contributed positively to the overall ambiance, creating a welcoming and engaging environment. Conversely, instances of indifference or lack of interest from staff members detracted from the atmosphere, leading to a less favorable impression.

> "The staff were very much like, 'hello', and then 'let us know if you need help', so you had plenty of time to wander around and look. However, it still felt as if you would have needed assistance, because I saw someone else getting help with this customization thing, then it's very much like professional service. Like, we'll give you space to look around, but we're also here to help you'. So it was a calm atmosphere." (Ida)

However, Peak Performance received mixed reviews regarding service quality, which in turn affected customer perception of the store atmosphere negatively.

4.3.2.5 Convenience & Accessibility

Manager perspective

Peak Performance strategically locates its stores to maximize brand awareness, customer engagement. The process of selecting these locations is meticulous and requires thorough preparation. This involves careful consideration of various factors, including the history of previous owners, geographical position, traffic patterns, local fees, sales performance of neighboring stores, and the condition and rental costs of the premises. By evaluating these parameters, Peak Performance ensures their stores are optimally positioned for maximum impact.

> "We are located on the busiest and most visited street in Copenhagen. So, I would say we have a really good location. We used to be on Østergade, right across from Magasin, but that was more tourist-oriented with the people passing by. Now, on Købmagergade, we also get Danes who pass by on their way to and from work." (Emil)

Moreover, they do not always pursue the most commercially optimal location, but instead opt for locations that resonate with their brand identity, exemplified by their choice of Åre.

> "Then there's another aspect, and that's what fits our brand, you know. Åre might not be the world's best commercial place to have a large store if you have to choose, but we've always had a store there." (Robert)

Customer perspective

Peak Performance's customers consider the store to have a favorable location in the city center on a bustling street, making it easy to find. Some customers are surprised by the store's location on a mainstream shopping street, feeling it lacks the prestige they expected. They anticipated a more carefully selected location that resonates with the brand's identity, offering a unique and inviting experience.

> "The store itself gives a rather luxurious impression, but it's located a bit further away from the other, more exclusive boutiques. It's sort of among more general stores like Monkey, I believe. I'm not exactly sure, but it's not the closest to these slightly more exclusive boutiques, and it almost feels like it should have been." (Ida)

4.4 Chapter Summary

Our findings are based on interviews with managers and consumers from Norrøna, Hestra, and Peak Performance. These interviews form the core of our study, providing essential insights into the operations and perceptions of these companies. The table below offers a simplified overview of our key findings:

Table 5. Summary of Findings

	Norrøna, Gothenburg		Hestra, Stockholm		Peak Performance, Copenhagen	
	Manager Perspectives	*Customer Perspectives*	*Manager Perspective*	*Customer Perspective*	*Manager Perspective*	*Customer Perspective*
Merchandise	High quality Functionality Durability Sustainability Limited Selection	High quality Functionality Durability Limited Availability	High quality Longevity Sustainability Limited selection	High quality Heritage Comprehensive assortment	High quality Functionality Durability Sustainability Localized & seasonal selection Online sales	High quality Extensive range of activities Limited availability Seasonal selection
Service quality	High-quality service Knowledgeable personnel Engaged personnel Localized expertise Warranties & in-store repair service Complementary services (coffee)	High-quality service Knowledgeable personnel Engaged personnel Complementary services (coffee)	High-quality service Knowledgeable personnel Tailor & Repair Service	High-quality service Knowledgeable & Supportive personnel	High-quality service Knowledgeable personnel Localized expertise In-store repairs Laundry service Customization Complementary service (hot chocolate) Omnichannel	Lack of interaction with personnel Knowledgeable personnel Laundry Service Customization Repair Service
Pricing	High price point Price to reflect quality and functionality Investment RE initiative Full-price strategy	High price point Price reflect quality and durability Investment Full-price strategy (some confusion)	High price point reflecting quality and functionality Investment Full-price strategy	High price point reflecting quality and functionality Deviating price-value perceptions in low-functionality items Full-price strategy	High price point reflecting quality Flexibility in pricing strategy	Price reflecting quality and stylish design Value of brand
Atmosphere & layout	Minimalist design Hospitable atmosphere Service Enhancements (lounge area, coffee machine, magazines) Storytelling	Minimalist design Hospitable atmosphere Sense of high-quality (clutter) Service enhancements (lounge area, coffee) Storytelling Store Personnel	Minimalist design Recognition with identity Natural materials Spacious layout Calm atmosphere Authenticity in service	Minimalist design Natural materials Elegant but too spacious Natural materials Calm atmosphere Lack of identity Storytelling Enhanced atmosphere by service quality Lack of service enhancement	Minimalist design Natural materials High-tech innovations Inspiration Storytelling Service enhancements (table, games) Engaging environment Storytelling	Minimalist design Natural materials High-tech innovations Luxurious ambience Service enhancement (table, games, assistance) Engaging environment Storytelling Store personnel
Convenience & accessibility	High foot traffic Accessibility Commercial Activity Exposure Awareness	High foot traffic Accessibility Competition Unassuming exterior (discrete)	Exclusive location Accessibility Target audience Like-minded competitors Awareness	Exclusive location Accessibility Target audience Like-minded competitors Anonymous appearance	Key touchpoint Accessibility Commercially optimal locations resonating with brand identity	High foot traffic Accessibility City center location Lack of prestige Expected higher resonance with identity

5. Analysis & Discussion

This chapter will elaborate and interpret the presented empirical material. The identified themes and aspects of concept stores identified in the results are fundamental for the analysis, which are elaborated upon with the existing theoretical literature as a compass. The analysis is divided into two sections. The first part consists of an analysis of the objectives and intentions by fashion manufacturing brands establishing concept stores. Further, the second part is elaborating on, and analyzing management's intended store image and the consumers' perceived store image of the concept stores.

5.1 Intentions behind concept stores

The following section examines the driving factors behind fashion manufacturing brands' decisions to establish concept stores. Through a thorough analysis of empirical data, several motives have been identified: 1) brand building and control, 2) strategic planning & financial motivations, 3) consumer trends and brand adaptation, and 4) support for online sales. These motives will be presented and analyzed in detail, with a particular focus on how they relate and enrich the existing literature.

5.1.1 Brand Building & Control

All three brands emphasize that one of the primary reasons for opening concept stores is the format's ability to communicate the company's history and values on a deeper and more engaging level. This supports the findings of Egan-Wyer et al. (2021), who argue that concept stores are focused on delivering softer values such as inspiration and presence. Furthermore, by seamlessly integrating these values with the physical representation of the brand, concept stores not only enhance brand identity but also foster a sense of community among consumers. This strategy further aligns with Huber et al. (2013) and Picot-Coupey (2014), which identify that experience-based store formats aim to enhance customer experience beyond traditional sales, by creating an innovative environment that evokes emotions such as engagement (Fontana, 2023) and connection (Dolbec & Chebat, 2013). This is critical for building long-lasting customer relationships (Borghini et al., 2009; Egan-Wyer et al., 2021; Nierobisch et al., 2017; Warnaby & Shi, 2018) and building brand image (Manlow & Nobbs, 2013; Ye et al., 2023). Thus, concept stores can serve as a powerful platform for brands to communicate their history and values, thereby fostering a deeper connection with consumers.

Furthermore, another reason for brands to open concept stores is to control how the brand is presented and perceived. By aligning the store's interior and product displays with the brand's identity, they enhance brand perception significantly. This aligns with the findings of Agndal & Axelsson (2019) who argues that companies strive to manage and control their brand image. This strategy is further supported by Ye et al. (2023) and Blazquez (2019) who found that specific design elements and atmospheric cues in experience-based stores, such as pop-up and

flagship, strongly influence consumer behavior, improving brand attitude. Similarly, Egan-Wyer et al. (2021) state that concept stores also aim to increase brand awareness and brand associations. In essence, concept stores play a pivotal role in enabling brands to meticulously control their image, enhance brand perception and drive consumer behavior by aligning strategic store design with brand identity.

5.1.2 Strategic Planning & Financial Motivations

Our research indicates that concept stores are established with the aim to serve as a profitable sales channel over the long term, contributing to the company's financial objectives. This aligns with Huber et al. (2013) and Triki & Hakimi (2017), who argue that the primary objective of concept stores is not necessarily to generate immediate sales. This further aligns with Egan-Wyer et al. (2021) assertion that, due to their permanent nature and lack of emphasis on immediate buzz and excitement, concept stores necessitate sustained validation over time, since they do not generate immediate sales impact but rather another value in the retail lineup. This is due to their inability to generate immediate sales impact, instead contributing supplementary value to the retail lineup. This entails that concept stores serve as a strategically positioned long-term investment.

Furthermore, our findings suggest that establishing concept stores strategically strengthens market presence, foster differentiation, and augmenting brand awareness. This strategy is crucial for long-term growth and expanding market share. As underscored by Egan-Wyer (2021), a concept store is "an accessible touchpoint that reduces friction on a diversified customer journey". It aims to assist task-oriented shoppers with their practical and mundane tasks throughout their daily lives, by leveraging their strategic location. However, even though the definition, as outlined by Egan et al. (2021), places significant emphasis on the importance of having a strategic location, it does not specifically address how the location of a concept store contributes to strengthening or revitalizing a company's market presence while simultaneously distinguishing itself from competitors. While she acknowledges the concept store as an important tool for increasing market penetration due to its favorable location, she chooses in her definition to characterize the concept store location as primarily accessible instead of desirable. However, our findings suggest that companies predominantly establish concept stores to solidify their market presence, indicating that the importance of location is even greater than the definition suggests. This notion is further supported by broader research on store formats, suggesting that novel formats enable retailers to offer locations that are more geographically (Jaravaza & Chitando, 2024; Jones et al., 2003; Severin et al., 2001) or emotionally accessible (de Lassus & Anido Freire, 2014), thereby augmenting the likelihood of spontaneous shopping trips and purchases (Léo & Philippe, 2002). This indicates that concept stores enhance market presence, differentiation, and brand awareness as well as convenience and accessibility, with strategic locations being crucial for their success.

Our findings further indicate that the selection of concept stores as a retail format considers economic and local factors such as city selection, available properties and investment capacity. As both flagship stores and concept stores are permanent in nature (Egan-Wyer et al., 2021; Robertson et al., 2018), the decision to opt for a concept store over a flagship is primarily driven by the high costs associated with establishing a flagship store in a prestigious location. As they are usually bigger in size, flagship stores are considered a larger investment. This assertion is in accordance with Moore et al. (2010) findings, which suggests that flagship stores tend to boast larger dimensions compared to other retail formats, thus enhancing the brands prestige. This indicates that a concept store can be a more cost-effective alternative to a flagship store due to lower establishment costs and smaller investments, while still considering economic and local factors.

Furthermore, the abundance space of a flagship store facilitates the creation of a memorable brand experience through dramatic design and comprehensive product showcasing (Arrigo, 2015; Fontana, 2023; Nobbs et al., 2012), serving as a marketing tool for generating buzz and cultivating brand awareness (Klein et al., 2016; Marciniak & Budnarowska, 2010; Picot-Coupey, 2014). However, our findings indicate that although concept stores incorporate storytelling elements, they do not reach the same level as flagship in this aspect (e.g. due to space). Nevertheless, they strive to effectively communicate the brand's story. This is consistent with Triki & Hakimi (2017) research, which suggests that concept stores integrate innovative store elements, complemented by curated assortment of private label items. This indicates that concept stores, despite their smaller size, effectively communicate the brand's story through innovative elements and curated assortments, making them an intermediate store format.

Additionally, Norrøna is the only brand acknowledging concept stores as a subsequent step in their strategic framework. The idea is to first strengthen the brands position through flagship stores and subsequently diversifying by introducing more concept stores. Concept stores are thus positioned as the primary initiators of the establishment process. More et al. (2010) supports this conclusion, suggesting that flagship stores represent a strategic approach to market entry. However, Hestra and Peak Performance do not cite this as a reason for opening concept stores. Norrøna has a longer history of retail presence and offers a diverse product range compared to Hestra, which specializes in gloves only. Previously, Hestra might not have seen the need for standalone retail spaces, an assumption drawn from their recent initiation of concept stores alongside their existing network of retailers. However, with the growing demand for experiential shopping, as indicated by Floor (2006), having a dedicated retail space becomes more important. Currently, Hestra operates four equally sized stores in different cities. Expanding to multiple stores in the same and different city could make this strategy more relevant for them. Conversely, Peak Performance has established numerous stores worldwide with various store formats. However, it is possible that they do not view the utilization of the format in the same manner as Norrøna. This assumption is based on the notion that Norrøna exhibits a strong commitment to executing its strategy, whereas Peak Performance's decision-making process is more influenced by marketplace dynamics, the size of the premises and its potential when choosing which store format to establish. This indicates that Norrøna uniquely

views concept stores as a strategic step following flagship stores to strengthen their market position, unlike Hestra and Peak Performance, which approach store formats differently based on product range, market dynamics, and retail presence.

5.1.3 Consumer Trends & Brand Adaptation

Based on the empirical findings, it is evident that Peak Performance has chosen to open concept stores in response to evolving consumer trends, reflecting a proactive approach to remaining relevant in the market. This aligns with previous research, which indicates that consumers are no longer solely focused on finding a particular product (Gauri et al., 2021); instead they seek emotionally engaging store experience (Floor, 2006). Hence, in line with previous research (Gauri et al., 2021), Peak Performance have commenced efforts to enhance the shopping experience through the establishment of a concept store format. This format, renowned for its brand experience (Egan-Wyer et al., 2021), serves as a strategic tool for brands aiming to differentiate themselves in competitive markets (Jahn et al., 2018; Klein et al., 2016; Robertson et al., 2018) and build brand image (Egan-Wyer et al., 2021). However, Norrøna and Hestra do not mention the same reason for establishing their concept stores. This may suggest that these companies have not mentioned this as a reason because other, more significant factors are driving their strategic decisions. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that concept stores represent a relatively new store format compared to its siblings, such as flagship- and pop-up stores (Egan-Wyer et al., 2021). While Norrøna, for example, have previously operated flagship- and pro stores, their perception of shifting consumer trends may encompass a broader motivation for investing in experiential store formats holistically, rather than exclusively targeting concept stores. This suggests that concept stores may be part of a broader strategy aimed at adapting to evolving consumer behaviors and delivering enhanced retail experiences in response to these dynamic market shifts.

5.1.4 Support for Online Sales

Based on the empirical findings, it is apparent that both Peak Performance and Norrøna strategically open concept stores to complement their online presence. This aligns with the assertion by Grewal et al. (2023) that despite the digital era, the physical store remains vital for many businesses' success, serving as "key nodes" in omnichannel operations. The findings suggest that concept stores offer a unique in-person shopping experience that cannot be replicated online, facilitating direct product interaction, enriching brand presence, and augmenting online business within the same market. This is in line with previous research (Egan-Wyer et al., 2021), suggesting that the primary objective of concept stores is not solely focused on generating direct sales. Instead, they aim to provide "softer" values such as inspiration, availability, image and presence. However, despite Hestra acknowledging its online presence, there is a notable absence of any explicit mention that the purpose of opening a concept store is to complement their online presence. Nevertheless, they do emphasize how their store serves as a place for customers to physically interact with their products, underscoring the importance of the physical aspect. Hestra's decision not to directly link this to their choice of opening a concept store may stem from the recognition that physical stores play

a crucial role in an omnichannel strategy, regardless of the specific store format. Additionally, this underscores that concept stores serve as a complement to online channels by offering a unique in-person experience, emphasizing the importance of the physical aspect in successful omnichannel strategy.

5.2 Concept Stores & Brand Image

In section 5.1 we outlined the driving factors behind fashion manufacturing brands' decisions to establish concept stores. In the following section, we aim to explore how brands shape their image through attributes of their concept stores and whether consumers' perception of these stores diverge from the intended brand image. Our focus lies in examining how these attributes influence the creation of both store and brand image, emphasizing the interplay of *merchandise, service quality, pricing, atmosphere & layout* and *convenience & accessibility* as highlighted by Anselmsson et al. (2017).

5.2.1 Merchandise

5.2.1.1 Norrøna: Customer vs Manager
Both managers and customers at Norrøna perceive the products as high-quality, tailored for specific purposes, such as skiing and outdoor activities. They emphasize quality construction, appropriate materials, attention to detail, as well as enduring design and durability. However, customers may not prioritize sustainability as much as managers do. Additionally, Norrøna prioritizes showcasing a selection of products in the concept store due to space limitations. However, customers perceive that the entire collection is available, indicating a disparity in how managers and customers perceive the availability of products in the store.

5.2.1.2 Hestra: Customer vs Manager
Both managers and customers articulate Hestra's product as high-quality gloves for various sports related activities. However, customers primarily associate their products with skiing and do not underscore their environmental aspect to the same degree as managers. Furthermore, Hestra's managers cite store space limitations as a factor restricting the full product range display, potentially causing some items to be unavailable in certain stores. However, customers find the store's selection extensive and are pleasantly surprised by the variety of products and colors offered.

5.2.1.3 Peak Performance: Customer vs Manager
Both managers and customers at Peak Performance characterize the products as superior quality and versatile, catering to diverse outdoor activities. However, managers emphasize these attributes to promote sustainability, a focus that may not be as pronounced among customers. Furthermore, Peak Performance tailor collections in concept stores to fit local preferences and market demand, highlighting technical, high-quality products. While customers noted an incomplete product assortment, they specifically pointed out the absence of skiing-related items, which are the brand's main association.

5.2.1.4 Comparison Among Brands

Based on the empirical findings, it is evident that all three companies prioritize versatile, high-quality, and durable products for outdoor activities. This emphasis on product excellence is also perceived and valued by customers, aligning with Baker et al. (1994) on the critical role of product quality in shaping consumer perception. However, while all companies emphasize sustainability as a crucial part of their products and identities, no customers explicitly mention it when describing the products, indicating a misalignment between the perceived image and the intended one. This supports Agndal and Axelsson (2019) notion that a brand's identity may not always fully reflect its image. This discrepancy could indicate that sustainability is not a prioritized factor when choosing products or that the companies' sustainability efforts are not communicated clearly enough. Since the concept store format is smaller than a flagship store and lacks dramatic elements, it is crucial for brands to enhance their in-store strategies to better highlight these initiatives. By doing so, they can ensure their commitments are more visible and impactful to customers. However, it may also indicate that the concept store format may not be the most suitable format for effectively showcasing these efforts.

Additionally, in line with previous research (Triki & Hakimi, 2017), all brands have curated collections due to space limitations, tailoring them to align with local preferences and market demand. However, while Peak Performance's customers perceived the assortment as curated, Hestra's and Norrøna's customers perceived it as full. This indicates that Peak Performance's customers are aware of the full product range, understanding that the curated selection is part of a broader assortment. Conversely, Hestras's and Norrøna's customers lack this awareness, suggesting they may not realize that the available selection does not represent the entire collection. It suggests that there is an alignment between Peak Performance's perceived and intended brand image, whereas Hestra and Norrøna may experience a misalignment in this regard. This discrepancy could be attributed to differences in communication strategies or marketing approaches. While Peak Performance successfully communicated its brand message in this regard, Hestra and Norrøna have failed to convey the full scope of their collections. This emphasizes the necessity for refined marketing strategies and clearer communication to comprehensively showcase the offerings and maintain brand consistency. When there is congruence between consumers and management perception of the store environment, it increases the likelihood of consumers choosing that particular retailer (Gilmore et al., 2001) thus strengthening the overall brand image (Kremer & Viot, 2012).

Furthermore, while Hestra and Norrøna successfully communicate their comprehensive ski collections, customers of Peak Performance have noted the absence of ski-related items in store, despite the brand's reputation for high-performance ski-gear. This aligns with Bloemer & De Ruyter (1998) assertion that each retail store may have a distinct image in the minds of consumers. This absence created a discrepancy between the brand image and the store offering, negatively impacting the perception of the brand and the store experience. One reason for Peak Performance's struggle may be their inability to maintain consistent marketing and in-store displays across different seasons, leading to confusion about their product focus. This aligns

with work by Gilmore et al. (2001), suggesting that disparities often occur as retailers unintentionally introduce stimuli that hinder positive consumer perceptions. However, even though ski products are seasonal, Norrøna and Hestra succeed in maintaining consistent and clear communication year-round. These brands maintain a strong focus on their core products, ensuring every touchpoint reinforces their expertise in ski-gear (eg, storytelling). This emphasizes the importance of maintaining a strong connection to their identity and appeal to customers associations, regardless of the season.

5.2.2 Service Quality: A New Perspective

Service quality is crucial for a store's image. Traditional factors include the knowledge, helpfulness and friendliness of personnel (Martineau, 1958), overall service and after-sales activities (Lindquist, 1974), as well as the number of salespeople and return policies (Mazursky & Jacoby, 1986). However, our findings suggest that, in addition to these traditional factors, other aspects in a concept store also contribute to service quality. Enhancements such as coffee, in-store repairs and customization can further improve service quality and strengthen store image.

5.2.2.1 Norrøna: Customer vs Manager
Both management and customers of Norrøna are aligned in their perception of the staff as helpful and knowledgeable. Additionally, Norrøna provides service enhancements such as in-store repairs, extended warranty options and amenities like complimentary coffee. However, none of the customers perceived the availability of repair services or extended warranty options in the store. However, their collective observation of the presence of a coffee machine left a positive impression.

5.2.2.2 Hestra: Customer vs Manager
Both managers and customers of Hestra described the service standard as high, emphasizing the knowledgeable and dedicated staff. Furthermore, managers specifically mentioned providing repair services, indicating an additional layer of customer care. However, despite this offering, customers did not seem to notice or mention it as an additional service enhancement, suggesting a disparity in perceptions.

5.2.2.3 Peak Performance: Customer vs Manager
Peak Performance's managers articulate their high service standards and the expertise of their engaging and well-educated staff. However, while acknowledging the staff's knowledge, the customers do not consistently encounter them as fully service minded as expected in a premium store. Moreover, although Peak Performance provides hot chocolate in their stores to foster discussions about its connection to Åre, none of the customers observed or were offered the hot chocolate. This indicates a disparity in perception between the intended service strategy by the company and the actual experience of the customers.

5.2.2.4 Comparison Among Brands

Concept stores are designed to facilitate everyday tasks through their strategic locations and functional design, rather than offering dramatic and exciting elements (Egan-Wyer et al., 2021). This makes high-quality service crucial for retaining customers, as there are limited dramatic features to keep them engaged. Without high-quality service, the store fails to achieve its intended purpose of convenience and customer satisfaction. In line with previous research (Martineau, 1958), the managers emphasize how friendly, knowledgeable, and dedicated personnel enhance their image. This image of high quality service is perceived and valued by Norrøna's and Hestra's customers, elevating their retail experience (Kumar & Kim, 2014; Samli et al., 1998). However, while Peak Performance's customers found the staff knowledgeable, they did not perceive the same level of engagement and service–mindedness. This indicates a disconnect between Peak Performance's image of high-quality service and the actual in-store experience. This misalignment creates unrealistic customer expectations that are not met, ultimately damaging the brand's image, as noted by Burt et al. (ed. 2010). In contrast, Norrøna and Hestra successfully align their brand image with customer expectation through consistent service delivery. This could indicate that Norrøna and Hestra have a more consistent staff training or effective communication and feedback mechanism compared to Peak Performance.

Additionally, all brands provide a service experience that extends far beyond the traditional sales-focused models, a principle further supported by Egan-Wyer et al. (2021). Each brand offers some type of service enhancement, such as in-store repairs or beverages. Despite these initiatives, few customers noticed the repair services, and none were offered beverages. This misalignment between the brand's intended image of superior service and customer's perceptions indicates a significant gap, suggesting that managers have overestimated consumer evaluations of this element (Samli et al., 1998). For instance, Peak Performance failed to effectively communicate its hot chocolate offering, designed to encourage discussions about the company's connection to Åre. The lack of customer awareness regarding these additional services indicates that these enhancements do not contribute effectively to the in-store experience. However, the lack of beverage offerings to customers may be due to their short time spent within the store. Regardless, it is essential that all brands improve their in-store communication regarding these service enhancements in order to increase awareness and appreciation among its customers. This will in turn strengthen their brand image (Gilmore et al., 2001; Mazursky & Jacoby, 1986).

5.2.3 Pricing

5.2.3.1 Norrøna: Customer vs Manager

Customers and managers of Norrøna underscores their high price point or their merchandise. However the managers place a strong emphasis on the added value of their products, which lies in their high product quality, functionality, longevity, and durability through a meticulous and thorough products process. This aligns with the perception of customers, who believe owning a Norrøna item is a long-term investment incurred with high value. The absence of promotions and sales within the store are intended to reinforce its quality associations. However, their RE-

initiative has led to some confusion among customers, primarily due to the lack of information. This confusion, however, has not significantly impacted customer perception of the brands premium pricing.

5.2.3.2 Hestra: Customer vs Manager

Hestra differentiates their merchandise from mass-produced brands, and the pricing reflects the value of their products, which lies in the quality, craftsmanship and longevity. The customers acknowledge Hestra's higher price point and perceive the high price point as a reflection of quality and functionality. However, the less functional gloves were perceived to have less value and hence an unjustified price point. Furthermore, through their full-price strategy, Hestra aims to convey high quality while avoiding competing with retailers. However, even though customers associated the high pricing with exclusiveness, they were not compelled enough to choose purchasing in-store over seeking discounts elsewhere.

5.2.3.3 Peak Performance: Customer vs Manager

Peak Performance's elevated prices are emphasized by both managers and customers, reflecting the brand's commitment to superior quality and sophisticated design, thereby aligning with the brand's identity and brand value. Further, the managers highlight the pricing strategy as indicative of the brand's distancing from fast fashion, reinforcing its premium positioning in the marketplace. However, managers emphasize seasonal sales in order to eliminate excess inventory, a detail that customers may not necessarily reflect on during their visits.

5.2.3.4 Comparison Among Brands

All brands maintain a higher price point to reflect their image. By pricing their products at a premium level, the brands aim to convey a message of exclusivity and quality. In all cases, customers justify the brands higher pricing, seeing them as indicative of superior quality, durability, functionality, and design. This is in line with findings suggesting that customers evaluate the product price based on its perceived value in relation to perceived benefits (Beneke et al., 2015). Additionally, customers perceive a purchase as an investment, suggesting effective communication of brand benefits and value (Dahlén et al., 2017). This is in line with previous research suggesting that if customers' perception of the product's value aligns with the brand's intended image, it results in increased purchase intent (Beneke et al., 2015; Sweeney et al., 1999). This indicates an alignment between customers' perception of the higher price level and the brand's intended premium image.

However, not all of Hestras customers perceived the price as justified. For instance, some found the city gloves to be lacking in functionality compared to the other models while others expressed a preference for purchasing discounted items from retailers instead. This aligns with Sweeney et al (1999) assertion that the perceived price affects consumers' willingness to buy. It suggests that customers perceive the price as unjustified, indicating a potential mismatch between perceived value and pricing strategy. In contrast, Norrøna and Peak Performance manage to maintain a higher value for their products by effectively communicating their benefits and aligning them with their premium image. However, it is essential to consider that

Hestra specialize solely in gloves, while Norrøna and Peak Performance offer a diverse range of products, including ski gear and running clothes. Their type of products encompasses a wider array of features and functionalities that appeal to different customer segments. However, it then becomes crucial for Hestra to better communicate these benefits to consumers. By better emphasizing quality of materials and features as well as the brand's heritage and expertise, Hestra can enhance the perceived value of their products and justify their premium pricing. This will in turn affect the consumers choice of store, as noted by Mazursky & Jacoby (1986) and McGoldrick (2002a). By aligning the perceptions of price and value, consumers are given a reason to purchase the brand (Aaker, 1991). This perceived value can then be leveraged by the brand to drive growth and profitability (Dahlén et al., 2017).

5.2.4 Atmosphere & Layout: A New Perspective

Atmosphere plays a vital role for a store image, emphasizing feelings of warmth, acceptance, and ease (Lindquist, 1974). Key elements include lighting, color, music, scent, and temperature (Baker et al., 1994; Kotler, 1973; Kumar & Kim, 2014). Additionally, functional factors including layout, privacy, comfort, and architecture also play an important role. Facilities such as washrooms, elevators, and width of aisles enhance the shopping experience (Lindquist, 1974; Thang & Tan, 2003). However, our findings indicate that respondents emphasize different aspects when describing the atmosphere and layout in concept stores. They highlight the importance of innovative elements, such as storytelling to enrich heritage and community building aspects like tables and lounge areas.

5.2.4.1 Norrøna: Customer vs Manager
Both consumers and managers described the design as minimalistic, with a focus on colorful product displays rather than unnecessary store fixtures. Additionally, both managers and customers emphasized the significance of the history-wall and the seating area, with managers also highlighting the cash register. This shared perception of store features contributes to a unified and consistent brand image. However, only customers recognized the vital role of the staff in fostering a welcoming atmosphere, both through their service and nature-inspired attire. This indicates a disparity in how consumers and managers view the importance of staff in shaping the store's atmosphere.

5.2.4.2 Hestra: Customer vs Manager
Hestras managers aimed to integrate the brand's identity into the store design, emphasizing minimalist aesthetic and premium, eco-friendly materials like limestone and timber. However, customers mainly perceived the store as aesthetically pleasing without necessarily seeing a direct correlation between these design elements and Hestra's brand values. Despite this discrepancy, both managers and customers perceived the product placement as elegant and exclusive, categorized in sport, dress and professional. Furthermore, managers prioritized creating engaging and memorable experiences through knowledgeable staff, which customers perceived as intended. Additionally, a few customers noted compelling storytelling elements, which were not explicitly mentioned by managers. Furthermore, perceptions of the store's

atmosphere varied, with contrasting views of tranquility and dullness. Consequently, customers expressed a desire for a more defined seating area and the addition of a coffee station to enhance their experience.

5.2.4.3 Peak Performance: Customer vs Manager

Both managers and customers at Peak Performance are aligned in their perception of the minimalist design enriched with nature elements, which effectively reinforces the brand's image of an outdoor lifestyle. They both describe the product placement as meticulously considered, with few items displayed to convey exclusivity. Although not all customers noticed the clear signage with detailed product and service descriptions and brand storytelling, those who did highly valued and appreciated these elements. Interestingly, managers did not prioritize these aspects as much. Instead, they emphasized the table in the center of the store as a gathering place, a point that was also noted by customers. Furthermore, while managers emphasized the staff's role in creating an engaging atmosphere, customers had mixed opinions due to varying perceptions of service quality.

5.2.4.4 Comparison Among Brands

All three companies aim to convey their image through their store design (Baker et al., 1994; Kotler, 1973; Kumar & Kim, 2014) by implementing a minimalist design featuring outdoor elements and meticulous product placement. This is in line with previous research by Egan-Wyer et al. (2021) suggesting that concept stores are oriented towards providing "softer" values such as inspiration, availability, image and presence. While Hestra's customers find the store aesthetically pleasing, they do not perceive a strong connection between the design and the brand values. However, Norrøna's and Peak Performance's customers perceive a clearer connection, suggesting a better alignment between brand image and store design compared to Hestra. This may be attributed to Norrøna and Peak Performance integrating more innovative store elements to accentuate their values and enrich the customer experience, aligning with work by Triki & Hakimi (2017). For instance, both managers and customers of Norrøna emphasized the integrated storytelling elements showcasing the brand's heritage through pictures. This aligns with research suggesting that concept stores aim to create brand awareness and positive brand associations (Egan-Wyer et al., 2021). In contrast, Peak Performance's managers and customers emphasize their centralized table, fostering a relaxed and inviting atmosphere for social interactions. The table aims to cultivate a more personal and homely ambiance, distinguishing the shopping experience from traditional retail environments (Egan-Wyer et al., 2021; Triki & Hakimi, 2017).

Both Norrøna and Peak Performance use these innovative store elements to foster a sense of community and belonging, aligning with Egan-Wyer et al. (2021) assertion regarding the vital role of concept stores in fostering customer-retailer relationships. Conversely, Hestras managers do not emphasize these elements in their stores. However, their customers express a strong desire for amenities such as a seating area and a coffee station. This incongruity highlights a notable gap between the brand's offerings and consumer expectations. These expectations likely stem from customers' perceptions of the brand, aligning with Keller (1993)

assertion that brand image is the brand association held in consumers memory. This indicates that customers hold high expectations for the store atmosphere, seeking a shopping experience characterized by relaxation and comfort. However, Hestras current approach appears to fall short of meeting these expectations. Given that the concept store aims to create brand awareness through innovative yet subtle elements (Egan-Wyer et al., 2021), the absence of key features like a seating area poses a significant missed opportunity. In such settings, clear and innovative store elements are crucial to reinforcing the brand's values, perhaps through storytelling or by providing a space for customers to engage with the brand on a more personal level. These elements are pivotal in bridging the perceived image of the concept store with the brand's intended image, underlining their importance in shaping the overall consumer experience and brand perception.

5.2.5 Convenience & Accessibility

5.2.5.1 Norrøna: Customer vs Manager
Norrøna's managers highlight the importance of prime locations with strong commercial activity and foot traffic, such as city centers or shopping centers. This strategy aims to enhance brand exposure and accessibility to both existing and potential customers, ultimately driving sales. Similarly, the consumers perceive the location as city central, with high foot traffic and adjacent to similar outdoor brands. However, even though there is an aligned perception about the convenience and accessibility of the store's location, the customers emphasize the unassuming exterior design, lacking wow-factor to draw them in. Instead, they walked past the store without noticing it.

5.2.5.2 Hestra: Customer vs Manager
Hestra motivates their choice of location based on potential visibility, serving as an advertising platform showcasing their brand. The location is strategically chosen to reflect their brand identity, suited among similar high-end brands and on a street frequented by their target audience. The location chosen is central and accessible for customers. Similarly, customers perceive the store-location as central, located among exclusive brands and clientele. They describe it as accessible but stress the rather anonymous appearance and lack a capturing element increasing customer awareness and engagement.

5.2.5.3 Peak Performance: Customer vs Manager
According to Peak Performance, the store is a key touchpoint in engaging with customers, increasing brand visibility and brand awareness. Therefore, they emphasize a location with geographical relevance and high foot traffic that resonates with their brand identity. Similarly, their customers perceive the location as accessible due to its placement on the main street. However, some also perceive a lack of prestige in this location.

5.2.5.4 Comparison Among Brands
The convenience and accessibility of a store is often linked to its location (Gilmore et al., 2001). When deciding on a location, all managers emphasize that their primary objective is to enhance

brand exposure and accessibility for both existing and potential customers. Consequently, city center areas are preferred for their high visibility and foot traffic. According to the findings, all customers perceive the concept store's location as accessible and convenient, located in city centers where foot traffic is abundant. This is in line with Egan-Wyer et al. (2021) suggestion that concept stores offer a more accessible shopping experience in city center and high streets, thus reducing friction in the customer experience.

However, Peak Performance's customers highlighted a perceived lack of prestige in the selected location. They assert that the mainstream pedestrian street does not align with the brand image they associate with Peak Performance, indicating a misalignment between the intended brand image and the perception of the location. In contrast, Hestra distinguishes itself as the only brand emphasizing how their choice of location meticulously aligns with their brand positioning strategy. Their aim is to convey a specific image that resonates with their target market. Through strategically situating their concept store near competitors that share similar values, Hestra endeavors to reinforce their brand identity and strengthen their position in the market. This strategic approach aligns with the finding of Virvilaite & Dailydiene (2012), who asserts that businesses consider factors like rivals when choosing a store location. Hestras customers perceive this strategic alignment positively, as they acknowledge the store as being surrounded by comparable exclusive stores. This indicates that prioritizing accessibility alone is insufficient. It suggests that other factors such as rivals, must also be considered to achieve alignment between the perceived image and the intended one.

Furthermore, despite the emphasis by all managers on accessibility, customers perceive the exterior design of both Norrøna's and Hestra's stores as rather anonymous, lacking a wow-factor. This indicates a misalignment between the perception of exterior design and the intended accessibility. If customers cannot easily locate the store, then its accessibility is compromised, undermining the purpose of selecting a prime location to enhance brand awareness. In contrast, Peak Performance's customers do not mention similar concerns, which might suggest that the brand has a more favorable and clear exterior design, or a higher brand awareness among its customers, who are likely more familiar with the brand and its store location. This underscores the importance of exterior design in shaping customer perceptions and experiences. While concept stores may not prioritize dramatic visual elements, as noted by Egan-Wyer et al. (2021), the exterior design remains a critical aspect of ensuring both convenience and accessibility. Brands must recognize the significance of exterior design in shaping customer perception in order to successfully utilize the concept store format.

5.3 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, we have conducted a comprehensive analysis based on two distinct research questions. Firstly, we explored the underlying intentions driving fashion manufacturer brands to establish concept stores. Our analysis uncovered four key drivers: (1) *Brand building and control:* In accordance with Egan-Wyer (2021), concept stores communicate the brand's softer

values, such as its history and brand values, fostering a deep connection with consumers (Borghini et al., 2009; Egan-Wyer et al., 2021; Nierobisch et al., 2017; Warnaby & Shi, 2018). By establishing concept stores, brands gain control over their brand presentation and perception, leading to improved brand attitudes, increased brand awareness and stronger brand associations (Egan-Wyer et al., 2021). (2) *Strategic planning and financial motivations:* Concept stores serve as strategically positioned long-term investments. It enhances market presence, differentiation, and brands awareness while ensuring convenience and accessibility, suggesting greater emphasis on location than previously asserted in research (Egan-Wyer et al., 2021). They provide a cost-effective alternative to flagship stores, effectively communicating the brand's story through innovative elements and curated assortment, despite its smaller size; making it an intermediate store format. Concept stores also serve as a subsequent step in penetrating a market after establishing flagship stores. (3) *Consumer trends and brand adaptations:* Concept stores allow brands to respond to evolving consumer trends (Floor, 2006; Gauri et al., 2021), serving as a strategic tool to differentiate themselves in the competitive market (Jahn et al., 2018; Klein et al., 2016; Robertson et al., 2018). (4) S*upport for online sales:* Concept stores serve to support online sales by offering customers a unique in-person experience, facilitating direct product interaction, enriching brand presence, and augmenting online sales within the chosen market.

Secondly, we investigate whether consumers' perception of concept store image diverged from the intended image of the brand. We have examined this by focusing on five attributes derived from previous research (Anselmsson et al., 2017; McGoldrick, 2002a; Virvilaite & Dailydiene, 2012), which we believe shape store image: *merchandise, service quality, pricing, atmosphere & layout* and *convenience & accessibility.* Our findings suggest that while all brands strive to create a store image that aligns with their overall brand image (Alić et al., 2017; Kremer & Viot, 2012; Virvilaite & Dailydiene, 2012), there are discrepancies in consumers' perception of the store image compared to the intended image (Gilmore et al., 2001).

Merchandise: A discrepancy exists between the brand's intended image and customer perception of sustainability, product range and which products are associated with the brand. This emphasizes the importance of enhancing in-store strategies and refine marketing strategies for clearer communications. *Service quality:* Discrepancies are observed between the brand's intended image and customer perception of the service experience as well as the communication regarding service enhancements. This underscores the importance of refining service delivery and communication strategies both in terms of personnel and service enhancements. *Pricing:* There are discrepancies in the brand's intended image and customer perception of the value proposition. This emphasizes the importance of reassessing the brand's messaging and value communication. *Atmosphere & layout:* Discrepancies are identified between the brand's intended image and customer perception of the store's atmosphere and design and its alignment with brand values. This highlights the importance of innovative store elements to reinforcing the brand's values. *Convenience & accessibility:* Discrepancies emerge between the brands perception of location accessibility and customers perception of its alignment with the desired image as well as the anonymity of the exterior design. This underscores the importance of taking

other factors than accessibility into account when choosing a location and carefully considers the exterior design.

These findings underscore the tendency for managers to overestimate their capacity to communicate the intended brand image through the concept store (Samli et al., 1998), highlighting the importance of ensuring alignment between the store image and brand image.

6. Conclusion

The final chapter of this thesis will conclude and revisit the purpose of the study, the research questions and aim in order to conclude whether they were fulfilled or not. The study's theoretical contribution and managerial contribution will be discussed as the result of the investigation. Lastly, suggestions for future research will be presented.

6.1 Research Aim & Objectives

The aim of this case study, focusing on the concept stores operated by Norrøna, Hestra and Peak Performance, was to contribute to our understanding of why fashion manufacturer brands decide to establish concept stores and how the consumers' perception of the concept stores' image differs from the brand's intended image. By delving into these aspects, this study aims to provide valuable insights into why fashion manufacturing brands choose the concept store format and deepen our understanding of the capabilities and limitations of concept stores as mediators of brand image. We approached this from a dual perspective, drawing insights from both brand managers and consumers.

We started by exploring the reasons behind fashion manufacturer brands' decisions to open concept stores. Our findings contribute to theoretical advancements by supplementing existing literature in this domain of concept store format. As detailed in chapter 5.1, we have identified four key drivers: 1) *Brand building & control*; concept stores provide a powerful platform for brand storytelling, while enabling precise control of brand image, 2) *Strategic planning & financial motivations*; concept stores serve as long term investments, enhancing market presence and differentiation, and serve as a cost-effective alternative to flagship stores, 3) *Consumer trends & brand adaptation*; concept stores are is a response to evolving consumer behaviors, aiming to provide innovative and tailored experiences, 4) *Support for online sales;* support for online sales concept stores complement e-commerce strategies, enhancing omnichannel strategy.

Additionally, we delved into how consumers perceive the image of concept stores, and notably, how this perception may diverge from the brand's intended image. The analysis focused on five key attributes shaping store image: *merchandise, service quality, pricing, atmosphere & layout,* and *accessibility & convenience.* Our findings suggest that while all brands endeavor to create a store image reflecting their brand image, there are significant gaps between managerial intentions and consumer perceptions. *Merchandise:* While managers consistently emphasize sustainability and a curated assortment, these messages often fail to resonate with consumers. Furthermore, there is a discrepancy between Peak Performance customers' perception and managerial understanding of the brand associations to skiing. *Service quality:* While managers emphasize a high service level, customers perceive variations in service quality, particularly noted at Peak Performance, and inadequate communication regarding service enhancements.

Pricing: Managers underscore a higher price premium as indicative of their brands value proposition. While customers generally grasp the concept of premium pricing strategies, there is a perception that certain products, like Hestra's less functional gloves, are overpriced. *Atmosphere & Layout:* Managers intend for the atmosphere and layout to reflect their identity. This is well-received by Norrøna's and Peak Performance's customers, though Hestra's minimalist design requires stronger alignment with brand values. *Convenience & accessibility:* Managers aim for the location to be accessible and create brand awareness, but customers do not understand the location's alignment with the brand's image. Additionally, customers perceive the exterior design as anonymous, affecting the intended accessibility of the store.

These findings underscore a common tendency among managers to overestimate their capacity to communicate the brand image through the concept store format. Consequently, customers perceive a gap between the brand's promises and its actual delivery, which can potentially undermine trust and loyalty. Considering concept stores as an intermediate format, they are well-suited for brands with limited resources. However, due to their restricted space and emphasis on facilitating everyday tasks rather than creating a dramatic and exciting atmosphere, it becomes essential for businesses to find effective ways to showcase their image. Therefore, ensuring that all aspects contributing to the store's image align with the overall brand image becomes even more critical. While concept stores can effectively convey a brand's image, their success depends on aligning managerial intentions with consumer perceptions.

6.2 Theoretical Implications

6.2.1 Refining the Definition of Concept Stores

The theoretical implications of this study contribute to refining the definition of concept stores proposed by Egan-Wyer et al. (2021). As outlined in Table 1, this definition primarily defines concept stores' locations as accessible, distinguishing them from the perceived desirability linked to flagship stores or the variable nature often assigned to pop-up stores. However, Egan-Wyer et al. (2021) conducted an explorative case study of the IKEA showroom concept store. Traditionally, IKEA's stores are large, out-of-town warehouse formats, which makes the introduction of concept stores in city centers a notable shift in terms of accessibility. In contrast, for fashion manufacturing brands, this shift is less pronounced since their stores are typically already situated in or near city centers, or their products are available through retailers located in urban areas. Our findings reinforce this finding as managers are more focused on enhancing market presence, differentiation, and brand awareness rather than just improving accessibility. This has implications for theory as it underscores the importance of concept stores not only as accessible touch points but also as essential elements in driving brand awareness. This indicates a necessity to refine the definition of a concept store to ensure it accurately captures its strategic role for fashion manufacturing brands. Therefore, we propose that the definition changes from "*accessible*" to "*variable*". Additionally, Egan-Wyer et al. (2021) definition states that a concept store does not offer direct sales. For instance, IKEA's concept store aims to inspire and

assist customers in planning and ordering, without enabling immediate purchases. However, our study shows that all concept stores examined do offer direct sales. This difference might be because the furniture industry, and especially large furnishing retailers like IKEA, require large inventories compared to the fashion industry. Even though the main goal of concept stores is to build and reinforce the brand, they still allow in-store purchases. This suggests that the definition does not adequately apply to the fashion industry. Consequently, we propose revising the definition to include "*direct sales*".

Table 6. How Concept Stores in Fashion Retail Differ From Furnishing Retail

Store	Aims to…	Type of customer	Duration	Assortment	Direct Sales?	Location	Atmosphere
Concept store in furnishing retail	Inspire	Task-oriented	Permanent	Limited selection of own-brands	No	Accessible	Ordinary
Concept store in fashion retail	Inspire	Task-oriented	Permanent	Limited selection of own-brands	Yes	Variable	Ordinary

6.2.2 A New Perspective on Image Attributes

In our analysis of store image, we used attributes derived from image theories initially developed for traditional retail stores. These key attributes included *merchandise, service quality, pricing, atmosphere & layout* and *convenience & accessibility*. When applying these to concept stores, it became evident that they did not seamlessly align with the complexities inherent in the experiential retail setting. Our findings revealed a shift in both customer and management perceptions regarding *service quality* and *atmosphere*.

Traditional views on service quality have primarily focused on personnel, overall service and after-sales activities, the number of salespeople and return policies. Our findings indicate that while the role of personnel remains crucial in concept stores, there is also a significant emphasis on innovative service enhancements. These enhancements aim to elevate the customer experience beyond the conventional service aspects typical in traditional stores (See chapter 2.2.2.1 under Service Quality). Therefore, we propose to expand the explanation of the service quality attribute by including *service enhancements*.

Service enhancements can be described as additional services and amenities that may be offered in-store to elevate the overall customer experience. Compared to basic transactional aspects, these enhancements aim to enrich the shopping experience by creating a more enjoyable and convenient shopping experience. This could include complimentary offerings, such as hot chocolate or coffee, creating a more comfortable and welcoming environment. Another important factor is in-store repairs and customization, which can add substantial value by

enhancing convenience and demonstrating their commitment to customer care. These service enhancements can therefore be seen as a tool to simplify the overall purchasing process.

Furthermore, traditional research on store atmosphere has focused on standard elements of store environments typical of traditional retail settings (see chapter 2.2.2.1 under Atmosphere & Layout). However, our study reveals that these aspects are not the main focus for customers or managers in concept stores. Instead, respondents emphasized the importance of storytelling and community-building elements that enhance the store's atmosphere. Therefore, we propose to expand the explanation of the atmosphere attribute by including *storytelling elements* and *community-building elements*.

Storytelling elements involve conveying a narrative of the brand through various touch points within the store. Storytelling serves to create an immersive experience that resonates deeply with customers, creating an engaging and memorable atmosphere. This can also help brands to differentiate themselves and build strong brand identities. Examples of storytelling factors include highlighting brand heritage through pictures, detailing the product journey through displays, emphasizing environmental efforts by displaying older collections.

Additionally, *community-building elements* play a crucial role in shaping the atmosphere of a store by fostering a sense of community among customers. These elements help transform the store into social hubs where customers can connect with both personnel and like-minded individuals, creating a feeling of belonging that encourages brand loyalty. By providing spaces that encourage social interactions like lounge areas or tables, where customers can rewind, play a game and share experiences, the store becomes more than just a place for transactions. Instead, it becomes a place for shared experiences, enhancing the overall atmosphere with a sense of warmth and inclusivity.

In summary, our findings contribute to a richer theoretical framework for understanding store atmosphere and service quality. By integrating service enhancements into the *service quality* attribute and storytelling elements and community-building elements to the *atmosphere* attribute, we extend the traditional understanding of what constitutes high-quality service and a positive and inspiring store ambiance in retail settings. This integration could provide a more comprehensive understanding and facilitate more effective management of the brand image in concept stores. The inclusion of these new elements allows for a more thorough and accurate assessment of consumer's perception of store image. This approach enables managers to identify and address discrepancies between the perceived and intended brand image.

6.3 Managerial Implications

6.3.1 Concept Stores: An Intermediate Store Format

During our research, we have identified four key drivers for fashion manufacturer brands opening concept stores: 1) brand building & control, 2) strategic planning & financial motivations, 3) consumer trends & brand adaptation 4) support for online sales. However, all these drivers may not be explicitly unique for the concept store format. Instead, they may also apply for traditional stores and other experience-based store formats. For instance, concept stores, pop-up stores and flagship stores can all serve as strategically positioned long-term investments (Egan-Wyer et al., 2021; Robertson et al., 2018). Their primary objective is not necessarily to generate direct sales but rather to emotionally connect consumers to the brand (Egan-Wyer et al., 2021; Huber et al., 2013; Triki & Hakimi, 2017). However, while the intentions for opening concept stores share similarities with traditional and experience-based store formats, concept stores offer unique advantages, particularly in comparison to flagship stores. Concept stores are cost-effective alternatives due to their ability to maintain lower establishment costs and smaller initial investments, making them a great option for companies seeking to expand their market presence without economical strains. Furthermore, our research emphasizes how concept stores, despite their smaller size, excel in conveying the brand's narrative through innovative elements and carefully curated product selections. This dual functionality positions them as an intermediate store format, bridging a gap between traditional retail formats and flagship stores. For managers, it is crucial to recognize this unique position of concept stores, allowing them to craft a nuanced store strategy. Such strategy can effectively amplify brand visibility and enhance the overall customer experience, ultimately driving increased sales and growth.

6.3.2 Concept Stores: A Mediator of Brand Image

Our results indicate a misalignment between customers' perceptions of the concept store image and the brand's intended image. This indicates that managers frequently overestimate their ability to effectively convey their brand image, leading to customers perceiving a gap in the in-store communication and store attributes. These insights demonstrate the importance of minimizing the disparity to ensure a consistent and cohesive brand experience (Gilmore et al., 2001; McGoldrick, 2002a). By utilizing the insights from this research, managers can address these disparities and make informed decisions to improve the alignment between customers perception and brand image. These insights could enhance existing concept stores and benefit those planning to adapt the concept store format.

In terms of *merchandise*, improving in-store strategies and refining marketing communication, can more effectively highlight the brands commitment to certain values, aligning customers' perceptions with the brands' image. Regarding *service quality*, it is important to have a clear communication of service enhancements and as well as a consistent staff training program and a comprehensive system for following up on staff performance. This approach can ensure that

service experience consistently meets the brand's standards and aligns with customer expectations and perceptions. Addressing *pricing* discrepancies includes reassessing the value proposition and its communication of benefits. This approach can help align the brand's premium pricing strategy with customers' perceptions. The store's *atmosphere & layout* should include design elements that reflect the brands' values. This will create a more consistent and engaging experience. Finally, considerations of *convenience & accessibility* should extend beyond physical access and evaluate location appeal and exterior design. This approach can enhance customer perception and support the brands overall positioning. Conclusively, by addressing these areas, brands can efficiently convey their intended brand image through the concept store format.

6.4 Limitations & Future Research

While this study provides insights into the phenomenon of concept stores, there is still need for future research. As concept stores represent a relatively new retail format, there is limited prior research that explores them. While this creates significant opportunities for new discoveries and contributions to the field, it also imposes limitations due to the reliance on a narrow literature base. Thus, the definition of concept stores in previous research is not entirely applicable in fashion manufacturing retail. This indicates that research on additional sectors may provide valuable insights in order to determine which concept store characteristics are overarching characteristics. Evidently, additional research on the phenomenon is essential in order to build a more robust theoretical framework and reach a broader consensus on the concept store theory.

Furthermore, throughout this research, it was acknowledged that traditional image theory does not seamlessly apply to concept stores. As the theory is derived from studies of traditional retail environments, it does not consider the unique elements of these experiential store formats. Evidently, our research found new perspectives on the store attributes *service quality* and *atmosphere*, namely *service enhancement, storytelling elements* and *community-building elements*. Considering these implications, future research should focus on empirically testing and validating the proposed elements of concept stores. In doing so, future research could develop novel frameworks of the store image theory in relation to experiential retailing.

References

Aaker, D. A. (1991). Managing Brand Equity: Capitalizing on the Value of a Brand Name, Illustrated edition., New York : Toronto : New York: Jossey Bass

Aaker, D. A. (1995). Building Strong Brands, Free Press

Agndal, H. & Axelsson, B. (2019). Professionell marknadsföring, 4th edn, Studentlitteratur AB

Ailawadi, K. L. & Keller, K. L. (2004). Understanding Retail Branding: Conceptual Insights and Research Priorities, *Journal of Retailing*, [e-journal] vol. 80, no. 4, pp.331–342, Available Online: https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S0022435904000648 [Accessed 5 December 2023]

Alić, A., Agić, E. & Činjarević, M. (2017). The Importance of Store Image and Retail Service Quality in Private Brand Image-Building, *Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp.27–42

Amer Sports. (2023). Amer Sports Annual Report 2023, Available Online: https://investors.amersports.com/files/doc_financials/2023/ar/Amer_Sports_Annual_Report_2023_single_page_FINAL.pdf

Anselmsson, J., Burt, S. & Tunca, B. (2017). An Integrated Retailer Image and Brand Equity Framework : Re-Examining, Extending, and Restructuring Retailer Brand Equity, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, vol. 38, pp.194–203

Arrigo, E. (2015). The Role of the Flagship Store Location in Luxury Branding. An International Exploratory Study: International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management, *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, vol. 43, no. 6, pp.518–537

Azeem, S. & Sharma, R. (2015). Elements of the Retail Marketing Mix: A Study of Different Retail Formats in India, *The Business & Management Review*, [e-journal] vol. 5, no. 4, pp.51–61, Available Online: https://cberuk.com/cdn/conference_proceedings/2015iciee_india11.pdf [Accessed 30 March 2024]

Bagdare, S. & Jain, R. (2013). Measuring Retail Customer Experience: International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management, *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, vol. 41, no. 10, pp.790–804

Baker, J., Grewal, D. & Parasuraman, A. (1994). The Influence of Store Environment on Quality Inferences and Store Image, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, [e-journal] vol. 22, no. 4, pp.328–339, Available Online: http://link.springer.com/10.1177/0092070394224002 [Accessed 17 April 2024]

Baker, J., Parasuraman, A., Grewal, D. & Voss, G. B. (2002). The Influence of Multiple Store Environment Cues on Perceived Merchandise Value and Patronage Intentions, *Journal of Marketing*, [e-journal] vol. 66, no. 2, pp.120–141, Available Online: http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1509/jmkg.66.2.120.18470 [Accessed 26 April 2024]

Beckman, A. & Michélsen, C. (2019). Creative Concept or Watered-down Version? A Study on Factors That Influence How a Concept Store Format Contributes to a Format Portfolio, Master Thesis

Beneke, J., Brito, A. & Garvey, K.-A. (2015). Propensity to Buy Private Label Merchandise: The Contributory Effects of Store Image, Price, Risk, Quality and Value in the Cognitive Stream, *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, vol. 43, no. 1, p.43

Berman, B. (2019). Flatlined: Combatting the Death of Retail Stores, *Business Horizons*, vol. 62, no. 1, pp.75–82

Blazquez, M., Boardman, R. & Xu, L. (2019). International Flagship Stores: An Exploration of Store Atmospherics and Their Influence on Purchase Behaviour, *International Journal of Business and Globalisation*, vol. 22, no. 1, p.110

Bloemer, J. & De Ruyter, K. (1998). On the Relationship between Store Image, Store Satisfaction and Store Loyalty, *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 32, no. 5/6, pp.499–513

Bonfrer, A., Chintagunta, P. & Dhar, S. (2022). Retail Store Formats, Competition and Shopper Behavior: A Systematic Review, *Journal of Retailing*, [e-journal] vol. 98, no. 1, pp.71–91, Available Online: https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S0022435922000100 [Accessed 26 April 2024]

Borghini, S., Diamond, N., Kozinets, R. V., McGrath, M. A., Muñiz, A. M. & Sherry, J. F. (2009). Why Are Themed Brandstores So Powerful? Retail Brand Ideology at American Girl Place, *Journal of Retailing*, vol. 85, no. 3, pp.363–375

Brown, J. R. (2010). Managing the Retail Format Portfolio: An Application of Modern Portfolio Theory: Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp.19–28

Bryman, A. & Bell, E. (2017). Företagsekonomiska Forskningsmetoder, Upplaga 3., Stockholm: Liber

Burt, S. & Davies, K. (2010). From the Retail Brand to the Retail- *Er* as a Brand: Themes and Issues in Retail Branding Research, *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, [e-journal] vol. 38, no. 11/12, pp.865–878, Available Online: https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/09590551011085957/full/html [Accessed 17 April 2024]

Burt, S., Johansson, U. & Thelander, Å. (eds). (2010). Consuming IKEA: Different Perspectives on Consumer Images of a Global Retailer, Lund, Sweden: Lund Business Press

Bustamante, J. C. & Rubio, N. (2017). Measuring Customer Experience in Physical Retail Environments, *Journal of Service Management*, vol. 28, no. 5, pp.884–913

Chun, H., Joo, H. H., Kang, J. & Lee, Y. (2023). E-Commerce and Local Labor Markets: Is the "Retail Apocalypse" Near?, *Journal of Urban Economics*, vol. 137, p.103594

Corkery, M. (2017). Is American Retail at a Historic Tipping Point?, *The New York Times*, 15 April, Available Online: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/15/business/retail-industry.html [Accessed 28 March 2024]

Creswell, J. W. & Creswell, J. D. (2023). Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches, Sixth edition., Los Angeles: SAGE

Dahlén, M., Lange, F. & Rosengren, S. (2017). Optimal Marknadskommunikation, 3rd edn, Stockholm: Liber

Daniel, C. & Hernandez, T. (2024). What Retail Apocalypse? A Delphi Forecast of Commercial Space Demand in the Toronto Region, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, vol. 77, p.103670

Dawson, J. (2000). Retailing at Century End: Some Challenges for Management and Research, *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, [e-journal] vol. 10, no. 2, pp.119–148, Available Online: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/095939600342325 [Accessed 1 April 2024]

de Lassus, C. & Anido Freire, N. (2014). Access to the Luxury Brand Myth in Pop-up Stores:

A Netnographic and Semiotic Analysis, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp.61–68

Deb, P. (2023). COVID 19 and the Global E-Commerce: Indian Journal of Law and Legal Research, *Indian Journal of Law and Legal Research*, vol. 5 Issue 1, pp.1–5

Dolbec, P.-Y. & Chebat, J.-C. (2013). The Impact of a Flagship vs. a Brand Store on Brand Attitude, Brand Attachment and Brand Equity, *Journal of Retailing*, vol. 89, no. 4, pp.460–466

Donovan, R. J. & Rossiter, J. R. (1982). Store Atmosphere: An Environmental Psychology Approach: Journal of Retailing, *Journal of Retailing*, vol. 58, no. 1, p.34

Dubois, A. & Gadde, L.-E. (2002). Systematic Combining: An Abductive Approach to Case Research, *Journal of Business Research*, [e-journal] vol. 55, no. 7, pp.553–560, Available Online: https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S0148296300001958 [Accessed 28 April 2024]

Easterby-Smith, M., Jaspersen, L., J., Thorpe, R. & Valizade, D. (2021). Management and Business Research, Seventh edition., London ; Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications

Egan-Wyer, C. J., Burt, S., Hultman, J., Johansson, U., Beckman, A. & Michélsen, C. (2021). Ease or Excitement? Exploring How Concept Stores Contribute to a Retail Portfolio, *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, vol. 49, no. 7, pp.1025–1044

Faircloth, J. B., Capella, L. M. & Alford, B. L. (2001). The Effect of Brand Attitude and Brand Image on Brand Equity: Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice, *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, vol. 9, no. 3, pp.61–75

Floor, K. (2006). Branding a Store: How to Build Successful Retail Brands in a Changing Marketplace, Philadelphia: Kogan Page

Fontana, F. (2023). The Evolution of the Flagship Store. Re-Defining the Design of Commercial Spaces for Fashion, 1S, *ZoneModa Journal*, vol. 13, no. 1S, pp.35–47

Fournier, S. (1998). Consumers and Their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research, *Journal of Consumer Research*, [e-journal] vol. 24, no. 4, pp.343–353, Available Online: https://academic.oup.com/jcr/article-lookup/doi/10.1086/209515 [Accessed 4 April 2024]

Gauri, D. K., Jindal, R. P., Ratchford, B., Fox, E., Bhatnagar, A., Pandey, A., Navallo, J. R., Fogarty, J., Carr, S. & Howerton, E. (2021). Evolution of Retail Formats: Past, Present, and Future, *Journal of Retailing*, [e-journal] vol. 97, no. 1, pp.42–61, Available Online: https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S0022435920300737 [Accessed 1 April 2024]

Gilmore, R., Margulis, W. & Rauch, R. A. (2001). Consumer's Attitude and Retailers' Images in Creating Store Choice. A Study of Two Different Sides of the Same Story, *International Journal of Value-Based Management*, vol. 14, no. 3, pp.205–221

González-Benito, Ó. (2001). Inter-Format Spatial Competition of Spanish Hypermarkets, *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, [e-journal] vol. 11, no. 1, pp.63–81, Available Online: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/713770572 [Accessed 1 April 2024]

González-Benito, Ó., Martos-Partal, M. & Garrido-Morgado, Á. (2018). Retail Store Format Decisions, in K. Gielens & E. Gijsbrechts (eds), *Handbook of Research on Retailing*, [e-book] Edward Elgar Publishing, Available Online: https://china.elgaronline.com/view/edcoll/9781786430274/9781786430274.00027.xml [Accessed 1 April 2024]

González-Benito, Ó., Muñoz-Gallego, P. A. & Kopalle, P. K. (2005). Asymmetric

Competition in Retail Store Formats: Evaluating Inter- and Intra-Format Spatial Effects, *Journal of Retailing*, vol. 81, no. 1, pp.59–73

Grewal, D., Breugelmans, E., Gauri, D. & Gielens, K. (2023). Re-Imagining the Physical Store, *Journal of Retailing*, [e-journal] vol. 99, no. 4, pp.481–486, Available Online: https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S0022435923000611 [Accessed 6 May 2024]

Haas, S. & Schmidt, L. (2016). What Drives the Success of Pop-Up Stores?, *Wissenschaftliche Beiträge / Technische Hochschule Wildau*, [e-journal], Available Online: https://opus4.kobv.de/opus4-th-wildau/frontdoor/index/index/docId/539 [Accessed 1 April 2024]

Henkel, L. & Toporowski, W. (2023). Once They've Been There, They like to Share: Capitalizing on Ephemerality and Need for Uniqueness to Drive Word of Mouth for Brands with Pop-up Stores: Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science: Official Publication of the Academy of Marketing Science, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science: Official Publication of the Academy of Marketing Science*, vol. 51, no. 6, pp.1284–1304

Hestra. (n.d.). Hestra Konceptbutiker, Available Online: https://hestra-production.imgix.net/2021/05/19080217/Hestra-store-stockholm.jpg?fit=clip&w=1800&fm=jpg&auto=compress%2Cformat [Accessed 26 May 2024]

Hestra Gloves. (2023). In Good Hands - Sustainability Report 2023, Available Online: https://issuu.com/hestragloves/docs/sustainability_report_2023 [Accessed 26 April 2024]

Holbrook, M. & Hirschman, E. (1982). The Experiential Aspects of Consumption: Consumer Fantasies, Feelings, and Fun, *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp.132–140

Hollenbeck, C. R., Peters, C. & Zinkhan, G. M. (2008). Retail Spectacles and Brand Meaning: Insights from a Brand Museum Case Study, *Journal of Retailing*, vol. 84, no. 3, pp.334–353

Huber, F., Lenzen, M., Vizethum, S. & Weißhaar, I. (2013). Erlebnis-Shopping Concept Stores: eine empirische Analyse des Einkaufserlebnisses durch Lifestyle und Atmosphäre, BoD – Books on Demand

Hultman, J., Johansson, U., Wispeler, A. & Wolf, L. (2017). Exploring Store Format Development and Its Influence on Store Image and Store Clientele – the Case of IKEA's Development of an Inner-City Store Format, *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, vol. 27, no. 3, pp.227–240

Jahn, S., Nierobisch, T., Toporowski, W. & Dannewald, T. (2018). Selling the Extraordinary in Experiential Retail Stores, *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp.412–424

James, D. L., Durand, R. M. & Dreves, R. A. (1976). The Use of a Multi-Attribute Attitude Model in a Store Image Study: Journal of Retailing, *Journal of Retailing*, vol. 52, no. 2, pp.23–32

Jaravaza, D. & Chitando, P. (2024). The Role of Store Location in Influencing Customers' Store Choice, vol. 4, p.302

Jin, B. & Kim, J. (2003). A Typology of Korean Discount Shoppers: Shopping Motives, Store Attributes, and Outcomes: International Journal of Service Industry Management, *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, vol. 14, no. 4, pp.396–419

Jones, M. A., Mothersbaugh, D. L. & Beatty, S. E. (2003). The Effects of Locational Convenience on Customer Repurchase Intentions across Service Types, *Journal of*

Services Marketing, vol. 17, no. 7, pp.701–712

Kaltcheva, V. D. & Weitz, B. A. (2006). When Should a Retailer Create an Exciting Store Environment?, *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 70, no. 1, pp.107–118

Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity: Journal of Marketing, *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 57, no. 1, pp.1–22

Kerin, R., Jain, A. & Howard, D. (1992). Store Shopping Experience and Consumer Price-Quality-Value Perceptions., *Journal of Retailing*, vol. 68, no. 4, pp.376–397

Kim, Y.-K. & Jones, R. (2011). WITHDRAWN: Single-Brand Retailers: Building Brand Loyalty in the off-Line Environment, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, p.S0969698911000178

Klein, J. F., Falk, T., Esch, F.-R. & Gloukhovtsev, A. (2016). Linking Pop-up Brand Stores to Brand Experience and Word of Mouth: The Case of Luxury Retail, *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 69, no. 12, pp.5761–5767

Kotler, P. (1973). Atmospherics as a Marketing Tool, *Journal of Retailing*, vol. 49, no. 4, p.48

Kotler, P., Keller, K. & Chernev, A. (2021). Marketing Management, 16th edn, United Kingdom: Pearson education limited

Kozinets, R. V. (2002). The Field behind the Screen: Using Netnography for Marketing Research in Online Communities, *Journal of Marketing Research*, vol. 39, no. 1, pp.61–72

Kozinets, R. V., Sherry, J. F., DeBerry-Spence, B., Duhachek, A., Nuttavuthisit, K. & Storm, D. (2002). Themed Flagship Brand Stores in the New Millennium, *Journal of Retailing*, vol. 78, no. 1, pp.17–29

Kremer, F. & Viot, C. (2012). How Store Brands Build Retailer Brand Image, *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, vol. 40, no. 7, pp.528–543

Kumar, A. & Kim, Y.-K. (2014). The Store-as-a-Brand Strategy: The Effect of Store Environment on Customer Responses, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, [e-journal] vol. 21, no. 5, pp.685–695, Available Online: https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S0969698914000575 [Accessed 17 April 2024]

Léo, P.-Y. & Philippe, J. (2002). Retail Centres: Location and Consumer's Satisfaction, *Service Industries Journal*, vol. 22, no. 1, pp.122–146

Levy, M., Weitz, B. & Grewal, D. (2014). Retailing Management, 9th edition., New York: McGraw Hill

Lindquist, Jay. D. (1974). Meaning of Image: A Survey of Empirical and HYpothetical Evidence, *Journal of Retailing*, vol. 50, no. 4, pp.29–37

Manlow, V. & Nobbs, K. (2013). Form and Function of Luxury Flagships : An International Exploratory Study of the Meaning of the Flagship Store for Managers and Customers: Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal, *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp.49–64

Marciniak, R. & Budnarowska, C. (2010). Marketing Approaches to Pop-up Stores: Exploration of Social Networking, [e-journal] vol. 42, no. 7, Available Online: https://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/15678/2/EAERCD_2009_Marciniak_&_Budnarowska.pdf [Accessed 26 March 2024]

Martineau, P. (1958). The Personality of the Retail Store, *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 36, no. 1, p.pp.47-55

Mazursky, D. & Jacoby, J. (1986). Exploring the Development of Store Images, *Journal of Retailing*, vol. 62, no. 2, pp.p145-165

McGoldrick, P. J. (2002a). Retail Marketing, 2nd edition., London: McGraw-Hill Higher

Education

Moore, C. M., Doherty, A. M. & Doyle, S. A. (2010). Flagship Stores as a Market Entry Method: The Perspective of Luxury Fashion Retailing, *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 44, no. 1/2, pp.139–161

Moore, C. M., Fernie, J. & Burt, S. (2000). Brands without Boundaries – The Internationalisation of the Designer Retailer's Brand, *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 34, no. 8, pp.919–937

Mossberg, L. (2007). A Marketing Approach to the Tourist Experience: Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality & Tourism, *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality & Tourism*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp.59–74

Niehm, L. S., Fiore, A. M., Miyoung Jeong, & Hye-Jeong Kim. (2006). Pop-up Retail's Acceptability as an Innovative Business Strategy and Enhancer of the Consumer Shopping Experience: Journal of Shopping Center Research, *Journal of Shopping Center Research*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp.1–30

Nierobisch, T., Toporowski, W., Dannewald, T. & Jahn, S. (2017). Flagship Stores for FMCG National Brands: Do They Improve Brand Cognitions and Create Favorable Consumer Reactions?: Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, vol. 34, pp.117–137

Nii Laryeafio, M. & Ogbewe, O. C. (2023). Ethical Consideration Dilemma: Systematic Review of Ethics in Qualitative Data Collection through Interviews, *Journal of Ethics in Entrepreneurship and Technology*, [e-journal] vol. 3, no. 2, pp.94–110, Available Online: https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JEET-09-2022-0014/full/html [Accessed 2 February 2024]

Nobbs, K., Moore, C. M. & Sheridan, M. (2012). The Flagship Format within the Luxury Fashion Market, *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, vol. 40, no. 12, pp.920–934

Norrøna. (n.d.a). Norrøna Concept Store Göteborg - Norrøna®, Available Online: https://www.norrona.com/sv-SE/norrona-butiker/norrona-concept-store-goteborg/ [Accessed 18 January 2024]

Norrøna. (n.d.b). History, Available Online: http://www.norrona.com/sv-SE/om-norrona/historia/ [Accessed 26 April 2024]

Osman, M. Z. (1993). A Conceptual Model of Retail Image Influences on Loyalty Patronage Behaviour, *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp.133–148

Pape, D. & Toporowski, W. (2023). Reviving the Experiential Store: The Effect of Scarcity and Perceived Novelty in Driving Word-of-Mouth, *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, vol. 51, no. 9/10, pp.1065–1094

PeakPerformance. (2019). Sustainability Performance Report 2019, Available Online: https://peakperformance.com/se/sv/media/wysiwyg/pdf/Sustainability_Performance_Report_2019_FINAL.pdf

Picot-Coupey, K. (2014). The Pop-up Store as a Foreign Operation Mode (FOM) for Retailers: International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management, *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, vol. 42, no. 7, pp.643–670

Post- och telestyrelsen. (2021). Digital omställning till följd av covid-19, p.257, Available Online: https://www.pts.se/globalassets/startpage/dokument/icke-legala-dokument/rapporter/2021/uppdrag-digital-omstallning-till-foljd-av-covid/digital-omstallning-till-foljd-av-covid.pdf [Accessed 8 November 2022]

Ramadan, Z., Farah, M., Abosag, I. & Sleiman, A. (2023). Typology of E-Commerce Shoppers: The Case of COVID-19, *Qualitative Market Research: An International*

Journal, vol. 26, no. 4, pp.345–367

Rennstam, J. & Wästerfors, D. (2018). Analyze! Crafting Your Data in Qualitative Research, First edition., Lund: Studentlitteratur

Reynolds, J., Howard, E., Cuthbertson, C. & Hristov, L. (2007). Perspectives on Retail Format Innovation: Relating Theory and Practice: International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management, *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, vol. 35, no. 8, pp.647–660

Rivett, L. (2022). Arc'teryx Launches 1st 'Pinnacle' Flagship Concept Store in Vancouver's Kitsilano Area [Interview/Photos], Available Online: https://retail-insider.com/retail-insider/2022/11/arcteryx-launches-1st-pinnacle-flagship-concept-store-in-vancouvers-kitsilano-area-interview-photos/ [Accessed 18 January 2024]

Robertson, T. s., Cesareo, L. & Gatignon, H. (2018). Pop-Ups, Ephemerality, and Consumer Experience: The Centrality of Buzz: Journal of the Association for Consumer Research, *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp.425–439

Sajonas, F. (2018). Your First Look Inside The North Face's New Brooklyn 'Prototype' Concept Store, *Hypebeast*, Available Online: https://hypebeast.com/2018/11/the-north-face-prototype-concept-store [Accessed 18 January 2024]

Samli, A. C., Kelly, J. P. & Hunt, H. K. (1998). Improving the Retail Performance by Contrasting Management- and Customer-Perceived Store Images, *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 43, no. 1, pp.27–38

Saunders, M. N. K., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. (2019). Research Methods for Business Students, Eighth Edition., New York: Pearson

Schmitt, B. (1999). Experiential Marketing, *Journal of Marketing Management*, vol. 15, no. 1–3, pp.53–67

Severin, V., Louviere, J. J. & Finn, A. (2001). The Stability of Retail Shopping Choices over Time and across Countries, *Journal of Retailing*, vol. 77, no. 2, p.185

Shi, Y., Lim, J. M., Weitz, B. A. & France, S. L. (2018). The Impact of Retail Format Diversification on Retailers' Financial Performance: Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, vol. 46, no. 1, pp.147–167

Sitoo. (2020). Hestra - Welcome to the Family!, Available Online: https://sitoo.com/articles/the-gloves-are-off-as-digital-transformation-accelerates-at-hestra [Accessed 5 May 2024]

Snoj, B., Pisnik Korda, A. & Mumel, D. (2004). The Relationships among Perceived Quality, Perceived Risk and Perceived Product Value, *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, [e-journal] vol. 13, no. 3, pp.156–167, Available Online: https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/10610420410538050/full/html [Accessed 20 May 2024]

Spena, T. r., Caridà, A., Colurcio, M. & Melia, M. (2012). Store Experience and Co-Creation: The Case of Temporary Shop: International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management, *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management*, vol. 40, no. 1, pp.21–40

Spence, C., Puccinelli, N. M., Grewal, D. & Roggeveen, A. L. (2014). Store Atmospherics: A Multisensory Perspective: Psychology & Marketing, *Psychology & Marketing*, vol. 31, no. 7, pp.472–488

ŞTIR, M. (2018). Product Quality Evaluation in Physical Stores versus Online Stores, *Expert Journal of Marketing*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp.7–13

Surchi, M. (2011). The Temporary Store: A New Marketing Tool for Fashion Brands: Journal

of Fashion Marketing & Management, *Journal of Fashion Marketing & Management*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp.257–270

Sweeney, J. C., Soutar, G. N. & Johnson, L. W. (1999). The Role of Perceived Risk in the Quality-Value Relationship: A Study in a Retail Environment, *Journal of Retailing*, [e-journal] vol. 75, no. 1, pp.77–105, Available Online: https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S0022435999800050 [Accessed 20 May 2024]

Thang, D. C. L. & Tan, B. L. B. (2003). Linking Consumer Perception to Preference of Retail Stores: An Empirical Assessment of the Multi-Attributes of Store Image, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, vol. 10, no. 4, pp.193–200

Toneguzzi, M. (2023). Swedish Outdoor Brand Peak Performance Launching Innovative Concept Store in Vancouver's Kitsilano [Interview], Available Online: https://retail-insider.com/retail-insider/2023/11/swedish-outdoor-brand-peak-performance-launching-innovative-concept-store-in-vancouvers-kitsilano-interview/ [Accessed 18 January 2024]

Triki, A. & Hakimi, M. (2017). The Concept Store as New Retailing Tool: From the Consumption Experience to the Revisit Intention, *Journal of Marketing Development and Competitiveness*, [e-journal], Available Online: https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-Concept-Store-as-New-Retailing-Tool%3A-From-the-Triki-Hakimi/53bee8bd0283a9b4bd7ac142337cf6868488cc72 [Accessed 18 March 2024]

Unni, A., Nand, S., Bhatt, V. & Sinha, B. (2023). A Study on the Customer Buying Behaviour on E-Commerce Websites with Respect to Electronics during Covid-19, in *2023 International Conference On Cyber Management And Engineering (CyMaEn)*, 2023 International Conference On Cyber Management And Engineering (CyMaEn), Bangkok, Thailand, 26 January 2023, Bangkok, Thailand: IEEE, pp.479–482, Available Online: https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/document/10051053/ [Accessed 28 March 2024]

Verhoef, P. C., Kannan, P. K. & Inman, J. J. (2015). From Multi-Channel Retailing to Omni-Channel Retailing, *Journal of Retailing*, [e-journal] vol. 91, no. 2, pp.174–181, Available Online: https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S0022435915000214 [Accessed 1 April 2024]

Verhoef, P. C., Lemon, K. N., Parasuraman, A., Roggeveen, A., Tsiros, M. & Schlesinger, L. A. (2009). Customer Experience Creation: Determinants, Dynamics and Management Strategies, *Journal of Retailing*, vol. 85, no. 1, pp.31–41

Via Ritzau. (2022). Peak Performance åbner ny Concept Store i Danmark, Available Online: https://via.ritzau.dk/pressemeddelelse/13665186/peak-performance-abner-ny-concept-store-i-danmark?publisherId=13561303 [Accessed 26 April 2024]

Virvilaite, R. & Dailydiene, M. (2012). Strengthening of a Private Brand: The Aspect of a Store's Image, *Engineering Economics*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp.90–98

Visplay. (n.d.). Norrøna Concept Store in Gothenburg, *Visplay*, Available Online: https://visplay.com/en/projects/norrona [Accessed 26 May 2024]

Warnaby, G. & Shi, C. (2018). Pop-up Retailing: Managerial and Strategic Perspectives, [e-book] Cham: Springer International Publishing, Available Online: http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-319-71374-8 [Accessed 1 April 2024]

Workshop. (n.d.). Peak Performance - A Futureproof Global Store Concept, Available Online: https://www.work-shop.com/case/peak-performance/ [Accessed 18 January 2024]

Ye, Y., Yang, Y. & Huang, Q. (2023). Identifying and Examining the Role of Pop-up Store Design: A Mixed-Methods Study, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, vol.

75, p.103503

Zwanka, R. J. & Buff, C. (2021). COVID-19 Generation: A Conceptual Framework of the Consumer Behavioral Shifts to Be Caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic: Journal of International Consumer Marketing, *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, vol. 33, no. 1, pp.58–67

Appendix A: Information sheet - Managers

Dear Sir or Madam,

We are two master students currently studying at the School of Economics and Management at Lund University. We are currently in the process of writing our thesis on global marketing, focusing on outdoor companies and concept stores. The aim of our study is to gain a better understanding of why outdoor companies in the retail industry are opening concept stores and how they facilitate customer-brand relationships. As you are an established outdoor company which has chosen to open a concept store, we believe you have valuable insights on the matter, and are interested in hearing more from you.

If you agree to take part, you will be interviewed by the researchers involved in the study. The interview consists of approximately 15 questions and will take one hour to complete, either online (Zoom or Teams) or in person. If granted, the interview will be audio-recorded and later transcribed. Participation in the interview is voluntary and can be terminated at any time. Active participation requires informed consent. In accordance with confidentiality requirements, the anonymity of participants will be ensured upon request, and personal information will be de-identified. To prevent unauthorized access to the material, audio files and transcriptions will be securely stored. The responses will be used for research purposes and published on LUP Student Papers.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us or our supervisor.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Best regards,

Petra Ohlson	Emma Stenkil	Ulf Johansson
Student	Student	Supervisor
Email:	Email:	Lunds Universitet
petra.ohlson1@gmail.com	emmastenkil@gmail.com	Email:
Telefon: +46738476621	Telefon:+46733986293	ulf.johansson@fek.lu.se

Appendix B: Interview Guide - Managers

Background Information:
1. How long have you worked at [company name]?
2. What is your professional title, and what are your responsibilities?
3. Can you briefly describe your company's brand and its core value?

Development of store formats:
4. In your opinion, why is it important for the company to expand with new store formats?
5. What specific factors motivated you to implement the new store format?
6. What opportunities and challenges have you experienced with introducing the new store format?

Implementation of concept stores
7. What is your definition of a concept store and what does it mean for you?
8. In what way does this new format differ from your previous experience-based store formats?
9. What kind of image do you want to create for the brand through the store concept?
10. Can you describe the store's role in the branding process?
11. Is the store's main purpose to create awareness and buzz, or is it primarily aimed at existing customers?
12. What associations do you want to create for the brand through your concept stores?
13. What specific goals and expected results do you strive to achieve with your concept stores?

Intended Store image
14. Do you offer any exclusive products or collections in your concept stores that are not available elsewhere? How do these contribute to the brand's image?
15. How do you work to ensure that the service level matches the requirements of the store concept? In what way does the level of service in your concept stores contribute to enhancing the brand experience?
16. In what way does the pricing in your concept stores reflect the brand's image? Are you striving to position yourself as a premium brand, and how is this reflected in your prices?
17. Can you describe the overall design concept for your concept stores? In what way does the design and interior design of your concept stores contribute to conveying the brand's values? Can you describe the atmosphere of the store?
18. How do you adapt your concept store's location and design to optimize accessibility and convenience for your customers?

Customer's image

19. How do you feel that your customers have reacted to the new store format?
20. How well do you think the store's image matches your customers' perception of the brand?
21. What strategies and methods do you use to ensure that your brand image matches the perception of your customers?

Concluding
22. Is there any additional information or questions that you think we should have covered during this interview?

Appendix C: Interview Guide - Store Managers

Background information:
1. How long have you worked at [company name]?
2. What is your professional title, and what are your responsibilities?
3. Can you briefly describe your company's brand and its core value?

The role of the concept store in creating brand associations (Store image)
4. What associations do you want to create for the brand through your store?
5. Can you guide us through the store and describe the overall design concept for your stores?
6. In what way does the design and interior design of your concept stores contribute to conveying the brand's values?
7. Can you describe the atmosphere in the store?
8. Do you offer any exclusive products or collections in your concept stores that are not available elsewhere? How do these contribute to the brand's image?
9. How do you work to ensure that the service level matches the requirements of the store concept?
10. In what way does the level of service in your concept stores contribute to enhancing the brand experience?
11. In what way does the pricing in your concept stores reflect the brand's image?
12. Are you striving to position yourself as a premium brand, and how is this reflected in your prices?
13. How do you adapt your concept store's location and design to optimize accessibility and convenience for your customers?

Customer's image
14. How do you feel that your customers have reacted to the new store format?
15. How well do you think the store's image matches your customers' perception of the brand?

Concluding
16. Is there any additional information or questions that you think we should have covered during this interview?

Appendix D: Interview Guide - Customers

Background Information
1. Name
2. When was the last time you visited [company's] concept store?
3. Have you visited any of [company's] other stores?
4. Do you know what a concept store is?
5. Were you familiar with the brand before visiting the concept store?
6. What thoughts or associations do you associate with [company]?

The customer's perceived Store Image:
7. Describe your visit in-store, and describe what you experienced.
8. Can you describe the design and layout of the store?
9. Was there anything in particular that caught your attention?
10. How would you describe the atmosphere of the concept store?
11. Are there any particular details/elements in their store atmosphere that made it unique?
12. How would you describe the location of the concept store?
13. Was it easy to find the store?
14. Can you tell us about the products offered in the store?
15. Were there any specific products you expected to find in the store?
16. What was your opinion of the products and collections offered in the store?
17. How would you describe the service you have received?
18. Would you like to describe your interaction with the staff in the store?
19. How did the staff affect your experience?
20. Besides staff, did they offer any other services?
21. Did you reflect on the pricing of the products?
22. How did the store affect your image of the brand?

Brand Image:
23. How did you feel the store communicated the company's brand identity or values?
24. Do you feel that the image of the concept store corresponds to the image you had of the brand before the visit?
25. Did your visit to the concept store change your perception of the brand in any way?
26. Is there anything related to the concept store that you feel does not correspond to the image you have of the brand?

Exit:
27. Is there any additional information or questions that you think we should have covered during this interview?