Branding and Channel Issues in E-commerce from an Information System's Perspective

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Abstract. E-commerce has matured and become mainstream. The fashion industry is now competing strongly in the digital markets. Beside traditional web-shops, new sales and branding channels are emerging e.g. M-commerce (mobile); social commerce; marketplaces; gaming etc. E-commerce and multi-channel retailing (MCR) now have a less technology-centric perspective while focusing more on sales and branding, although technology is the carrier and imposes limits. Corporate information systems are extended to the consumer's computers, smartphones and digital entertainment platforms. The information systems (IS) research tradition is somewhat challenged but can provide an elaborate framework for the understanding of the business and technology changes as well as provide an ideal support for research and businesses in choosing among the different MCR options. This paper proposes a model to understand and position fashion companies' existing and future sales and branding channels from an IS perspective. Future research suggestions include long-term challenges and benefits of distinct electronic channels.

Keywords: multi-channel retailing, e-commerce, information systems, branding, fashion

1 Introduction

E-commerce has in many industries and for many companies become commonplace, although by mainstream corporations first generally accepted during the last two-three years. Especially in the fashion industry, e-commerce [1][2] is experiencing a strong growth [3] –in general a 17% annual growth is experienced in the period from 2000 – 2009 [4]. E-commerce operations are now expected to be in place by customers, distributors and partners, and the absence of well-working and well-designed e-commerce operations will negatively affect the business. A transition is about to take place from multiple channels to multi-channel retailing (MCR) which ideally merge company insights with customer behaviour and preferences [5][6][7].

As most research contributions originates from "the first dot com bubble" from 1995 – 2005, it is now interesting to redefine the insight into companies dealing with

e-commerce as a mature technology with mature business processes. Scupola [8] looks at e-commerce from a company/leadership adoption perspective, where "why" seems to have been replaced with "how". Several maturity models have been proposed [9][10] although promising, they seem idealistic with several targets lying 5 – 10 years ahead for even the most dedicated companies. At the same time new channels are emerging such as social commerce [12], refined infomediaries [11], marketplaces, affiliate and cooperative retailing [4].

The main research question of this study is: *Which factors should a fashion brand consider in order to succeed when building an e-commerce multichannel portfolio?* Contrary to extensive business transformation suggested by e.g. Ashworth et al. [10] we see companies letting their business remain on the lower levels of Ashworth's maturity model, but at the same time adopt new technologies (channels), such as social commerce and mobile commerce. Along with this, companies are struggling to achieve adherence and synergy among channels. We argue that an IS view will enhance this understanding and shed light on the consequences better than the classical view with more singular views on either business or technology can do.

2   Methodological considerations on multi-channel retailing

This study is qualitative, cross-disciplinary and inspired by interpretivism [14][15]. Critical is the positioning of multi-channel retailing (MCR) [9] within an IS research methodology [16]. The basic platform of MCR is viewed as a technological system typically representing a supply chain. Information conveyed by the IS platform includes disciplines such as sales, customer relationship management, branding and an array of socio-technical issues which each has research traditions of its own [17]. This relates to Taylor [18] identifying IS research as issues of balancing focus and diversity by applying a polycentric view.

This paper stretch from business strategy into IS strategy [19] and with Taylor [18] remains largely within 'Internet Applications Thematic Miscellany'. A critical issue within MCR is that various channels relate to different foci: social commerce is related to collaborativeness and inter-human relations [13], M-commerce is highly technical, affiliations relate to inter-business systems, all challenging a clear cut methodological stance. Bryant [20] states that communication is always prevalent in IS research and that communication convey social constructs, i.e. aiming at maintaining the view on the techno-social construct around MCR; the context of the system, more than the system itself, is critical Avgerou [21]. Smithson & Hirscheim [22] have in their seminal contribution(s) underlined IS as a research discipline of comprehension through evaluation of technological and business factors.

Baskerville & Myers [23] have described the "danger" of IS research working in waves of fashion (not clothes, but habits) with rising and declining interest for certain topics. In this study we "suffer" from the majority of IS e-commerce contributions being from a past wave. We therefore join Baskerville & Myers by conducting this study in close collaboration with IS practitioners and as Benbasat & Zmud [24], we emphasize relevance in practice. The idea of engaged scholarship from Van de Ven [52] and Mathiassen & Nielsen [25] focuses the research agenda on finding reason

and provide practitioners, as well as research communities, with insight from the matured use of e-commerce.

This study is based on data collection from a number of fashion companies with e-commerce, MCR strategy or perspective [17]. The two largest fashion companies in Denmark are used as exemplary cases [15]. Data collection is by unstructured and open-ended interviews with managers and IT suppliers and business partners. Data collection identified strategic, tactical and operational approaches to MCR in each company. Company access include past employment, as advisers, or in regular researcher roles. The considerations have been presented at industrial seminars with about 110 participants in December 2010 and January 2011 and feedback has been collected from these events.

This paper is a part of a series of papers from an industrial PhD project, and a general research in technology-based innovationfocusing on the fashion industry.

The method can be visualized as revolving between two main pillars of *technical infrastructure* (enablers) and a set of *commercial objectives* (promoters) with two beams of *channel design* and the *social construct*.
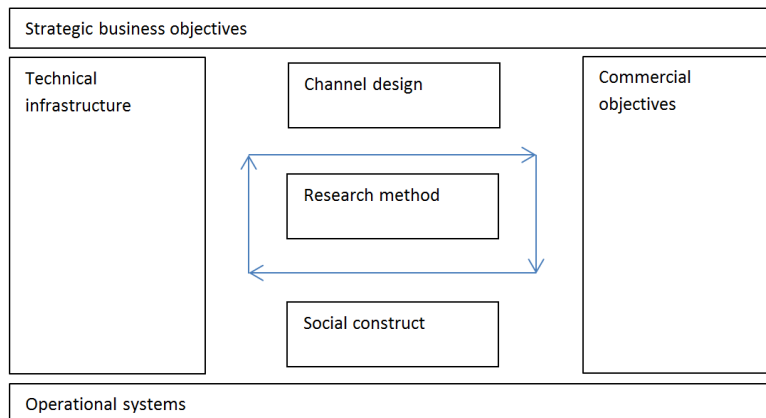

Fig. 1. Research model.

The social construct include branding and consumer-oriented flow of information; also actors along the supply chain could be observed here. Channel design includes decision making on channel life-cycles, channel positioning, cross-channel issues and eventually the functional design of the channel. The boundaries of the method are made by the business strategy and the existing operational system. The IS method and its cross-disciplinary nature include elements of retail and branding research [26][16].

3 Theoretical understanding of multi-channel retailing factors

E-commerce and MCR conjoin the technological platforms of commercial organisations and the commercial activity of branding [27], marketing [28] and sales itself. This dichotomy itself is reflected in companies with potentially unclear responsibilities and difficulties in the promotion, development and operation of the individual organisational and the business process components required to reach full benefits of the market potentials.

3.1 The value of information systems

The carrying fundamental of any business activity including IS and e-commerce is the ability to create value. Amit & Zott [29] suggest a framework for evaluation of value in e-commerce comprising *business model structure* and *business model content*. From an innovation economics view, they observe value sources from efficiency, complementarity, lock-in and novelty. In a commentary to Amit & Zott, Johansson & Mollstedt [30] argue to replace 'complementarity' with 'nature of the core product'. Karabeg [51] expand Amit & Zott's concept of value creation in e-business with issues of aesthetics and visual/function attractiveness. Also Noboa [31] argue in the line of Amit & Zott on value creation and required frameworks for assessing and developing value.

IS are where IT meet the organisation. Alter [32] presents a number of suggestions for definition of IS and IS research and most importantly the proposal for a generalised IS observation of IS as 'work systems'. By this definition an organisational, a personal or a business context should always be present, perceived or identifiable. E-commerce differs somewhat, as the business purpose is obvious, and some IS components reside in the internal organisation. The consumer perspective is less clear however Chang *et al.* [33] provide a detailed literature study in consumer – channel interrelatedness.

IS research communities has largely adopted e-commerce as a research discipline on electronic retailing [34][35][36][11][37][38][39]. Chu & Smithson [34] point at the dominating risk of conflicts within the commercial and organisational fabric. Parboteeah et al. [36] observe consumer excitement and satisfaction as parallelisms to user satisfaction. Son & Riggins [11] unfolds infomediaries as generators of consumer traffic in line with e.g. search engines [40][4].

3.2 E-commerce and multi-channel retailing

E-commerce is the classical discipline of exposing physical products at display on an electronic platform, attracting customers, enabling selling, and executing fulfilment. E-commerce is described as the combination of sales, administration, IT and logistics [41]. Heinemann & Schwartzl [4] state 'new online retailing' as evolutionary to retailing, and the general potential of the internet as a matured sales channel being complementary to other sales channels. Aldin & Stahre [42] emphasize e-commerce as the coupling of digitally-enabled marketing with digital supply chain systems.

Gensler *et al.* [43] address multi-channel in a broader sense including bricks-and-mortar, tv-shops, trade shows and homeshopping, and call for implementation of channel evaluation systems with respect to different customer profiles especially noting loyal versus switching customers. Evaluation of loyalty is also presented by Verhoef *et al* [7].

Retailing channels are to be distinguished between physical (offline) and digital (online) channels [10]. Even Wightman [39] projects how IS and retail should merge views. Kwon & Shannon [44] describe offline shopper belief as consisting of self-relevance, service, merchandise and store environments, whereas the online shopper is directed by aesthetic appeal, navigation convenience, transaction convenience and online content. Furthermore they describe cross-channel shopping as impacted dominance of offline shopping experience above online shopping experience. In the current context online channels are to be viewed as a multiplicity of digital communication and commerce options.

Gensler *et al.* [43] raise the importance of continuous evaluation of channel performance although cross-channel performance plays a limited role. Wallace et al. [45] optimistically state that customer satisfaction and the availability of multiple channels are interconnected, as customers expect a variety of retailing options. Webb & Lambe [46] warn of risks of internal and external conflicts and rivalry among channels and emphasizes the brand-owner responsibilities. Aldin & Stahre [42] discuss the issue of cannibalising the existing retail channels.

Channels are evolving from traditional mono-brand web-shops into social commerce, mobile commerce, gaming, product placement, affiliations, marketplaces etc.

3.3 Brand

The brand is one of the most critical assets of any company in terms of identification, attracting new customers, and developing existing customer relationships [27]. E-commerce extends a brand from a physical realm to a digital realm. Traditionally, branding has had a strong role in internet strategies. E-commerce systems still represents a balance between branding and sales with search engines making products commonly search-able [40]. A company needs to protect and care for the brand with equal importance in the digital sales channels as in the physical sales channels. The MCR marketing environment presents a number of brand management challenges [47]. Marketers must manage channels and communication options to strengthen direct sales and brand equity (value) impact, including indirect brand equity effects connected to a particular channel or communication option. From a strategic perspective, marketers must develop and operate channels and communication options to ensure synergy of sales and brand equity impacts. The brand is one of the firm's most valuable intangible assets [26] and generally branding is regarded a top management priority. In retailing, branding can be especially important in influencing customer perceptions and driving store choice and loyalty. Treiblmaier & Strebinger [37] discuss the requirements of aligning business strategy with both technology and branding, albeit with an underlining of appropriate matches of the right IT infrastructure and project governance for the right branding approach. E.g. strong

branding imposes other requirements on IT than a strong focus on high performance e-commerce. With IS, it seems there are some evidence that branding i.e. replace traditional front-end requirements of IS.

3.4 The IS perspective

As stated above, IS provides the methodological foundation for this study. Contributions like [34][35][36][11][37][38][39] each account for IS as scientific understanding for e-commerce and its position with organisational environments.

Subsequently we view the presented cases with a theoretical foundation driven by an IS perspective augmented by channel and branding considerations [48]. Alter's [32] multi-factor *work systems model* (WSM) approach gives meaning in terms of research criteria such as '*Recognition that IS should be analysed and designed as sociotechnical systems*' and '*Elevating the centrality of service and service metaphors in the IS field*'. As Alter discusses the widespread (lack of) user satisfaction, e-commerce is more self-evaluating: As put by Karabeg [51], customers are only attracted to e-commerce if the visual and functional appeal is superior to the perceived product value. Alter's [32] model WSM model reflect Information Systems research as a triangle of strategies, infrastructure and environment (see figure 4). E-commerce adds intra-, inter- and extra-organisational issues that fits appropriately into the IS analytical lens.

MCR tend to resemble classical work systems regarding corporate objectives, design processes, decision processes and organisation, just the 'users' are replaced by 'consumers'. 'Usefulness' [32] is replaced by commercial success. Williams [49] suggests an evolutionary view on the organisational development of the e-commerce unit within companies. Zeng *et al*. [50] discuss organisational transformation closely related to development in the technological foundation of e-commerce.

4 Case studies

4.1 Bestseller A/S

Bestseller A/S is a 2bn€ fashion wholesaler and retailer based in Denmark with 2.000+ concept stores in EMEA and Canada and 10.000 multi-brand retail customers including large European department stores such as Peek & Cloppenburg, Stockman and Gallerie Lafayette. Bestseller was founded in 1975, is privately owned by the CEO, and has 10 main brands. For most brands four – eight collections are presented annually comprising around 12000 new products. The number of recurring or stocked products is relatively low as it account for around 8 % of the turn-over. Some store segments receive new products as often as weekly to bi-monthly. The average product life time in stores should be less than 3 months.

From 2001 – 2007 Bestseller remained reluctant on up e-commerce, but made large scale experiments with texting/SMS-marketing, online customer clubs, online

games, online storytelling, and various local initiatives from brands, countries and store owners on customer loyalty systems, online promotions, etc. Bestseller started B2C e-commerce in January 2008 with its leading kids brand 'Name It' on the remnant of a defunct kids store. E-commerce now includes five main brands. Each brand was first "rolled out" in a detailed country-by-country manner with careful adaption to language, sales traditions and native customer support. Today the shop is serving the markets of Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Netherlands, Germany and a general English-version named "Others".

E-commerce was initially started as a separate organisational entity dislocated from the headquarters. This - along with a rapid development in the new area – created tensions with existing marketing and sales activities. These tensions led to a termination of the dislocated organisational entity and an outsourcing of the activity to a specialised e-commerce operator. one year after, product management, customer support, and several other activities were back-sourced into Bestsellers headquarter. The e-commerce operation is now developing steadily. During the early phase MCR was heavily pursued in getting stores to actively use e-commerce as referrers, linking between online and local, physical stores and create coherency in products and services across channels. Much of this was too complex at the time, and MCR has been downplayed to the benefit of a stricter revenue focus.

4.2 IC Companys A/S

IC Companys is a Northern European wholesaler and retailer of fashion products managing a number of brands targeted to markets like winter sports, luxury apparel, and mid-market. IC Companys has a number of "home grown" brands, but has successfully bought and developed a series of new brands. IC Companys has around 350 concept stores, a smaller number of strong chains, and approximately 3000 traditional multi-brand retail customers. IC Companys has since 2007 entered a high prioritized e-commerce strategy. The concept stores are generally recognized by using point-of-sales and other IT systems operated by IC Companys's central office. The multi-brand chains are closely linked to IC Companys using a number of EDI and business integration technologies.

IC Companys originally viewed itself as a wholesaler of fashion products leaving all retail operations to the retailer. However, over the years the concepts stores as a sales and branding channel have grown in importance. The same applies to the chains consisting of both department stores and e.g. sporting goods chains. This change in strategic importance regarding retail stores, together with the new e-commerce activity, has forced IC Companys to revise its business strategy. Looking at consumers across both online and offline retail channels could increase IC Companys overall service offering to the consumers. Consumer purchase preference, history intelligence, supply chain insight and seasonal offerings are adapted closely to the consumers' idea about the brands. A multi-channel retailing strategy is defined by a combined view on consumers across channels. The strategy furthermore enables a close monitoring of marketing campaigns. IC Companys is in its operational division constantly looking to architect information systems for a guiding role in

transformation of the operational systems towards accomplishing the targets of the new business strategy.

With a different technological approach, IC Companys is looking to develop its supply chain technologies. Currently, the store warehouses and the e-commerce warehouse are separate. At the same time, many concept stores and chain customers have a substantial stock of the season's products. IC Companys is looking to integrate retailing, IT and logistics into a single warehouse supplying all categories of customers - both B2B and e-commerce - to optimize supply chain efficiency and forward products to those channels giving the best earning. Rapid sales insights at the store level should enable intelligent replenishment of goods from a common warehouse. This also relates to another innovation approach, where the store-owners ask IC Companys for active participation in risk-sharing when buying a new season's products without knowing the sales opportunities. Consumer insight, e-commerce and intelligent, fast warehouse operations will all contribute to accomplishment of this innovation request.

IC Companys' MCR approach is as such one of the most aggressive found in Scandinavia with a direct aim of linking e-commerce and several physical channels to a common supply-chain. Basic to this is a radical change in information systems design. Where the value chain used to be: design – purchase – sell – ship it will now be: design – purchase – sell – MCR where the operating system will serve any channel, and independent customers will "just" be another channel with less information insight than the own-owned channels.

4.3 Cases summary

The cases are from the two largest fashion companies in Denmark. Over the last 3 years their e-commerce have gone from 0 to about 1% of the retail turn-over.

The companies interpret MCR somewhat differently. ICC's MCR strategy is ambitious in following the unique consumer through concept stores, multi-brand stores and online, by offering personalised shopping advice and taking an active customer relationship approach. Bestsellers MCR strategy focuses more on the general branding, the effect of presence in both digital and physical markets, and a future possibility to expose the individual store. Both companies are linking from brand-sites to the online shop for the brand, thus slightly reducing the direct impact of branding and shopping. Mobile commerce is not yet in question. Bestseller is using social commerce to a limited degree, but has a stable tradition for various online communities and has used several types of infomediaries. Bestseller is taking advantage of marketplaces like the UK online retailer ASOS, but with individual legal entities having the selling responsibilities.

There is no direct engagement from stores to e-commerce at the moment for any of the companies. I.e. no hand out of goods purchased online in stores, no profit sharing and no cross referral. This puts both companies in the very early stages of the maturity models [9] [10].

New channels are generally more business driven than technology driven, which is both yielding success based on known technologies, but also reducing failures with

immature technologies. New channel responsibilities are typically anchored within the marketing and sales departments in mixed marketing strategies [28].

5   Discussion

In both cases the business objectives are a mix of branding, sales and cross-channel impact. The focus of e-commerce balances between marketing and revenue. A model approach for channel choice and design is required [33]. The model must reflect branding objectives related to the channels, and the channel's role in the retailing scenery must be identifiable [51] [9]. An IS perspective can attribute with the linking between technological and organisational drivers.

5.1   Branding and channel model

Cross-channel expectations and impacts between physical and digital channels are one of the strongest drivers in MCR [49]. It is shown that physical channels impact digital channels more than the reverse in terms of actual buying propensity [44]. Cross-channel impact between digital channels deserves interest, as there is a risk that these only exist to support each other and therefore attention must be paid to continuous evaluation [38]. Marketing views might argue that marketing remain a purpose of its own, merely benefiting from the digital options as enabler technologies. Respecting this together with the learnings from the cases, the marketing effort must be accounted for independently of the sales channels. The multitude of channel facing the companies has led to the following figure:

Fig. 2. Channel grouping.

The companies are thus shifting from 'traditional e-commerce' in the form of webshops into more complex technological and organisational networks of digital branding and sales platforms. Figure 2 visualizes the empirical considerations found.

Brand and technology management must address this. Few scientific contributions exist on value of aggregated and complex technology and branding architectures, but as Treiblmaier & Strebinger [37] we argue that companies need to converge brand and technology management in the making of MCR strategic and tactical prioritisations.

Using classical IS arguments to observe both technology and business, figure 2 is mapped into the subsequently proposed model – figure 3 - oriented at identifying the role of a channel in a mature e-commerce environment. The model also proposes to introduce a pragmatic commercial view on the channel architecture in terms of control of branding and consumer experience.
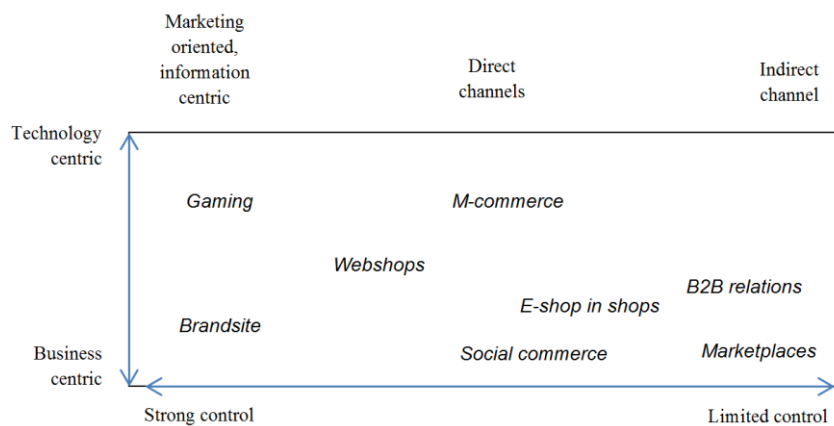

Fig. 3. Modelling of channel positioning.

The control issue links closely with internal vs external relationships and dependencies of the IS construct. Furthermore control is setting the management boundaries: Marketplaces like Amazon.com are only indirectly to control – but plenty reason to maintain control with direct and information channels.

From the cases above, Bestseller has been strong in the left and right hand side of the model, but weak in the centre. Contrary to this IC Companys have had a clearer priority in the centre.

With the strong tradition for selling to both concept stores and multi-brand (independent) retailers, both cases are quite careful in assessing the impact of digital sales channels on physical sales channels i.e sales cannibalisation [4][9][19]. New channels must be developed to support the total sales activities underlining the view of MCR and not just multiple channels.

The empirical observations seem to partly support the view expressed in the proposed maturity models of [9][10]. However the maturity models do not take into account the rapidly expanding number of competing digital channels. Henceforth companies have to pay attention to developing their ability to switch to new and interesting channels, making it difficult to reach the highest level of maturity. Instead, maturity lies in the ability to switch between channels and adapt new channels e.g. using service oriented architectures.

Despite the aforementioned frameworks for identifying business value, the cases show that there is a long way to go. In the first phase of Bestsellers implementation, branding from a marketing view alone justified business value, as the rapidly growing e-commerce accounts for only a fraction of physical retailing. The strategic choice and decision making is fundamental [27] [45] [24] and hence the plethora of new channel options depletes the narrow business value of the individual channel.

The importance of branding indicates that IS studies on e-commerce beneficially could include branding in the scientific lens [26].

5.2 The IS perspective

Where branding and sales should reflect emotions and sentiments [51], IS provide frameworks for balanced evaluation [22] including the breadth of IT, organisation and business factors.

Alter [32] only partially includes e-commerce as IS in a 'traditional' sense. Given the above stated uncertainty of control and internal/external the model view could benefit from including a control issue. The control issue will highlight business impact and influence on each channel.

We tend to view several MCR designs as a disruption of systems but as a continuation of information between the buyer and the seller; several technologies and infrastructures might be prevalent as the customer might shop seamlessly between direct and indirect channels.

Furthermore satisfaction is 'revenue' on the short term and risk of depleting brand equity on the long term. The above mentioned value proposition is critical to this understanding. The IS perspective is useful but can be augmented with infomediaries, affiliations, social commerce, gaming channels, etc. thus adding new tiers of technology which cannot be controlled by the brand owner.

Using Alters WSM model [32] we propose a parallel model for MCR. The model highlights the MCR and consumers as externalized in relation to corporate information system potentially having their own infrastructure, environment and strategies, but attracted to the company through appropriate branding and channel architectures:
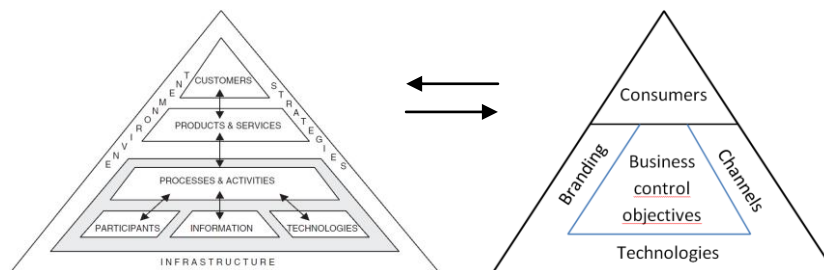

Fig. 4. IS model – branding and channel augmentation to Alter's model

Branding, channel, and technology impose requirements of alignment with both the internal IS, but also branding across channels and cross-channel issues [37]. The

model suggests – as in IC Companys' case – that channels are founded on one central connecting point in the hosting organisation. It should ideally be easy to add, reorganise and remove channels. Bestseller is similarly providing data out of a common datahub. The model also suggests that channels tend to be technologically external in terms of corporate production systems. IS research in MCR is thus indicatively more complex and multi-paradigmatic than classic organisation-internal IS.

Considering the methodological standpoint of this study, the IS approach has proven useful, as the business impact of applying technology is determined by the dual context of organisation and technology. The case studies show a different path than expected. The 'Internet Applications Thematic Miscellany' seems to evolve into a complete semi-externalised business models. The research model proves useful when going/evolving from traditional work systems to e-commerce.

5.3 Findings summary

E-commerce in fashion retailing is maturing and moving from single, independent channels to both physical and digital multi-channel retailing. This raises the question of which factors a fashion brand should consider in order to succeed when building an e-commerce multichannel portfolio?

This study so far views the fundamental factors as consumers, branding, channels and technology. In figure 3 a model is proposed for management and awareness within e-commerce using technology versus business drivers as one dimension and internal versus external control as the other dimension. To further summarize the findings:

- Existing IS models need to be extended towards branded consumer solutions [26][27][48][50]
- Re-interpret corporate IS from a consumer value perspective including attractiveness and brand value [2][36]
- Clarify the purpose, position, role, interrelation, and success criterias of each channel [4][42][38]
- Develop channel control and management according to figure 3
- Organise internal structures for securing positive interrelations between technology and business [8][10][34[49]
- Understand the technological foundations and infrastructure requirements associated with each channel and the combined offering [37]
- Secure alignment between channels on e.g. price, product categorisation, product presentation, and storytelling [1][9]
- Enable appropriate evaluation mechanisms [7][29][43]

5.4 Contours of future research

As this paper is the first in a recently started research project, a series of analytical studies are planned.

Data collection on e-commerce and MCR strategies is underway for about 12 companies in the fashion and life-style sector. The similarities and differences among these companies are highly interesting when aiming to reach a more detailed understanding of how e-commerce and MCR is influenced by retail presence, product pricing segment, and product life-cycle characteristics. As a business impact study it is highly interesting to identify promoters and barriers and eventually economical results.

Multi-channel retailing has been discussed for several years, however many companies still operate in the multiple channel arena. IC Companys and a number of other fashion brands have expressed clear intentions on pursuing "real" MCR. Even though cross-channel customer insight and customer support/experience seem attractive, little has been recorded on the long-term benefits including channel alignment, extent of channel collaboration, issues on mixed ownership of channels, and the operational issues associated with creating and maintaining customer expectations.

Traditionally IS has not included issues like branding and direct customer/consumer interaction, but when systems are stretched out of the company and made ubiquitous and pervasive in relation to the life of consumer, new requirements and research dimension comes forward.

6   Conclusion

E-commerce has over the last 5 years matured in fashion retailing and been largely accepted by brand owners. Organisational and commercial barriers against e-commerce have been reduced, but new barriers for positive exploitation of the possibilities lies within prioritisation, maintaining uniform and consistent branding, avoiding cross-channel conflicts, selecting between hype and sustainable channels, and the overall strategic alignment between marketing / branding, and channels / technology.

The IS approach offers an improved understanding of the technology – organisation duality as the fundamental driver of business development. Several authors emphasize that MCR is closely connected to organisational transformation; our study however indicates that companies take a more evolutionary path rather than focusing on a radical business transformation. This is makes MCR a probably source of organisational conflict. Observation of our proposed models will hopefully contribute to a clearer picture for companies in organising, positioning and aligning MCR.

This study points to a dual conclusion on multi-channel e-commerce and retailing in the design of the business transformation [50] and the management of this process. Multi-channel retailing needs to be driven by a business strategy. Marketing-oriented, shorter-lived channels must be segregated from the long-term channels. Conclusively, the IS stance has yielded a better understanding of the commercial phenomena of e-commerce, channel development, and branding in the context of technology and business.

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