

2013

# Thoughtfully selected : case study analysis of brick and mortar, e-commerce, and blended retailers

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**THOUGHTFULLY SELECTED: CASE STUDY ANALYSIS OF  
BRICK AND MORTAR, E-COMMERCE, AND BLENDED RETAILERS**

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**A Master's Thesis presented to the Faculty of the  
Graduate Program in Communications  
Ithaca College**

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**In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Science**

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**By**

**Rory Raabe**

**September 2013**

Roy H. Park School of Communications  
Ithaca College  
Ithaca, NY

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN COMMUNICATIONS

This is to certify that the Thesis of

Rory Raabe

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree Master of Science in the Roy H. Park School of Communications  
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### **Abstract**

The American shopping experience has recently shifted from brick and mortar stores, those that exist in physical form, to E-commerce, a relatively new mode of buying goods, and thus there is a potential difference in how clothing retailers communicate and sell products to consumers in stores and now communicate and sell products to consumers via the Web. By way of the case study method, this thesis spotlighted three distinct boutiques and their separate journeys toward communicating and selling products to consumers via brick and mortar stores and the Internet. Previous works (McComb, 2012; Moin, 2012; Strugatz, 2012) have explored how consumers shop in stores versus online and what major department stores are doing for customers in those respective formats, but there has yet to be any research specifically on boutiques and the ways such specialized companies operate their brick and mortar and online businesses. Through my study, I explored how boutiques operate their brick and mortar and online businesses. Major findings include supplementation of traditionally brick and mortar strategies morphed toward the E-commerce platform; increasing and diversified workload for all boutique owners due to technological advances; store strategies reflecting the values, perspectives, and identity of the particular boutique owner who owns the shop; and physical place as unimportant to online boutique retailers in favor of building online community.

*Key words:* fashion, boutiques, independent business, strategic communication, technological shift, and consumer communication

### **Acknowledgements and Dedication**

I would like to thank the members of my thesis committee, Dr. Gordon Rowland, Dr. William Ryan, and Dr. Cory Young, for the knowledge, enthusiasm, and time that you have devoted to this project.

A particular thank you is owed to Dr. Cory Young for acting as my thesis advisor. The countless hours spent talking about this thesis, and the one before, with Cory has made the experience of completing a master's thesis as pain-free as possible.

Thank you also to my classmate, Betsy Acker and all of my friends at Gimme! Coffee. Thank you for your support throughout this process and the many cups of coffee we shared talking about what I *really* want to know about boutiques.

I owe a great deal of gratitude to my family. To my parents, Martha Kelshaw and Marshall Raabe, and to my aunt Liz Dills, thank you for reminding me to work on my thesis when I didn't need reminding, telling me not to stress the small stuff, and for making me believe that great things really do await me.

I also owe special thanks to my stepfather Todd Kelshaw and my sister Deirdre, thank you for always telling me not to buy more clothes. By telling me not to, I think you created a monster!

Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my grandparents, Buford Raabe and Josephine Raabe. As small business owners of the past, your entrepreneurial spirits have instilled a keen interest in independent businesses in me. You have also always encouraged my outlandish fashion sense. I hope to one day open my own boutique, like you opened your donut shop in 1950 in Seattle, WA.

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## Chapter 1: Argument Summary

The relatively new channel of buying and selling via the Internet, E-commerce, is a booming source of revenue for many industries. With annual E-commerce sales projected to hit \$278.9 billion by 2015 (Rogers, 2012), retailers and marketing experts are paying attention. As important as E-commerce is, there is still talk of the crucial importance of the in-store shopping experience. According to Forbes.com, “what sets truly innovative marketers apart is a single, counterintuitive insight: the in-store shopping experience matters now, more than ever” (McComb, 2012). If E-commerce and in-store experiences are to coexist in this multichannel shopping culture, retailers need to tailor their communication strategies and tactics to consumers via the brick and mortar store and the digital arena.

For this study, I chose to hone in on fashion boutique retailers. After going through the mission statements of fifteen known fashion boutiques (Appendix D), I created my own definition of “boutique” that represents how the storeowners of these boutiques describe their businesses. Used frequently throughout the study, I define “boutique” as fashion retailers that describe themselves and their selection of merchandise using words akin to (if not verbatim) “hand-picked items, thoughtfully curated, carefully selected” and/or who have a certain cult following (either self-described or apparent to customers). In my first stage of background research, I noticed that only big name brands like Macys, Nordstrom, and Saks Fifth Avenue were garnering press about their digital initiatives and revitalized stores. Previous studies about how younger and smaller fashion retailers were handling this shift toward simultaneous digital and physical presences did not exist. As an avid purveyor of various Etsy.com shops, E-boutiques, and physical independent stores, I observed that my favorite types of retail businesses were not being represented or given a voice in research pertaining to changes in their field.

It was my intent with this study to uncover how boutique retailers have responded to the surge in E-commerce, built online stores, and kept the brick and mortar portion of business functioning. With this original research, I aimed to write a descriptive analysis of how boutique retailers may communicate strategies and tactics in-store and online, create in-store and online experiences for consumers, and communicate their values, perspectives, and identity in-store and online. My research questions were as follows: How do boutique retailers communicate and sell products in stores? How do boutique retailers communicate and sell products online? How do boutique retailers create similar or dissimilar experiences online and in stores? Finally, how do retailers communicate boutique characteristics such as identity and values online and in stores?



## Chapter 2: Literature Analysis

There have been no previous case studies on boutique retailers in regard to brick and mortar, online, and blended formats. Previous literature was found on the topic of independent stores in comparison to chain stores, but this literature was unrelated to fashion. Due to time constraints, I did not conduct a literature review about generic independent stores; I focused solely on boutique retailers. A review of literature on the topics of the shopping experience (in-store, blended, and online), multichannel shoppers, E-commerce, and independent boutiques/E-boutiques was fundamental to the study, to show how these topics currently intersect and to highlight a gap in the literature among the shopping experience, E-commerce, and in-store experience specifically for boutique retailers.

### Shopping Experience/ Multichannel Shoppers

In 1995, Jeff Bezos launched amazon.com and Pierre Omidyar founded eBay— these two companies changed the shopping experience forever. What was previously and almost exclusively an in-store experience quickly became a multichannel experience. Suddenly, consumers could comparison shop online and in stores— searching for the lowest price, the best service, and the quickest way to obtain their selected goods, online or in-store. As a result of this technological shift, the broad industry of retail has changed, as has how companies communicate to consumers online and in stores (Bickle, 2013).

This study specifically looked at these changes in the shopping experience in apparel, shoes, and accessories, where intersection of online and in-store experience is key. In an online *Huffington Post* article titled “E-commerce: 5 Things You Need to Know,” Joe White, co-founder, COO and CFO of Moonfruit, a company that helps entrepreneurs set up and maintain their business websites, says

Buyers browse in stores to see and touch the physical goods, then search and purchase them online looking for the best price available. Small businesses need to take charge and be sure to retain customers by being accessible via mobile, social, and Web channels and by ensuring their customers know the correct URL to visit in extending their physical store experience online (Rogers, 2012).

In an interview with *Women's Wear Daily*, clinical professor of marketing at the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University Tim Calkins said, "People don't draw lines between online and physical presence" and "many people now get information and shop across channels, and the problem is very often they expect similar policies and service across channels, but often companies don't deliver that" (Lockwood, 2012). These expert opinions show that the shopping experience is, indeed, becoming a multichannel operation (McPartlin & Feigen Dugal, 2013). How companies choose to operate their multichannel platforms was a concern of mine for this study.

The shopping experience has changed, and so have shoppers (Benson, 2012). According to a recent online article on the ever-demanding customer, they want "fast, free, personal... customer service in the increasingly competitive multichannel world. And they want those characteristics wherever they shop, whether it's in a brick and mortar store, on a smartphone or online" (Lockwood, 2012). With an increasing number of people shopping online and in brick and mortar stores (referred to throughout as "multichannel" shoppers), retailers are looking to integrate branding across platforms. This integration of content across platforms is important for customers, because, increasingly, the majority of shoppers today are multichannel shoppers (The Verde Group & Jay H. Baker Retailing Center, 2011)—and a multichannel shopper spends five to six times more than the customer who only uses one channel (Lockwood, 2012). The bottom

line is, “for all retailers—online and brick and mortar—the key to customer service today is to think about every channel in which they sell” (Lockwood, 2012). Boutique fashion retailers need to deeply think about every channel in which they sell— specifically, these retailers need to consider the ways in which they are communicating with customers online and in stores.

### **Shift to E-commerce**

The late 1990s saw a sparked interest in E-commerce, but nowadays buying goods and services on the Internet is common practice. E-commerce is not only a channel for business; it is an important part of *any* business. By 2015, annual E-commerce sales are projected to hit \$278.9 billion (Rogers, 2012) and the E-commerce barrier to entry continues to get lower (Rogers, 2012). My study focused on fashion-related business-to-consumer (B2C) E-commerce, which is one of the most popular E-commerce fields. “E-commerce is the only metric brands and retailers have to measure success in the digital world and, while they’re not forgetting about social media, enhancing the online shopping experience is becoming paramount” (Strugatz, 2012).

The online shopping experience is forcing businesses to rethink strategies and “on the whole, retailers and brands across the spectrum are increasingly paying heed to their E-commerce destinations” (Strugatz, 2012). According to a *Women’s Wear Daily* article, “the latest best practices in online commerce include such attributes as:

- Free shipping, or at least free returns.
- Loyalty programs to reward the best customers, modeled on the airlines’ programs.
- Video merchandising.
- Fulfilling orders from their brick and mortar stores as well as from central warehouses” (Strugatz, 2012).

One company online retailers continue to watch is Amazon. "... Just as there are trendsetters in fashion, so there are in the online world – and none more so than amazon.com, which wields the greatest power in E-commerce and is setting the pace for how fast other retailers must evolve to keep up" (Strugatz, 2012). Maureen Mullen, research and advisory services for L2, a think tank for digital innovation, said "... [Amazon is] putting huge pressure on the (fashion) industry" (Strugatz, 2012). Based out of Seattle, Washington, amazon.com has innovated E-commerce with a plethora of features, most notably Amazon Prime, a service of free two-day shipping on all orders for a flat annual fee. Nomura Equity Research analyst Aram Rubinson told *Women's Wear Daily* that Amazon is

just revolutionizing retail. I don't think any other adjective or any other verb would suffice. They are changing the way every retailer on the planet is thinking about retailing, and if they aren't, they should be thinking about it differently because of Amazon (Strugatz, 2012).

Brick and mortar stores are expected to have E-commerce sites now. The basic reason for this is because it is easy to set up an online store. According to Mark Hayes, head of marketing and public relations at Shopify, a company that helps business owners establish their own online stores

You don't need to raise capital or hire expensive designers and programmers. You can literally go from concept to commerce in just a few minutes for almost no money and with no technical background. It's called the 'democratization of E-commerce,' whereby what used to cost thousands of dollars and take months of preparation is now more of an afterthought to the development of a product or service. This allows entrepreneurs to

focus on doing what they do best and not worry about the complications of E-commerce (Rogers, 2012).

This ‘democratization of E-commerce’ is good news for small businesses and individuals interested in selling items online. Mark Hayes, head of marketing and public relations at Shopify, says

with an E-commerce store, your business is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. You don’t pay rent or the salaries of sales associates. You don’t have any geographical limitations that restrict your customer base, which means you can sell to any country in the world, any time zone and in any language (Rogers, 2012).

With 24/7 online access to shopping, retailers that may have been exclusively brick and mortar in the past are now globally accessible.

### **In-store Experience**

Although E-commerce is a fundamental part of business now, let us not forget the significance of the in-store experience: people go to boutique retailers to see, feel, and try on clothes prior to making a purchase. Whereas the previous two sections (shopping experience/multichannel shoppers and shift to E-commerce) explained the importance of a new shopping experience geared toward the Internet, this section and the next go into more detail about the scope of my research within fashion-related businesses. For the fashion industry, E-commerce is booming, but “... what sets truly innovative marketers apart is a single, counterintuitive insight: The in-store shopping experience matters now, more than ever” (McComb, 2012). The in-store shopping experience is resurging and online capabilities

(especially mobile) could make brick and mortar retail destinations even more valuable in the future.

The modern in-store experience is all about connecting consumers to the physical store and the web simultaneously. Some clothing retailers are enacting technology that allows the following scenario to happen: “If you go online, you can see inventory in the store, actually purchase a product on coach.com and pick it up at the store two hours later” (Strugatz, 2012). The in-store experience remains powerful, because “people still want to see, touch and feel products, and do so with others... Only a store can deliver that full experience” and “with our current economic stagnation, we are shopping less, but we want our experience to provide more –not merely a trip to the mall, but rather an escape” (McComb, 2012). The bottom line for retailers is that, “... brands that deliver a powerful in-store experience will continue to prosper” (McComb, 2012). The physical store is the ultimate ad for a brand, but how do boutique retailers communicate their strategies and tactics, create experiences, and communicate values, perspectives, and identity in-stores *and* online?

### **Independent Boutiques/ E-Boutiques**

To recap the previous sections: the shopping experience is changing; shoppers are changing; E-commerce is a vital part of any B2C business; and, in the fashion industry, the in-store experience still reigns supreme. With this information, I came to find a context through which I would examine these changes: boutique retailers. Boutiques are important retailers to study within the changing fashion landscape, because, as eBay president Devin Wenig said, “choice is everywhere. What matters most is helping consumers find what they want” (Young, 2012). Furthermore, Wenig says that consumers “want a curated experience that isn’t intrusive” (Young, 2012). Wenig’s use of the word ‘curated’ comes up throughout this study, and in this

context, it simply means an edited and intentional mix of brands. For example, Houston, Texas boutique Myth & Symbol's mission is "to bring precisely curated and expertly crafted works of style and beauty—especially from independent and responsible sources—into our patrons' lives" (Nguyen, 2013, *About*).

Currently, academic studies specifically about boutiques and the shopping experiences they provide do not exist. Boutiques can offer a personalized experience (based on their small size), be involved in their communities (boutiques have a limited number of locations), and present an individualized identity (since they are geared toward niche customer bases). A study focused on boutique retailers is necessary to know more about the changing shopping experience, because, as Richelle Parham, chief marketing officer for eBay North America, said, "the future of shopping isn't about the transaction, it's about the people" (Young, 2012). Basically, the future of shopping depends on how storeowners communicate with customers, and studying how boutique retailers communicate with their customers in this technologically shifting retail landscape has possible implications for retail in general.

Lastly, there is a currently a shift happening that differentiates physical and online community development. According to a 2003 article titled "History and Emergence of Online Communities", "emailing, chatting, working together, and participating in online communities has become a normal part of many people's lives (Rainie & Packel, 2001) making strict demarcation between online and offline activity less meaningful" (Preece et al., 2003, pp. 7-8). What this potentially means for boutique retailers, particularly online boutique retailers, is that building an online community may make place-based community building unnecessary. This also leads to the question of how computer-mediated communication between boutique owner and customer can be potentially as meaningful as face-to-face communication.

### Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

This study finds its theoretical framework in theories of computer-mediated communication (CMC) and interpersonal communication (referred to throughout as ‘face-to-face’ communication) due to boutique retailers’ communication with customers happening via brick and mortar, online, or blended interactions. For the purposes of this study, interpersonal communication refers to “a distinct type of interaction between people” (Wood, 2010, p. 19)—specifically interactions between boutique owner and customer. Computer-mediated communication refers to the online or blended interaction between boutique owner and customer. Using interpersonal and computer-mediated communication as lenses helped me to understand how online interactions are able to be as meaningful as face-to-face interactions and how all interactions between storeowner and customers can be unique experiences.

For boutique retailers, both CMC and face-to-face communication commonly revolves around communicating about and selling products, which requires effective communication and social interaction. Within the realm of CMC, I specifically sought to understand how online and blended boutique retailers communicate to customers via the online format. For this, Joseph Walther’s social information processing theory was used to illuminate the social capabilities of online communication. To emphasize how face-to-face interactions shape online interactions and boutique policies, Berger & Calabrese’s uncertainty reduction theory was used.

First, I will summarize the value of uncertainty reduction theory (1975) for this study and then continue on to social information processing theory (1992). Charles R. Berger & Richard J. Calabrese developed uncertainty reduction theory in 1975. The theorists “elected to focus our attention on the initial phases of interaction between strangers” (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, p. 99). For this study, those strangers refer to the boutique owner and customer. “Central to the



present theory (uncertainty reduction) is the assumption that when strangers meet, their primary concern is one of uncertainty reduction or increasing predictability about the behavior of both themselves and others in the interaction” (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, p. 100). The theorists go on to say that, “this assumption is consistent with Heider’s (1958) notion that man seeks to ‘make sense’ out of events he perceives in his environment” (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, p. 100).

Basically, people seek to make their experiences with strangers as comfortable as possible—boutique retailers must reduce customers’ uncertainty in buying merchandise. Buying merchandise from a boutique online translates to uncertainty in buying an item without trying it on, buying an item from a particular store for the first time, uncertainty in the return policy, and uncertainty in when the item will arrive. Uncertainty reduction in an exclusively brick and mortar boutique refers to reducing uncertainty in prospective shoppers on trying out a new shopping destination.

Uncertainty reduction theory also maintains that, “as persons continue to communicate with each other, their uncertainty about each other decreases” (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, p. 104). This theory holds true for boutique retailers who want to create experiences for customers and build relationships with customers. By interacting, boutique owners and customers can “make sense” of a unique boutique experience and possibly interact again in the future. This is where social information processing theory (1992) comes into play.

Joseph Walther’s social information processing theory within the realm of CMC is key to understanding how brick and mortar, blended, and online boutique retailers communicate with customers. Uncertainty reduction theory shows that as people interact, levels of uncertainty go down, and social information processing theory shows that, even in B2C interactions, both

parties are driven by the sociability of those interactions. Interestingly, this sociability is craved in face-to-face interactions and computer-mediated interactions.

Social information processing theory “assumes that communicators in CMC, like other communicators, are driven to develop social relationships” (Walther, 1996, p. 10), and “the human need for affiliation is just as active when people communicate online as when they are with each other face-to-face” (as cited in Griffin, 2009, p. 140). Boutique retailers talk with customers face-to-face in store, communicating sales strategies, tactics, values, perspectives, and the organization’s identity as well as their own personal identity. The same strategies and tactics are communicated online—through a mediated communication method.

For boutiques, two aspects of social information processing theory are critical in deciphering between a boutique’s CMC and face-to-face interactions. These two aspects are as follows:

1. **Verbal cues.** When motivated to form impressions and develop relationships, communicators employ any cue system that’s available. Thus, CMC users can create fully formed impressions of others based solely on the linguistic content of computer-mediated messages. For example, a boutique can employ X as a cue to form relationships. An online shopper may see the words X, Y, Z, and form an impression about the store.
2. **Extended time.** The exchange of social information through CMC is much slower than it is face-to-face, so impressions are formed at a reduced rate. Yet given enough time, there’s no reason to believe that CMC relationships will be weaker or more fragile than those developed with the benefit of nonverbal cues (Walther 1992; cited in Griffin, 2009, p. 140). For example, a boutique can indicate how customers should get in touch

via X, Y, or Z methods and then customers can interact with the storeowner. This interaction can take place via communication platforms X, Y, or Z with time of the interaction varying. Based on the content and duration of this interaction, boutique retailers can interact with customers and form relationships similar face-to-face interactions.

The above features are important to this study because they further exemplify that similar communications in-store can be created online. As the researcher, I was aware of the boutique retailers' interactions with customers over time based on what boutique owners communicated to me via in-depth interviews. The explanation of verbal cues and extended time show that language and time can be important factors in E-commerce communication. Also, verbal cues and extended time show a link between Walther's social information processing theory and Berger & Calabrese's uncertainty reduction theory. Both social information processing and uncertainty reduction get at the notion that people crave sociability in their interactions with others and as the sociability of an interaction increases, that original feeling of uncertainty decreases. The different formats by which boutique retailers operate (brick and mortar, online, blended) perhaps suggest a different sociability in experiences, but there is currently no research on the subject. What is supported by research is the general notion that computer-mediated and face-to-face communication produce varying communication experiences: "The more information one gets about one's partner, the less uncertainty he or she has. The mechanisms by which they exchange information, however, may be limited in CMC settings" (Tidwell & Walther, 2002, p. 321).

Throughout this study, I investigated how brick and mortar, online, and blended boutique retailers communicated to customers. Using the case study method to spotlight three individual

boutique retailers (Homegrown, Anaise, Myth & Symbol), I conducted physical and online observation of the three boutiques, in-depth interviews with the boutique owners, and an analysis of the interviews and website content. Through this, I have gained a greater understanding of boutique retailers.

### **Chapter 4: Methodology**

As an avid purveyor of boutique retailers since high school, I have held a personal interest in this area of independent business for a long while. Boutiques were initially of interest to me, because I have always had a keen interest in fashion and style. Later on, that initial interest in boutiques led me to be interested in fashion-related businesses that are operated by one person or a few people. Boutique retailers own businesses that are tied to their longtime passions for fashion and style—so by being able to study these retailers, this study was an inspiration for me to someday own my own fashion-related business.

In my initial undertaking of this study, my intent was to discover new information about boutique retailers that could be helpful to current boutique storeowners, those interested in opening a boutique retail store in the future, or simply to individuals working in some capacity in the realms of brick and mortar retail and E-commerce.

I also understood from the outset that this study could be useful to those studying communication in the realms of business-to-consumer communication, computer-mediated communication, and interpersonal communication. Boutique retailers depend on these types of communication to sustain their businesses, so communication is of utmost importance to these retailers.

In taking on this study, I assumed I would find a lot of talk regarding the shift in fashion retail moving toward E-commerce and that the boutique owners featured in the study may have negative views toward the future of brick and mortar retail. These initial assumptions were based solely on my literature review, but findings of the study were not as simple (or pessimistic) as these assumptions. As Lazaraton (2003) stated, "... a careful examination of the assumptions

underlying existing research is critical if we are serious about conducting, reporting, and promoting rigorous quality research in any form” (p. 2).

This study, qualitative in nature, puts forth insider information in that the featured storeowners needed to trust me as an interviewer and as someone with a genuine interest in boutique retailers. This trust was achieved via my initial communication to the storeowners explaining my proposed study, the ease of the actual interviews, and the continued contact between the storeowners and I after the interviews.

The present study is informed by a qualitative worldview, grounded in the case study method, and utilizes qualitative interviews as data. In this section, I will explain how this study is best conducted through a qualitative worldview before proceeding to describe the case study methodology and qualitative interviews as data.

### **Qualitative Worldview**

A qualitative worldview was necessary for this study based on the nature of my original research questions and data sources. According to Creswell (1994), "A qualitative study is defined as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting” (pp. 1-2). Denzin & Lincoln (1994) define qualitative research as:

multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials—case study, personal experience, introspective, life story interview,

observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts-that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals' lives (p. 2).

Both of these definitions shed light on how qualitative research is rooted in creating a holistic picture of a certain phenomenon, which is, in this case, the experiences of boutique owners running their businesses.

Besides defining qualitative research, it is also important to explain that there are different types of qualitative research and goals of the qualitative method. Qualitative research leads to contextual findings rather than generalizations. “Qualitative research places emphasis on understanding through looking closely at people's words, actions and records” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 16). Furthermore, qualitative data collection methods require the researcher to capture language and behavior. Ways to capture this include qualitative interviews—the data collection method that I used in this study.

### **Case Study Methodology**

Creswell (1994) divides qualitative research into five main Qualitative Research Types (1. The Biography, 2. Phenomenology, 3. Grounded Theory, 4. Ethnography, and 5. Case Study) and I have chosen to use the case study methodology for this study. According to Denzin & Lincoln (2008), case study methodology is “defined by interest in an individual case, not by the methods of inquiry used” (p. 119). There are no required methods of inquiry for case studies other than “by whatever methods, we choose to study, *the case*” (p. 119). This methodology “... draws attention to the question of what specially can be learned about the single case” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 120).

Specifically, I conducted an instrumental collective case study. In instrumental case studies, “... a particular case is examined mainly to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a

generalization. The case is of secondary interest. It plays a supportive role, and it facilitates our understanding of something else” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 123). In my study, I examined three boutiques individually to offer a glimpse of the issues involved with E-commerce and in-store experiences in boutique retail environments. This was a collective case study in that it is an “... instrumental study extended to several cases (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 123). In this study, it was pertinent to include a few cases to illustrate the differences in boutiques’ size and scope and what affects that can possibly have on E-commerce and in-store experiences.

Creswell (1994) notes that the case study carries the following challenges: (1) The researcher must identify his or her case. He or she must decide what bounded system to study, recognizing that several might be possible candidates for this selection and realizing that either the case itself or an issue, for which a case or cases are selected to illustrate, is worthy of study; and (2) The researcher must consider whether to study a single case or multiple cases. The study of more than one case dilutes the overall analysis; the more cases an individual studies, the greater the lack of depth in any single case. When a researcher chooses multiple cases, the issue becomes "How many?" —Typically, however, the researcher chooses no more than four cases. What motivates the researcher to consider a large number of cases is the idea of generalizability, a term that holds little meaning for most qualitative researchers (p. 63).

In this chapter, I will go further into *why* I selected the specific cases in the Data Collection section. Each of the three cases represents a different platform (brick and mortar, online, or blended) that deserves study. I did not choose multiple cases for generalizability, but rather, to allow readers to learn about three unique boutique retailers operating under different formats.



### Qualitative Interviews

The method used for obtaining data about these cases was qualitative interviews. An in-depth interview of approximately forty-five minutes was conducted with each boutique owner involved in the case studies. According to Mischler (1991), an interview's

particular features reflect the distinctive structure and aims of interviewing, namely, that it is discourse shaped and organized by asking and answering questions. An interview is a joint product of what interviewees and interviewers talk about together and how they talk with each other. The record of an interview that we researchers make and then use in our work of analysis and interpretation is a representation of that talk (p. vii).

All of the data collected for this study is rooted in qualitative interviews about the featured boutiques.

A qualitative approach was used for this study, because there is no existing literature specifically looking at the various formats of boutique retailers. "Cochran and Dolan's (1984) delineation between research suggests quantitative research is more "confirmatory" and qualitative research is more "exploratory" (Cochran & Dolan, 1984, p. 29 as excerpted in Hastings & Payne, 2013, p. 316). My data analysis for the three in-depth interviews can be aptly described as exploratory. Also, "interview talk is, by nature, interpretation work concerning the topic in question. It is reflexive, theoretical, contextual, and textual, because the objects of talk are not abstract, ideal entities everyone sees in the same way" (Talja, 1999, p. 464). Remember, the data obtained from this study was purely qualitative and specific to the featured boutiques.

Firstly, an in-depth interview refers to "an interview style that is guided by an interview schedule, but also retains a high degree of flexibility according to the participant's experiences (Broom, 2005, p. 66). This flexibility according to participants' individual experiences was

important to this case study, because “coming from this interpretive tradition, a qualitative interview-based study seeks to establish an in-depth understanding of the experiences of the respondents and the meanings within their accounts of a particular action, process, or event” (Broom, 2005, p. 67). Also, “as Rubin and Rubin (1995, p. 35) suggest, interpretive social research is about figuring out what events mean, how people adapt, and how they view what has happened to them and around them” (Broom, 2005, p. 67). The methodological purpose of this study was to establish a deep understanding of the three cases, and this understanding was achieved through qualitative data analysis.

The interview style for the case study can be described as qualitative semi-structured or in-depth. This means, “the researcher has an interview schedule with a list of themes and potential questions to ask the interviewee. This interview style is flexible, allowing for an open dialogue that can extend beyond the parameters set by the interview schedule” (Broom, 2005, p. 66). To create an interview schedule, a researcher “creates a list of questions that facilitate an exploration into each theme you have developed, focusing on creating questions that are as open as possible, rather than closed questions that restrict the interviewee to one or a number of possible answers. The interview schedule should be used to create an open environment in which the interviewee can reflect on issues you introduce through the interview schedule within the context of their own experience (Ezzy, 2002, p. 11 as excerpted from Broom, 2005, p. 68). My interview schedule (also known as my interview questions) can be found in the Data section of this chapter. This interview schedule served to open dialogues with the boutique owners about their experiences as boutique owners—experiences that were organized in the themes of customer service, technology, communication and sales strategies, and location.

### **Data**

For this study, I sought to conduct case studies on three types of boutique fashion retailers: brick and mortar only, online only, and blended. I was operating under the assumption that by studying these different types of retailers, each unique as its own entity, there was potential to gain new information about how being brick and mortar, blended, or online influences that particular boutique.

Originally, I wanted to feature three boutiques based on their size, geographic location, and previous familiarity. However, when I was scheduling interviews, two out of three of the original boutique owners I had wanted to interview were unavailable. Therefore, I selected two other boutiques that fit the same criteria based on size, geographic location, and previous familiarity.

I scheduled an interview with the owner of Homegrown (Andrew Douglas), but I was still missing blended and online only boutiques for the case studies. I made a list of all of the blended and online only boutiques that I either knew of or had shopped at. From this list, I e-mailed the storeowners and asked if they would be interested in being featured in my case study on boutiques and concurrently participate in an in-depth interview.

Trang Nguyen of Myth & Symbol, a blended boutique in Houston, TX, and Renee Friedrich of anaise.com responded and agreed to participate. With all of my boutiques secured, I was ready to finalize these cases as the cases of my study.

Looking back, I selected the particular cases based on: the channel by which they operate, geographic location (the boutiques are spread across the U.S.A), previous familiarity, and convenience. An obvious limitation of this study is that all of the featured boutique owners self-selected themselves by agreeing to participate. The risk here lies in the storeowner's portrayal of

himself or herself in a way that may be slanted from the actual truth. However, with the data sources not completely dependent on the in-depth interviews, this risk was somewhat alleviated.

These boutiques are good examples for the case study method, because all of them are unique spaces. The boutiques in this case study are separate from each other, but what brings them together is the fact that all of them are operating in different formats as niche boutiques.

To gather material about each boutique, I conducted qualitative interviews. For Homegrown, I was in Ithaca, NY and therefore was able to conduct an in-depth, in-person interview. Due to lack of time and resources, I could not go to the brick and mortar location of Myth & Symbol to conduct the interview. Therefore, all information pertaining to Anaise and Myth & Symbol was retrieved via Skype interviews.

In order to interview the owners, I received approval from Ithaca College's Human Subjects Research Board. As indicated on the Informed Consent form, the interviewees had the choice to remain confidential, but none of them opposed to using their names and the names of their boutiques. The following questions were asked of all three boutique owners (this list is referred to as my interview schedule in the Data Analysis section):

- Please tell me how you started your boutique.
- Please describe your boutique's concept in as much detail as possible.
- Please describe the in-store and/or web experience you provide in as much detail as possible.
- How do you communicate and sell products in-store and/or on the web?
- In the past year, have you changed your communication strategies and tactics toward customers at all? If so, please explain the change(s) you made.
- What types of retailers do you see as your competition?

- Do you see these modes of shopping experiences eventually molding into one or do you see E-commerce and in-store experiences as separate for the foreseeable future? Please explain your reasoning.
- Who is your in-store and/or web shopper?
- What are the values and perspectives of your boutique?
- How do you communicate these values and perspectives in-store and/or on the web?
- What role does community play in your boutique?
- How do you create community in-store and/or on the web?
- What role does place play in your boutique?
- How do you foresee the clothing, footwear, and accessories specialty niche marketplaces to look like in the future? In reference to in-store, online, and mobile experiences.
- Do you see the shopping experience today as different or the same from the pre-E-commerce past? If yes, how?
- Again, our purpose is to look at the ways niche fashion retailers operate their businesses online and offline. Is there anything else you may be able to help us with?

All of the interviews were recorded via GarageBand (an Apple software program) and then transcribed.

Additionally, I visited [anaise.com](http://anaise.com) and [myhandsymbol.com](http://myhandsymbol.com) many times, frequenting the websites, the accompanying blogs, and social media profiles for background information, and for the purposes of looking for the boutiques' brick and mortar and online communication strategies and tactics, experiences created, and to get an idea of the organization's values, perspectives, and identity. To get a feel for what it was like to be a multichannel shopper, I conducted at least one transaction as a customer with each boutique.

## The Cases

Below is a bit of information about each boutique featured in the case study. After describing each boutique, I will continue on to data analysis.

### Homegrown



Homegrown is a lifestyle skate shop located in Ithaca, NY. It is “the only skater owned and operated shop in Ithaca, NY. Open since 2005” (2012) according to the owner Andrew Douglas. Douglas opened Homegrown right out of high school in 2005 after seeing a previous skate shop in the same location fail. Douglas took what he saw the other store doing wrong, along with his love of skateboarding, as inspiration to open his own shop. He is an Ithaca native, an active member of the Ithaca skateboarding community, and the sole employee of Homegrown.

Homegrown is an independent niche boutique featuring high-end skate shoes, apparel, socks, and skateboards. The vast majority of transactions occur in the store and a few phone orders come in from time to time. The store carries skate apparel and shoe brands such as Huf, Adidas, Magenta, and Politic. Douglas runs the business within a physical store and through a website that does not yet have E-commerce capabilities, but will in the next few months. Douglas operates the physical store and maintains the website, Facebook page, Twitter feed, and Instagram profile. Homegrown is open Monday-Sunday 12:00pm-7:00pm on the Ithaca Commons, an area that boasts a variety of local shops in the downtown region of Ithaca. Homegrown also hosts local art openings (outside of normal business hours) about once every month.

In talking about the identity of his store, Douglas remarked, “I pick and choose everything that’s in here. I have a very specific aesthetic that I definitely will stick to whether or not it’s working, which is kind of a fault, but anything that’s super poppy or something that I don’t agree with personally, it’s just not going to make it in here, whether it’s good for business or not” (2013). Homegrown maintains an aesthetic of understated, clean, classic, and quality-made skate apparel and shoes—this is Douglas’s style.

Entering Homegrown, there is apparel on one side and shoes on the other. The middle of the store is bare besides a large black couch. In the back of the store is Douglas’s desk, where he processes transactions, works on the computer, and talks shop with customers.

Homegrown is located at 104 E State St, Ithaca, NY, 14850 and [homegrownskateshop.com](http://homegrownskateshop.com).

**Anaise.com****ANAÏSE**CONTACT JOURNAL MY ACCOUNT CART 

NEW ARRIVALS

CLOTHING

JEWELRY

ACCESSORIES

BAGS

SHOES

BOOKS/PRINT

HOME/OBJECT

BODY

GIFT CARD

DESIGNERS

SALE



Anaise is an online only boutique owned and operated solely by Renee Friedrich in San Jose, CA. The store went live in April 2011, with a tightly edited and select “offering of clothing and objects, featuring timeless, well-crafted pieces from emerging and established designers. Our goal is to provide you with a source of unassuming elegance, subtle femininity, and modern boheme” (Friedrich, 2013, *Contact*). In the past two years, the store has expanded to include shoes, accessories, and home wares by designers such as A Detacher, Wolcott: Takemoto, and Rachel Comey in its range of offerings. All transactions occur online at anaise.com.

Visiting anaise.com, customers see a range of products against a white, sparse background. This is intentional: “I tried to make the environment really sparse and minimal. Just to make the clothing and objects really stand out. I think it makes browsing a little more enjoyable for the customer when the background is clean and sparse” (Friedrich, 2013). One click on an item and a full description appears—Friedrich writes all item descriptions, photographs products, maintains the website, buys the merchandise from designers,



communicates with customers, and ships orders. Only Friedrich operates Anaise and the idea of it came about when she was moving and in between jobs. Friedrich decided to make Anaise completely online, because she'd "be able to reach a global audience and the overhead costs were pretty low. I had a small budget" (Friedrich, 2013).

A big part of Anaise's identity as a shop revolves around the abundance of choices that can overwhelm today's shoppers. Friedrich said, "We're able to offer really personalized service and I think in general when you're shopping now, there's so much selection and it feels overwhelming. And what I try to do with Anaise is edit the selection down and offer a concise selection for the customer. So it's a little easier to shop" (Friedrich, 2013). This overwhelming environment led Friedrich to "open a really personalized shop with a concise selection of clothing and objects" (Friedrich, 2013). The items available at Anaise seem to reflect Friedrich's personal style: refined, sophisticated, feminine, and wearable.

In addition to maintaining [anaise.com](http://www.anaise.com), Friedrich also has an Anaise blog (<http://www.montmarte.blogspot.com/>), which documents Friedrich's travels, design inspirations, and any Anaise sales. Friedrich is happy maintaining the website and blog right now and she does not have plans to open a brick and mortar store anytime soon. She would like to eventually, but cautions that "it would really have to be in the right location" (Friedrich, 2013).

Anaise is located at [www.anaise.com](http://www.anaise.com)

## Myth & Symbol



Myth & Symbol is an online and brick and mortar boutique owned by Trang Nguyen, Chau Nguyen, Roque Strew, and Ameet Gaitonde. Myth & Symbol has been open since July 2012 and the owners are still figuring out their business as a new boutique. Nguyen said the following about being one of four co-owners: “I love that there’s four of us, because we all have completely different skills. Those skills put together, we don’t have to hire anyone. I come from an e-commerce/marketing and social media background; my sister has an art background. Her husband, he does all of our branding and graphic designing, so he does our website. And then we have another guy, Ami, and he has the business background” (Nguyen, 2013). Originally, the owners were going to open up a brick and mortar shop without an accompanying E-commerce website, but, as Nguyen said, “when we actually started up and running, we realized how important it (the website) is. So it’s essentially, like, the brick and mortar and the online store are almost equal priorities” (Nguyen, 2013). Along with being equal priorities, brick and mortar and online sales are split about 50/50.

The store (both online and brick and mortar) features clothing, shoes, beauty, and home ware. Made using Big Cartel, a web shop platform, [mythandsymbol.com](http://mythandsymbol.com) uses the same warm color palette of orange, green, and tan hues throughout its online store and various social media profiles. In addition to maintaining the website, Myth & Symbol is active on Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, and Twitter. Nguyen noted the importance of original content across social media platforms by saying, “We try to make all of our social media platforms different. So with Twitter, I emphasize lifestyle. So I’m not just tweeting about the store, but maybe things that are happening in Houston or interesting articles. With Facebook it’s more behind the scenes and our Tumblr is for inspiration. Instagram is really taking pictures of the clothes” (Nguyen, 2013).

Myth & Symbol carries sustainable fashion designer wares from Dusen Dusen, Dieppa Restrepo, Black Crane, and Steven Alan. As seen from photos of the brick and mortar store, the physical Myth & Symbol store is an artistic and inviting space with handmade furniture and light fixtures throughout the store. Nguyen describes the brick and mortar space, saying “there’s a lot of colors, there’s a lot of textiles, different textures... we have different woods and our dressing room is completely made out of hand-dyed rope” (Nguyen, 2013). The owners take their retail space a step further by offering artistic workshops frequently, which fits well with their aesthetic as a creative space dedicated to handmade and/or responsibly made items.

For more information, please visit the shop at [mythandsymbol.com](http://mythandsymbol.com) or in person at 2537 Times Blvd, Houston, TX, 77005

As described above, this case study offers insights to boutiques in different stages of development. It was my intent to study these businesses individually in order to uncover how niche boutiques are responding to the surge in E-commerce and creating in-store experiences simultaneously.

### **Data Analysis**

To analyze the data, Professor Young and I established themes across the three in-depth interviews based on the data that emerged in speaking to the boutique owners. Establishing themes across interviews is tricky, because “inevitably this approach to analysis relies partially on hunches and intuition, or creativity, nuance and detail. Its intuitive and flexible nature is both its strength and its weakness” (Broom, 2005, p. 72). Also, “interview data is ultimately co-constructed—it reflects things about you (the researcher) as it does about the person being interviewed” (Broom, 2005, p. 72). I tend to agree with Ezzy’s (2002, p. 57) suggestion that “qualitative research is biased to a degree, but then again, all research is inherently political and thus contains a degree of bias” (as excerpted from Broom, 2005, p. 72). The themes may have been partly provoked by the range of interview questions asked, but, in general, the themes reflect an overall portrait of the individual boutiques and the issues they face. The next section will go into more detail regarding these themes.

### **Themes**

“Interview-based studies can be qualitative or quantitative” (Broom, 2005, p. 66). The findings of this study come from in-depth, qualitative interviews. The appropriate way to analyze these interviews was to organize the data into thematic categories, based on commonalities and differences that emerged throughout each interview. According to Strauss & Corbin (1990):

Themes, or categories, are the classification of more discrete concepts. This classification is discovered when concepts are compared one against another and appear to pertain to a similar phenomenon. Thus, the concepts are grouped together under a higher order, more abstract concept called a category (p. 61).

You know you have found a theme when you can answer the question, “*What is this expression an example of?*” (emphasis added, Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Based on the interviewees’ answers, the similarities and differences listed below were identified and served as organizational markers for understanding the cases. Since this study focused on trustworthiness and reliability rather than generalizability—reliability meaning “the degree to which the data accurately represents the population being studied” (Broom, 2005, p. 72), after analyzing the transcripts of interviews, I sent the transcripts to Professor Young to read. Professor Cory Young acted as a second set of eyes on the data and, therefore, increased the trustworthiness of this study. Once Professor Young had identified commonalities and differences, we discussed our individual findings and agreed upon the following themes:

- **Customer relations:** any way that the boutique interacts with and perhaps maintains a relationship with customers
- **Technology:** ways in which the boutique communicates to others and about themselves via any Internet technology (website, social media, etc.)
- **Communications and sales strategies:** ways that each boutique communicates and strategizes day-to-day and in the long term; the strategies that boutique owners use to communicate and sell merchandise, in-store, online only, and blended (in-store and online).
- **Location:** how location influenced customer relations, technology and strategies

With these themes, Professor Young and I were able to put individual interview responses into the themes and compare what the three boutique owners said in regard to customer relations, technology, communication and sales strategies, and location.

### **Limitations**

This study focused on fashion boutique retailers, but could have extended to small independent businesses in general. With more time, I could have interviewed a greater number of boutique owners and even extended the research to boutique owners who own multiple stores or who were not based in the U.S. The data came from qualitative interviews with boutique owners, but it may have been beneficial to include a survey of boutique owners and/or include interviews with customers. Also, this research pertained to independent boutiques, but with more time and resources, I could have explored how some chain retailers (such as Urban Outfitters Inc.) are marketing themselves to resemble independent boutiques. The next section goes into detail about these findings.

## **Chapter 5: Findings and Implications**

With the themes of data analysis in mind, I found emerging concepts regarding brick and mortar, blended, and online boutiques. Each of these mediums offers unique insights into how boutique retailers function in terms of the concepts of customer relations, technology, communications and sales strategies, and location. These findings emerged from the cases of Homegrown, Anaise, and Myth & Symbol, but may also apply to other brick and mortar, online, and blended boutiques.

### **Brick and Mortar Boutique: Homegrown**

#### **Customer Relations**

Seen through the case of Homegrown, brick and mortar boutiques offer unique spaces for customers to shop in their local communities. Owner Andrew Douglas describes the customer's experience of walking into his store as

It's not like walking into a larger, big box store or like any kind of shop in the mall, where you're just going to be hounded by salespeople just hovering over your shoulder, asking you questions, pretty much just trying to sell you things. A lot of the people that come in here have a pretty good idea of what they're looking for, so I kind of just let them figure stuff out for themselves. For the most part, it's a pretty unobtrusive sales style, but people mostly appreciate it" (Douglas, 2013).

This unobtrusive sales style matches Douglas's view of who his customers are: people who know about the skateboarding lifestyle. Expanding on this, Douglas said

When people walk into the store, they either get it or they don't. Ideally, they see what's being stocked and like how it's laid out and either they're with it or they're not. It's surprisingly polarizing, but I guess I just communicate that to people just via the layout of

the store and everything is really visible. The brands are not hidden; it's pretty plain. You can see what's in the store from outside the shop; you don't even have to come in really (2013).

Douglas's hands-off sales approach mixed with customers generally knowing what they want speaks volumes about Homegrown's identity as a hip store with in-the-know customers. The way that Douglas communicates with customers in person shows that he recognizes his customers as knowledgeable and savvy shoppers. His approach relies on interpersonal communication rather than any computer-mediated communication, and this emphasis on interpersonal communication may influence Douglas's relationship with customers.

### **Technology**

Brick and mortar stores are increasingly using Internet technology to promote their brick and mortar spaces. In the case of Homegrown, Douglas lamented how an online presence was vital for his brick and mortar business and how he feels increasing pressure to sell merchandise online. Douglas said

If I want to keep the business successful, probably (I'll have to start selling things online). But just being one person, it's kind of a hindrance, because you can almost just hire someone completely to do the online portion of the business. It's a whole other job in addition to what I'm doing, so there are only so many hours in the day. It's a major undertaking. It's something I'm equipped for and it'll definitely be happening, probably within the next year (2013).

This major undertaking has recently come to fruition and Andrew opened a new website for Homegrown with E-commerce capabilities in May 2013. Technology is something that brick and



mortar retailers need to keep up with to stay competitive with blended and online retailers.

Speaking about the future of brick and mortar boutiques, Douglas said

I want to be optimistic and say that brick and mortar retail has some life left in it, but I think more and more it's just going to be unnecessary overhead and E-commerce is going to take over and businesses will just have warehouse space, it will be cheaper than actual retail space. They won't have to pay, you know, salespeople. I think of E-commerce as like virtual closets and all that stuff is going to become much, much, much more prominent in the coming years. It's going to have a really big impact on retail (2013).

This connotation that brick and mortar boutiques will not, in the future, prevail without online presence and counterpart web shops is the norm amongst brick and mortar boutique owners. The argument toward blended and online boutiques is strong: more sales, more customers, and more recognition in the boutique's particular niche marketplace.

### **Communications and Sales Strategies**

The communications and sales strategies of a brick and mortar store are easily observable, because those strategies are reflected in the retail space. Douglas of Homegrown describes his store as a 'lifestyle' boutique and its communications and sales strategies reflect the lifestyles and identities of its owner. Douglas said that Homegrown is "an extension of my taste and lifestyle, there isn't a lot more to it, it's how I operate it. Home away from home, Homegrown" and that

Values of the shop pretty much are my values. I pick and choose everything that's in here. I have a very specific aesthetic that I definitely will stick to whether or not it's working, which is kind of a fault, but anything that's super poppy or something that I

don't agree with personally, it's just not going to make it in here, whether it's good for business or not (2013).

### **Location**

The location of any brick and mortar store is purposeful and commonly reflects a storeowner's ties to a particular community. Douglas owns Homegrown in Ithaca, NY because he is a native to the area. On the topic of choosing a brick and mortar location, Douglas said

The shop is located here because I'm born and raised here. And after a brief stint on the west coast, I came back here and the opportunity (of the store) just kind of cropped right up. So I've been doing this since I was twenty. For now, this is the only place I think it could exist. It's hard to go to another person's town and be like, "Here's a skate shop—support it," so I've been skateboarding and I've been in this community for a long time and that's why it's here (2013).

Being a member of the Ithaca, NY community allowed Douglas to be exposed to a skateboard boutique called Hardpacked early on in life and only after cultivating an interest in such a boutique could he notice what he would and would not do for his own skateboarding store. When asked if he could open Homegrown in another location, Douglas said

It would be impossible to just go to, like, New York, and be like, "Hey, here's a shop. You guys should support it even though I don't know you." It just doesn't really work like that in skateboarding. It's pretty territorial. I might be able to do one in Syracuse if I really wanted to, but for now this is good (2013).

As can clearly be seen in the case of Homegrown, location is rooted in the storeowner's locational roots. Brick and mortar boutique owners are not anxious to open shops in locations in which they do not have personal ties.

Lastly, as can be seen in this brick and mortar store, face-to-face interaction is integral to the business. Douglas reduces uncertainty in customers through his interactions with customers. He takes a hands-off sales approach, but knows nearly all of his customers on a first name basis. As he said in an interview, “Skateboarders usually just come in and they know exactly what they want or they’ve seen it online and they’re going straight for it—super low maintenance. They’re pretty much self-serve and I know most of them on a first name basis, I would think” (2013). For shoppers who don’t know Douglas or are unfamiliar with the store, Douglas is quick to become friendly with new people and the website and social media presence of Homegrown provides information about the store, merchandise selection, and contact information.

### **Online Boutique: Anaise**

Exclusively online boutiques are the newest form of boutique retailers and these boutiques are taking the retail market by storm. Without the need for retail space (and operational costs), almost anyone can build a web shop. Websites such as ebay.com and etsy.com provide individuals with premade platforms for selling merchandise, but opening an independent online boutique requires at least rudimentary skills in web design.

### **Customer Relations**

In the case of Anaise, owner Renee Friedrich offers a customer experience that is as similar to brick and mortar as she can create. Although customers cannot try on the merchandise before making a purchase, Friedrich offers an open return policy. Like a brick and mortar boutique, Friedrich’s online boutique has a unique design aesthetic. Like speaking to customers in-store, Friedrich keeps long customer service hours via e-mail and therefore all of her communication with customers is computer-mediated. In my interview with her, Friedrich also stressed the importance of uniqueness, saying that what sets Anaise apart from other boutiques is

We're able to offer really personalized service and I think in general when you're shopping now, there's so much selection and it feels overwhelming. And what I try to do with Anaise is edit the selection down and offer a concise selection for the customer. So it's a little easier to shop, more enjoyable (2013).

As is the case in most online boutiques, many Anaise customers know what they want. This makes sense, because Internet shoppers can stumble upon an item somehow and then shop around to find it at a particular Internet store. If the same item is available in multiple web shops, a customer is going to buy that item based on price and relationship to any of the boutiques carrying that item. Friedrich pointed out that Anaise customers "get that the pieces are hand selected by me and tightly edited" (2013), and this personally edited selection is what draws many customers to Anaise.

### **Technology, Communications and Sales Strategies**

At Anaise, Friedrich is content with the store being exclusively online for now. Speaking about her use of Internet technologies, Friedrich said, "we use social media platforms like Facebook, our blog, and we also rely on word of mouth, other blogs, press coverage, and our mailing list" and "I think online retailers are gradually stepping away from a traditional commercialized format. They're presenting in a more personalized approach. It's more informal and natural and more relaxed" (2013). This 'personalized approach' fits well with Anaise's status as an independent boutique operated by one individual.

Friedrich also lamented that online shopping is the future of shopping, saying

I think online stores have grown considerably in the last few years. But in store, I feel like that rate of growth is not as fast compared to online, just because you'd have to have

more capital. Doing online is so much easier. You need a lower budget; it's easy to create a site; you're able to have a global reach. And with a store, it's harder to do that.

And that, "the online market is going to really grow. I mean it's already growing. I think it's just going to get bigger and bigger" (2013).

Online shopping is also easier than ever. Friedrich spoke about how online shopping can become a personal problem (potentially for customers) by saying, "I feel like online shopping is so easy and it can potentially be a very bad habit. Now I think people are just busy. Going online, you don't have to leave your house or your office. It's much simpler than making an effort to leave and go somewhere" (2013).

Could all boutiques be exclusively online in the future? According to the data collected in this study, probably not. Friedrich pointed out this seesaw of pro's and con's for online shops, saying that, "it's much harder for brick and mortars now, because with smart phones you're able to automatically price shop within that store" but "as an online shop, you're kind of missing out trying on the clothing. Seeing it up close and personal" (2013).

As far as the communications and sales strategies of her web shop go, Friedrich said, "I always hope that what I like and what's popular blend together. I think I buy more on my connection to that piece. Whether an item is going to be popular comes second" (2013). Her decision to operate an online store came easily, because, "I always wanted to open a really personalized shop with a concise selection of clothing and objects. I decided to create an online space since we'd be able to reach a global audience and the overhead costs were pretty low. I had a small budget" (2013).

**Location**

Since the store is exclusively online, Friedrich says physical location is not important. Rather than gaining support from her local community in San Jose, California, she has gained support from the online community at-large. Friedrich said, “location’s not really important, since we’re just online. I mean, it definitely helps that we’re in the Bay Area, and that we’re in close proximity to San Francisco, but we could really work from any location” (2013).

Although physical location is not important, Friedrich reduces uncertainty in customers virtually by offering an open return policy, providing detailed information about each piece of merchandise on the website, maintaining the blog which (to an extent) lets customers get to know her as a storeowner, and by keeping long customer service hours via email and thus participating in frequent CMC interactions on a daily basis.

**Blended Boutique: Myth & Symbol**

Blended boutiques get the best of both worlds: brick and mortar and online stores allow for locality and global reach—using interpersonal and computer-mediated communication. Operating a blended boutique requires more skills, hours, and funds from storeowners than operating an exclusively brick and mortar or online shop.

**Customer Relations**

As is the case for all blended retailers, Myth & Symbol has the unique challenge of balancing in-store and online customers. Myth & Symbol defines itself as a ‘lifestyle store’ in its mission statement and, expanding on this, storeowner Trang Nguyen revealed via Skype interview that this ‘lifestyle’ is a

high quality lifestyle. It doesn’t have to mean an expensive lifestyle, but the people who shop at our store are in tune with the quality of the product, and I would say of even what

they're eating, what they're driving, the places they go to, so they still have that same mindset when they buy their clothes versus buying their food (2013).

In other words, the Myth & Symbol customer is a conscientious shopper who cares about where the items they consume come from. This is a good thing, because Nguyen and her fellow owners of Myth & Symbol are also conscientious shoppers who value clothing (and other items) coming from responsible and sustainable sources.

When it comes to Nguyen's interactions with customers, she spoke about the importance of communicating the boutique's story and the story of its storeowners

Right now I'm in the store all the time, but when I say that it helps when shoppers know about the designers, it also really helps that people know about us—the actual founders and owners behind the store. It goes back to being personal, having that community feel. People are more likely going to support someone they know versus a big corporate store" (2013).

### **Technology, Communications and Sales Strategies**

Delving into technology, Nguyen highlights the important strategies of e-mails and personal touches for online and in-store customer relations—she said, "I've noticed that every time we send an e-mail, the next few days, that's when we get the most traffic in the store. I have customers who, I will literally send an e-mail and they'll come by an hour later and say "I just got the e-mail!" They want to get the new products before everyone else does" and "I realize that customers love personal touches and that's something that was a tactic for us in the beginning. I'm realizing how important it is" (Trang, Myth & Symbol).

Through my Skype interview with Nguyen, she alerted me about a potential problem for blended retailers: meaningful personal touches for online customers. Reminiscent of Joseph Walther's computer-mediated communication theory, Nguyen said

I feel like in-store it's a little more personable, because I can have that two-way conversation, whereas online I'm sending them a note, but it's not a conversation. It's just a note. Sometimes if a customer e-mails us, takes an effort to ask about measurements or "I got my package and I love it", we'll have that conversation, but it's not as personable (Nguyen, 2013).

This difference in meaningfulness of in-store and online customer interactions may be worth researching further in future studies. For now, Nguyen is focusing on social media—more specifically, creating original content across platforms. Nguyen said

We try to make all of our social media platforms different. So with Twitter, I emphasize lifestyle... so I'm not just tweeting about the store, but maybe things that are happening in Houston or interesting articles. With Facebook it's more behind the scenes and our Tumblr is for inspiration. Instagram is really taking pictures of the clothes. I hate when people blast the same thing over all their social media accounts. It makes me think, "Okay... what is the point of me following you on Facebook versus Twitter?" We want people to follow us on everything (Nguyen, 2013).

Whether brick and mortar, online, and/or blended, all boutiques have a distinct identity and that identity comes out in the way the boutiques tweet, update Facebook, write blog posts, Instagram photos, and describe the merchandise on their websites. Nguyen also spoke to the fact that people just shop online today. She said



I honestly think that online shopping is where people are shopping the most. That's where I shop, too. I think it's mainly because I'm always at the store so I don't have time to go shopping. I think people nowadays are so busy that they want to shop online. But there are some people, myself included, who sometimes need a specific item immediately and they don't have time to buy it online. Maybe it will come in three days or a day, but there's that risk of "What if it doesn't fit" (Nguyen, 2013)?

The popularity of online shopping can also be bad for independent boutiques like Myth & Symbol. Nguyen said

I sometimes think Internet isn't a good thing, because sometimes when it comes to pricing, bigger stores may go lower than the suggested retail price. They will slash things on sale and that will really hurt us. Saks marks down their items really soon and that hurts us because we'll just get something and all of a sudden we'll see it's online for a lot cheaper. Obviously, that's going to hurt our Internet sales, because people are going to go there instead. That even hurts our brick and mortar sales, because people will get the items online (Nguyen, 2013).

That people are shopping online more frequently than in the past (perhaps becoming more bargain-driven shoppers) and that larger retailers can go below the suggested retail price suggests a tougher market for boutique retailers in the future.

Responsibility and sustainability are important parts of Myth & Symbol's communications and sales strategies. Nguyen said, "As long as there's a responsible source behind the product, then that's what we want to feature" and "I want to be proud of everything I sell" (Nguyen, 2013). As is obvious in this case, store communications and sales strategies share a close relationship with storeowner identity.

**Location**

Currently, Myth & Symbol operates out of Houston, Texas. Nguyen decided to open her shop in Houston, because that is her hometown and where she and her co-owners are all based. Also, Nguyen chose the neighborhood of Rice Village for Myth & Symbol's Houston location, saying, "The reason that we chose this location, it's in the Rice village, is because almost everyone there is essentially a mom and pop boutique. So the people who do shop in that area, they love supporting local businesses" (Nguyen, 2013).

Community support is very important to Myth & Symbol, and with the other independent boutique owners of Houston, the storeowners all spend time together. Nguyen said

The great thing about Houston is the independent boutique community is so small.

Everyone knows each other; it's really close knit. They're so supportive. They'll tell their customers to go to our store and we'll do the same. We try to get together for dinners and drinks just to talk about what's working and what's not working (Nguyen, 2013).

With independent boutiques being so connected, this communication may be advantageous for Houston shoppers. A lack of cross branding amongst the Houston boutiques (caused by storeowner communication) may increase the individuality and selection of merchandise offered.

Something that sets Myth & Symbol apart from other boutiques and complements its identity as a creative space that features lots of artistic and daring designers is its focus on special in-store events. Nguyen said

We do a lot of in-store events. That's actually one of our biggest things. We'll have trunk shows and we'll have spring preview parties. We try to bring in a lot of designers for pop up shops. I've noticed a lot of times that people will follow us on Facebook and

Instagram and Twitter and they'll go on our website, but it's really hard for them to actually go into the store, because Houston is so spread apart (Nguyen, 2013).

Since Myth & Symbol is located in Houston, currently only Texas residents are required to pay sales tax. On this topic, Nguyen said, "I believe that we get such a huge following online from California and New York stores because they (the shoppers) don't have to pay taxes. It's so huge" (Nguyen, 2013). This may soon change with the Senate recently passing a bill to make it easier for states to collect sales tax on online purchases (Mosemak, 2013). If this becomes law, the effects could be great for small businesses such as boutique retailers.

As a blended boutique, Myth & Symbol reduces uncertainty virtually and physically and participates in face-to-face and CMC interactions with customers. Nguyen, along with her fellow co-owners, reduces uncertainty in brick and mortar customers by interacting with those customers face-to-face, keeping track of customer names and anecdotal information, providing a warm and inviting brick and mortar atmosphere, and hosting in-store events. All of these face-to-face interactions reduce uncertainty, because the interactions (involving Nguyen or the other owners) show customers the identity behind Myth & Symbol. Nguyen's emphasis on 'responsibly made' and 'sustainable' products show customers the values of Myth & Symbol, and it is up to those customers to decide if Myth & Symbol's values align with their own. Uncertainty is reduced at mythandsymbol.com via CMC communication—including email interactions with customers, detailed product descriptions, a fully updated website, and original content on Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, and Instagram.

The findings in this study have implications for brick and mortar, online, and blended boutique retailers. To understand my findings and what they imply for the various boutique retail formats, I returned to my original research questions.

## Implications

### How do boutique retailers communicate and sell products in stores?

This question pertains to any information in the brick and mortar and blended domain of my research. Based on the small data set, boutique retailers communicate and sell products in stores by: providing personalized service to customers, offering a unique and curated selection of merchandise, maintaining a consistent design aesthetic that fits with the merchandise, providing a unique place to shop in the geographic location of the store, creating and maintaining some form of an online presence, and word-of-mouth marketing. Below are some ways that boutique retailers communicate and sell products in-store that are limited to the brick and mortar and/or blended boutique:

- Brick and mortar storeowners interact with customers face-to-face
- The storeowners may be involved in the community and that involvement may publicize the boutique
- The store location is purposeful
- There is space for in-store events
- The store can evolve with physical changes in store design
- Customers can see, touch, smell, and experience the merchandise
- Customers can experience immediate gratification in their purchases
- Return policies may be stricter than online only stores

Boutique retailers who communicate and sell products in-store benefit greatly from face-to-face interaction with customers. Friendly relationships can develop and customers can build rapport with the shop owners. In-store customers are able to know the shop owners, stop in regularly when they are in the neighborhood, and attend in-store special events. Depending of the

size of the city in which the store is located, the store may become known amongst locals and other business owners in the area. There has been much debate over whether face-to-face interactions are more meaningful than computer-mediated interactions and this study suggests that while boutique owners try to make all interactions with customers meaningful, the boutique owners of this study expressed that face-to-face interactions with customers tended to be more meaningful for them.

Besides benefitting from face-to-face interaction, brick and mortar and blended boutique owners benefit from having the actual merchandise in a physically accessible place for customers. Shopping is an experience of the senses: oftentimes shoppers want to feel fabrics and try on the merchandise. Customers can know how an item fits and how it looks in person at first glance in a store. With this in mind, brick and mortar stores are able to have strict return policies, because customers always have the option to try on merchandise before making a purchase. For any brick and mortar or blended boutique, being able to communicate and sell products means that a number of things need to be in place before interacting with customers. Brick and mortar and blended boutiques requires owning or renting a space for the store, any maintenance or construction that must be done to maintain the space, and acquiring furniture for that space. Maintaining such a space implies certain work that online boutiques do not encounter. Although maintaining a retail space is a large task for a brick and mortar and blended boutique, blended boutiques have the added job of selling merchandise online. This was not a surprise, but it was a surprise that all of the boutique owners indicated that they felt the need to maintain brick and mortar and online retail spaces.

### **How do boutique retailers communicate and sell products online?**

This question pertains to any information in the online and blended domain of my research. Boutique retailers that communicate and sell products online do so in the following ways:

- Maintaining a brick and mortar store and website OR website only
- Brand recognition by customers
- Customers' product searches online
- E-mail interaction with customers
- Design and aesthetic of the website
- E-mail lists
- Social media presence on multiple platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and Instagram
- Blog advertisements
- Shipping orders quickly
- Using unique and personalized packaging on shipped orders
- Flexible return policy

Boutique retailers communicate and sell products online through their website. The website shows customers the shop's selection of brands, the aesthetic of the site, and perhaps information about the shop itself. Customers can browse the merchandise of entire stores, e-mail questions about sizing and fit, and, if a purchase is made, receive their newly purchased goods in three to seven business days. The transaction can take place in a person's living room, office, or even their mobile device.

For boutique owners, selling items online means a lot of work. For boutique owners selling their wares in a brick and mortar store and online, there are added aspects to the job that brick and mortar only boutique owners do not encounter. In addition to the general ways that all boutiques communicate and sell products, an online boutique owner keeps longer customer service hours via e-mail, measures all garments, takes on duties as product information writer, editor, and photographer, and needs at least rudimentary website coding skills to build, edit, and add information to the shop's website. Even if using a website template provided by another business, such as Myth & Symbol's use of Big Cartel, the shop owners must know coding basics to ensure that their website fits their particular aesthetic and to be able to add products on a daily basis.

Online shop owners are communicating to customers exclusively online via e-mail, social media, e-mail lists, blogging, the shop website, and personalized packaging. Although there is no face-to-face interaction in online transactions, personalized computer-mediated communication does foster personal connection. That connection may not be as meaningful as face-to-face interaction, but it is still meaningful. For instance, Trang Nguyen of Myth & Symbol writes notes on packages, commenting on a customer's location or the purchased item, and doodles on each package. This *interest* that Nguyen has in her online customers goes to show that online boutique transactions can be personalized and unique experiences.

### **How do boutique retailers create similar or dissimilar experiences online and in stores?**

Boutique retailers can create similar experiences or dissimilar experiences via the brick and mortar, blended, and online boutique. All three boutique owners in my sample strive to create similar experiences online and in stores. Brick and mortar, online, and blended retailers create similar experiences online and in stores by taking the following steps online *and* in store:

providing personalized service to customers, offering a unique and curated selection of merchandise, maintaining a consistent design aesthetic that fits with the merchandise, providing a unique place to shop in the location of the store, creating and maintaining some form of an online presence, and word-of-mouth marketing.

Exclusively brick and mortar boutiques cannot create dissimilar experiences in-store and online, unless their social media presence ventures far from the boutique's identity. Online boutiques offer a dissimilar experience from brick and mortar boutiques—the findings of this study point to online shopping as more convenient (Douglas, 2013; Friedrich, 2013; Nguyen, 2013). Blended retailers can create dissimilar experiences online and in stores via inconsistencies online and in store. Blended retailers create dissimilar experiences from exclusively brick and mortar and online boutiques by being both brick and mortar and online.

Currently, boutique retailers do not have the resources to introduce free returns, regional warehouses, and national marketing campaigns, so the dissimilarity of experiences between boutique retailers and larger department store retailers continues. By hosting in-store events and workshops, brick and mortar and blended boutiques can offer customers the social interaction and gathering that online boutiques cannot. Also, with special events, brick and mortar and blended boutique storeowners can encourage customers to shop locally to contribute to their local economies.

### **How do retailers communicate boutique characteristics such as identity and values online and in stores?**

All retailers convey certain characteristics to their publics, but boutique retailers commonly convey characteristics such as unique identity and values. Identity and values of a boutique can be conveyed through the boutique's mission statement, the boutique's brick and



mortar and online store, and any web presence. In this study, boutique characteristics such as identity and values were also linked to the store owner's goals for the business and how the boutique fits into its larger community. A boutique's identity and values are also a representation of the storeowner's identity and values.

Brick and mortar boutique retailers communicate identity and values in store via maintaining the brick and mortar store with a consistent design aesthetic, brand selection, and face-to-face interactions with customers. Online boutique retailers communicate identity and values online by maintaining the design aesthetic of the web shop, selection of brands, e-mail interaction with customers, e-mail lists, social media presence on multiple platforms, blog advertisements, unique and personalized packaging on shipped orders, and a flexible return policy. Blended boutique retailers communicate identity and value by combining the tactics that brick and mortar and online boutiques use to express identity and values. The full list of tactics that blended boutique retailers use to express identity and values is as follows: mission statement, brick and mortar and online shop aesthetic, brand selection, transparent and original social media content, and unique packaging.

Identity can be communicated through the brick and mortar, online, and blended formats, because customers can visually get an idea of what the style of the store is either online or in-store. By looking at what brands a boutique carries, customers get a sense of what styles and quality of clothing can be expected from a particular boutique. In the cases of the boutiques featured in this study, the design aesthetics of all of the stores (virtual and physical) are vastly different.

From this research, I have taken away that boutique retailers operating in different formats (brick and mortar, online, and blended) have different priorities and different formats

dictate the types of work the boutique owners must commit to. Brick and mortar storeowners focus on face-to-face interactions with customers, online storeowners rely on CMC, and blended storeowners juggle face-to-face interactions and CMC with customers. Regardless of format, all boutique retailers communicate and sell products, aim to create similar experiences between their individual brick and mortar and online activities, and communicate values and identity. Finally, each boutique, regardless of format, is unique in and of itself. Before the study, I did not have an in-depth understanding of how boutique retailers operate their businesses, but now I understand how relationships with customers and establishing a clear and unique identity are of utmost importance.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Research**

The findings of this study explored how boutique retailers operate their brick and mortar, online, and blended businesses. This exploration brought light to many themes and indicates that the field of boutique retail is changing toward building meaningful interactions with customers, consistent use of technology, strategies that reflect the ‘de-risk’ of purchases for customers, and decreasing importance of brick and mortar location. Further research that could build upon this study may include some of the following questions:

- What do websites such as Farfetch or Polyvore (websites that show the current stock of partnered boutiques) mean for the future of boutiques?
- How do current boutique owners compare to boutique owners of the pre-Internet past?
- How are boutique retailers blending their brick and mortar strategies with online initiatives?

The major strength of this study lies in the fact that it is currently the only study of its kind about boutique retailers. Before this study, the formats of brick and mortar, online, and blended boutique retailers had never been researched side-by-side using the instrumental collective case study method. For this study, I made a contribution to the field of boutique retail by creating my own definition of ‘boutique’ as independent fashion retailers that describe themselves and their selection of merchandise using words akin to (if not verbatim) “hand- picked items, thoughtfully curated, carefully selected” and/or who have a certain cult following (either self-described or apparent to customers). Current and/or prospective boutique retailers and small business owners in general will benefit from reviewing this study.

Perhaps the information gained in this research will encourage exclusively brick and mortar boutique owners to create and maintain a web presence and even open an E-commerce

website. As seen from this research, a web-counterpart of a boutique does not have many downsides—except for more work and larger customer bases.

## APPENDIX A: Informed Consent Form

### Informed Consent Form (Thoughtfully selected: Case study analyses of brick and mortar, E-commerce and blended retailers)

1. Purpose of the Study: To uncover how niche fashion boutiques are responding to the surge in E-commerce and creating in-store experiences simultaneously, and to describe how three fashion-related business can, and lead in the fields of E-commerce *and* brick and mortar stores. The research collected will be integrated into Rory Raabe's Master's thesis.
  
2. Benefits of the Study  
**For the subjects**: The ability to articulate the challenges of communicating and selling their products to consumers in stores and online, in their own words. Responses address the gap in literature about the differences in selling face-to-face versus online, specifically for boutiques.  
**For the scientific community and/or others**: This research provides a needed descriptive analysis on E-commerce, brick and mortar stores, and blended retailers revealing unique challenges faced by boutiques trying to survive in the new shopping landscape.
  
3. What You Will Be Asked to Do  
**Amount of time it will take**: 45-90 minutes  
**Tasks and procedures**: You will be asked to participate in a face-to face or telephone interview to answer questions about your experiences of communicating and selling products in-store and online. This interview will be audio-recorded.  
**Exclusionary criteria**: Only employees and managers/owners of the store, over the age of 18 are eligible to be interviewed. Customers and vendors will not be interviewed.
  
4. Risks: While serious physical or psychological effects are not anticipated, it is possible that by sharing personal and/or organizational experiences, you may become anxious or upset. We will do all that we can to ensure that your responses will be kept completely confidential.
  
5. If You Would Like More Information about the Study: After the interview is completed, your responses will be analyzed and compiled in order to complete the requirements for the Master's thesis. Once the thesis is approved and completed, you may request a copy, which will be delivered via E-mail. You will have the option to include your E-mail or physical mailing address. Otherwise, you may contact us using the information below at any point in time.  
  

Rory Raabe, Graduate Student Program E-mail: <a href="mailto:rraabe1@ithaca.edu">rraabe1@ithaca.edu</a> Telephone: (206) 618-8804	Dr. Cory Young, Chair of the Communications Graduate Program E-mail: <a href="mailto:youngc@ithaca.edu">youngc@ithaca.edu</a> Telephone: (607) 274-3698
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*Address*: Department of Strategic Communication. Roy H. Park School of Communications. Ithaca College. 953 Danby Road. Ithaca, NY 14850
  
6. Withdraw from the Study: You have the right at any point in time to refuse to complete the interview, skip any questions that you feel uncomfortable answering, or withdraw from the study.
  
7. How the Data will be Maintained in Confidence: In order to maintain confidentiality, you will not be asked to identify your name or the name of your boutique. If desired, you may provide a pseudonym. All

transcripts and audio files of the interviews will be secured as digital files on a password protected computer that only the principle investigator and advisor have access to.

I have read the above and I understand its contents. I agree to participate in the study. I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print or Type Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature Date \_\_\_\_\_

I give my permission to be audiotaped (videotaped). **(This sentence should only be used when appropriate.)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX B: Boutique Mission Statements**

None of the boutiques have explicit mission statement sections on their websites, but all have either “Contact”, “About”, or “Info” sections that express what the store “serves as” (Homegrown), what its “mission” is (Myth & Symbol), or what the store “aims to provide” (Anaise).

### Homegrown

Since opening in 2005, Homegrown has been the only skateboarder owned and operated shop serving the Ithaca area. The shop serves as a hub for the skateboard community here, and offers a selection of the best footwear, clothing, and skateboard products available. In addition, the shop also hosts monthly showings for local artists giving them an opportunity to display their work in front of a broader audience.

### Myth & Symbol

We are a small brick-and-mortar store established in 2012 and based in Houston, TX. Our mission: to bring precisely curated and expertly crafted works of style and beauty — especially from independent and responsible sources — into our patrons' lives.

### Anaise

ANAÏSE is an on-line shop with a select offering of clothing and objects, featuring timeless, well-crafted pieces from emerging and established designers. We aim to provide you with a source of unassuming elegance, subtle femininity, and modern bohème.

**APPENDIX C: Boutiques that contributed to my definition of “boutique”**

Totokaelo (totokaelo.com)

Frances May (francesmay.com)

Maryam Nassir Zadeh (mnz.com)

Opening Ceremony (openingceremony.us)

American Two Shot (americantwoshot.com)

Net-a-porter (net-a-porter.com)

Beklina (beklina.com)

Anaise (anaise.com)

Myth & Symbol (mythandsymbol.com)

Homegrown (homegrownskateshop.com)

Space 15 Twenty (space15twenty.com)

Myrtle (myrtleLA.com)

Bird (shopbird.com)

Need Supply Co. (needsupply.com)

Assembly New York (assemblynewyork.com)



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