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Bookselling culture and consumer behaviour:

Marketing strategies and responses in traditional and online environments

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Abstract

This research examines the implementation of marketing both by chain and online booksellers, and consumer responses to this marketing and a reading of the current trade press revealed calls for research into consumer wants and needs (Watson, 2002; Holman, 2007; Horner, 2007a). While BML (Book Marketing Limited) carries out a valuable range of research into publishing and bookselling on an ongoing basis, nevertheless, both are relatively new research areas, and bookselling is particularly underdeveloped. It would appear that research in the field of bookselling has yet to be examined in an academic context. With specific respect to the development of a comprehensive understanding of consumer responses to bookshop marketing, the research is original, timely and useful, and builds upon the foundations of existing research, as detailed above.

The mixed-method approach adopted in this study enhanced the level of triangulation possible, with interviews, surveys and focus groups serving to consolidate and support sets of results. This empirical research has uncovered rich source material from consumers both online and offline, revealing complex responses to traditional and online bookselling environments.

Key original findings include: the widespread perception of homogeneity across chain bookshops by consumers; the presence of a coffee shop can enhance the concept of the bookshop as a social space and that consumer behaviour online was found to tend towards linear, goal-oriented book buying, whereas traditional book shopping tends to be much more about browsing, and have a serendipitous quality to it.

The research has developed a comprehensive understanding of the approaches to marketing taken by chain booksellers, but more especially, the range of consumer responses and behaviour in both traditional chain and online bookshops. It has built upon the existing scholarly material available in these fields, as well as extending and developing research in the new academic field of bookselling. There is considerable scope for further investigation in both traditional and online bookselling, as outlined in the Conclusions chapter, building on the findings emerging from this research.
Contents

Chapter 1 - Introduction .............................................................................. 1
  1.1 Current bookselling context ................................................................. 1
  1.2 Recent bookselling history ................................................................. 5
  1.3 Non-traditional retailing ................................................................. 9
  1.4 Coffee shops .................................................................................. 11
  1.5 Online bookselling .......................................................................... 12
  1.6 Independent bookshops ................................................................. 14
  1.7 Book clubs .................................................................................. 16
  1.8 Digitisation ................................................................................. 17
  1.9 Future bookselling ........................................................................ 18
  1.10 Publications ................................................................................ 19
  1.11 Research aim and objectives ....................................................... 20

Chapter 2 - Methodological Approach ....................................................... 22
  2.1 The Research Questions and Research Objectives ......................... 22
    2.1.1 Research rationale ................................................................. 22
    2.1.2 Provenance of the research questions ..................................... 24
    2.1.3 Development of the research aim and research objectives .......... 26
    2.1.4 The use of chain bookshops - rationale .................................... 30
  2.2 The Choice of Methods ................................................................ 32
    2.2.1 Rationale ............................................................................. 32
    2.2.2 The ‘pragmatic researcher’ .................................................... 32
    2.2.3 A developmental approach ................................................... 33
    2.2.4 Mixing methods .................................................................... 34
    2.2.5 The quantitative-qualitative continuum .................................. 35
    2.2.6 The interaction of the methods ............................................. 36
  2.3 The Methods ................................................................................ 38
    2.3.1 The use of interviews .............................................................. 39
      2.3.1.1 Rationale ....................................................................... 39
      2.3.1.2 Potential interview bias .................................................. 40
      2.3.1.3 Selecting the participants ................................................ 40
      2.3.1.4 Interview design and administration ................................ 41
      2.3.1.5 Carrying out the interviews ............................................ 42
      2.3.1.6 Approach to the analysis ................................................. 42
        2.3.1.7.1 Observation and notes ............................................... 43
        2.3.1.7.2 Coding the interviews ............................................... 44
    2.3.2. Further use of interviews ....................................................... 45
      2.3.2.1 Rationale ....................................................................... 45
      2.3.2.2 Carrying out the telephone interviews ................................ 46
      2.3.2.3 Overcoming problems of access ....................................... 46
      2.3.2.4 Analysing the interviews with online experts .................... 46
    2.3.3 The use of questionnaires .......................................................... 47
      2.3.3.1 Rationale ....................................................................... 47
      2.3.3.2 Awareness of potential bias ............................................. 48
      2.3.3.3 Selecting the participants ................................................ 49
      2.3.3.4 Questionnaire design and administration .......................... 50
      2.3.3.5 Carrying out the questionnaires ...................................... 51
      2.3.3.6 Analysis of the questionnaires ........................................ 51
      2.3.3.7 Using SPSS ................................................................... 51
    2.3.4 Use of online questionnaires ....................................................... 52
      2.3.4.1 Rationale ....................................................................... 52
2.3.4.2 Potential difficulties with online methods........................................53
2.3.4.3 Using online questionnaires at objective 4........................................54
2.3.4.3.1 Postal surveys.................................................................................54
2.3.4.3.2 Pilot postal surveys..........................................................................54
2.3.4.3.3 Street surveys..................................................................................55
2.3.4.4 Online questionnaire design and administration.................................55
2.3.4.5 Using online questionnaires again.........................................................56
2.3.4.6 Analysing the online questionnaires......................................................57
2.3.5 The use of focus groups ...........................................................................57
2.3.5.1 Rationale..............................................................................................57
2.3.5.2 Awareness of potential bias....................................................................58
2.3.5.3 Recruiting focus group participants......................................................58
2.3.5.4 Successful moderation of focus groups...............................................59
2.3.5.5 Focus groups – design and administration..............................................59
2.3.5.6 Carrying out the focus groups.................................................................60
2.3.5.7 Analysis of the focus groups.................................................................61
2.4 Ongoing assessment & evaluation of research progress.............................62
2.4.1 Introduction................................................................................................62
2.4.2 Observation in-store...............................................................................62
2.4.3 Consolidation of objectives .....................................................................63
2.5 Methodology – a Critical Reflection ............................................................65
2.5.1 Introduction...............................................................................................65
2.5.2 Data collection..........................................................................................65
2.5.3 Methodological limitations – impact upon Conclusions...........................68
2.5.4 Methodological strengths........................................................................71
2.5.5 Holistic reflection.....................................................................................72
2.6 Conclusion...................................................................................................74

Chapter 3 - Review of the Literature.................................................................75
3.1 Introduction..................................................................................................75
3.2 Marketing, Branding and Store Layout.......................................................76
  3.2.1 Introduction..............................................................................................76
  3.2.2 Segmentation, Targeting and Positioning...............................................77
  3.2.3 Marketing Mix..........................................................................................90
  3.2.4 Decision process model..........................................................................94
  3.2.5 Model of reasoned action.......................................................................98
  3.2.6 E – marketing........................................................................................101
    3.2.6.1 New strategies..................................................................................101
    3.2.6.2 Information sharing.........................................................................101
    3.2.6.3 Customisation..................................................................................102
  3.2.7 Approaches to marketing.........................................................................104
  3.2.8 Store surroundings.................................................................................109
  3.2.9 Shop layout and design..........................................................................112
  3.2.10 Effects of a ‘discount image’.................................................................112
  3.2.11 Brands and branding..........................................................................114
    3.2.11.1 Introduction....................................................................................114
    3.2.11.2 Brand equity, maintenance and integrity......................................116
      3.2.11.2.1 Brand equity..........................................................................116
      3.2.11.2.2 Brand personality, values and attributes..............................118
      3.2.11.2.3 Branding – advantages for the buyer....................................121
      3.2.11.2.4 Branding – advantages for the seller....................................123
      3.2.11.2.5 Brand Alliances....................................................................125
    3.2.11.3 The bookshop as a brand...............................................................125
    3.2.11.4 Bookshop events............................................................................127
    3.2.11.5 The role of the bookseller.............................................................127
4.1.4.1 Nationwide promotions ................................................................. 200
4.1.5 Organisational differences ................................................................. 202
4.1.6 The newer marketing initiatives ......................................................... 203
  4.1.6.1 Coffee shops, sofas and brand identity ....................................... 203
4.1.7 Bookshops in the local community ..................................................... 205
4.1.8 Bookshop customers ........................................................................... 206
  4.1.8.1 ‘Typical’ customers ....................................................................... 206
  4.1.8.2 Developments in bookshop clientele ........................................... 207
4.1.9 Role of the staff .................................................................................. 208
  4.1.9.1 Impact on bookshop brand ........................................................... 208
  4.1.9.2 Staff coteries ................................................................................. 209
4.1.10 Atmosphere and ambiance ................................................................. 210
4.1.11 Store identity ..................................................................................... 211
  4.1.11.1 Brand distinction ......................................................................... 211
4.1.12 The impact of online bookselling ..................................................... 212
4.1.13 Publisher influence .......................................................................... 214
4.1.14 Future plans ....................................................................................... 215
4.2 In-store questionnaires with bookshop customers .................................. 217
  4.2.1 Introduction ....................................................................................... 217
  4.2.2 Consumer demographics ................................................................. 217
  4.2.3 Consumer behaviour in bookshops ................................................. 218
  4.2.4 Consumer impressions .................................................................... 221
  4.2.5 Other bookselling outlets .................................................................. 223
    4.2.5.1 Visiting online bookshops .......................................................... 223
    4.2.5.2 Visiting supermarkets ................................................................. 223
  4.2.6 Consumer responses to in store marketing ....................................... 223
    4.2.6.1 Store image ............................................................................... 223
    4.2.6.2 Important bookshop qualities .................................................... 225
    4.2.6.3 Consumer dislikes in store .......................................................... 226
    4.2.6.4 Author events ............................................................................ 226
  4.2.7 Factors influencing book choice ....................................................... 227
  4.2.8 The newer marketing strategies ....................................................... 232
    4.2.8.1 The coffee shop ......................................................................... 232
    4.2.8.2 Seating ...................................................................................... 234
  4.2.9 Interacting with others ..................................................................... 235
    4.2.9.1 Interacting with other customers .............................................. 235
    4.2.9.2 Interacting with booksellers ...................................................... 237
  4.2.10 Bookshop impact on emotion ........................................................... 239
4.3 Focus groups with bookshop customers .............................................. 241
  4.3.1 Introduction ....................................................................................... 241
  4.3.2 Brand identity of the bookshops ....................................................... 241
  4.3.3 Promotional techniques ................................................................... 243
    4.3.3.1 ‘3 for 2’ offers ........................................................................... 243
    4.3.3.2 Other discounting ...................................................................... 244
    4.3.3.3 Other marketing ........................................................................ 245
  4.3.4 The effect of discounting on browsing .............................................. 245
  4.3.5 Range and homogeneity ................................................................... 246
  4.3.6 Local relevance ............................................................................... 247
  4.3.7 The book shopping experience ......................................................... 248
  4.3.8 Bookshop surroundings .................................................................... 250
  4.3.9 The ‘duality’ of the bookshop experience ......................................... 252
  4.3.10 Bookshop customers ...................................................................... 253
  4.3.11 The booksellers .............................................................................. 254
  4.3.12 Coffee shops ................................................................................... 255
  4.3.13 The bookshop as a ‘third place’ ...................................................... 257
4.3.14 Online book shopping .......................................................... 260
4.4 Online surveys with newer bookshop users ................................... 262
  4.4.1 Introduction ........................................................................... 262
  4.4.2 Demographic information ...................................................... 262
  4.4.3 Habitual bookshop behaviour ................................................. 263
    4.4.3.1 Period of bookshop visiting .............................................. 263
    4.4.3.2 Frequency of bookshop visiting ........................................ 264
  4.4 Bookshop use .......................................................................... 265
    4.4.4.1 Potential barriers to bookshop use .................................... 265
    4.4.4.2 Encouraging more bookshop use ....................................... 267
  4.4.5 Purchasing behaviour ............................................................ 271
    4.4.5.1 Frequency of purchasing ................................................ 271
    4.4.5.2 Reasons for not purchasing .............................................. 271
  4.4.6 Brand awareness ................................................................. 274
  4.4.7 In-store marketing/qualities .................................................... 275
    4.4.7.1 Consumer responses to in-store marketing/qualities ............. 275
    4.4.7.2 Consumer responses to key marketing tools ....................... 276
      4.4.7.2.1 Attractiveness of discounting .................................... 276
      4.4.7.2.2 Attractiveness of the coffee shop ................................. 279
      4.4.7.2.3 Attractiveness of sofas ............................................ 281
  4.5 Interviews with online managers .............................................. 282
    4.5.1 Introduction ........................................................................ 282
    4.5.2 The online site .................................................................... 282
      4.5.2.1 Inception and development of the site ............................ 282
      4.5.2.2 Site redesign .............................................................. 283
    4.5.3 Consumers and personal relationships .................................. 284
    4.5.4 Customer loyalty ............................................................... 285
    4.5.5 Characteristics of online bookselling .................................... 287
    4.5.6 Brand heritage ................................................................. 290
    4.5.7 Marketing and branding online .......................................... 291
    4.5.8 The future of online bookselling ....................................... 292
  4.6 Online survey with users of online bookshops ............................. 294
    4.6.1 Introduction ....................................................................... 294
    4.6.2 Demographic information .................................................. 294
    4.6.3 Habitual behaviour in online bookshops ............................... 296
    4.6.4 Crossover between traditional, online and supermarket use .... 300
    4.6.5 Browsing ........................................................................... 306
      4.6.5.1 Comparing online and traditional browsing ..................... 306
      4.6.5.2 The browsing experience online ..................................... 306
    4.6.6 Impressions of online bookselling ....................................... 308
      4.6.6.1 Site design ................................................................... 308
      4.6.6.2 Online qualities ......................................................... 308
      4.6.6.3 Trust .......................................................................... 312
      4.6.6.4 Tactile quality ............................................................. 313
    4.6.7 Impulse buying online ........................................................ 313
    4.6.8 Interaction with others online ............................................. 316
    4.6.9 Emotion change online ...................................................... 319

Chapter 5 - Discussion of key findings ............................................. 322
  5.1 Introduction ............................................................................ 322
  5.2 Expanding the book buying market ........................................... 322
    5.2.1 Monitoring marketing strategy .......................................... 326
  5.3 Discounting ............................................................................ 326
    5.3.1 Consumer responses to discounting ................................... 327
      5.3.1.1 Experienced consumer responses to discounting ............. 328
5.3.2 Further effects of discounting.................................................................................. 329
5.4 Branding......................................................................................................................... 330
  5.4.1 The predilection for rebranding ............................................................................. 330
  5.4.2 Consumer perception of brand identity................................................................. 332
5.5 The consumers ............................................................................................................... 333
  5.5.1 Consumer value.................................................................................................... 333
  5.5.2 Habitual bookshop behaviour............................................................................... 335
  5.5.3 Factors influencing purchase: traditional customers............................................. 337
  5.5.4 Factors influencing purchase: online customers.................................................. 338
  5.5.5 Factors influencing unplanned purchasing......................................................... 339
  5.5.6 Gender issues....................................................................................................... 340
5.6 Organisational differences.......................................................................................... 340
  5.6.1 The wider impact of discounting........................................................................... 340
  5.6.2 The question of cultural obligation ...................................................................... 343
  5.6.3 Management autonomy ...................................................................................... 344
5.7 Community relevance................................................................................................. 350
  5.7.1 The role of the bookshop in the community........................................................... 350
  5.7.2 The Bookshop as a third place............................................................................. 351
  5.7.3 Coffee shops and their contribution to ‘third place’............................................. 352
    5.7.3.1 Consumer responses to the coffee shop......................................................... 353
    5.7.3.2 Negative responses to coffee shops.............................................................. 355
5.8 The Bookshop experience........................................................................................... 356
  5.8.1 Consumer activity in bookshops.......................................................................... 356
  5.8.2 Browsing – online and offline ............................................................................. 357
  5.8.3 The duality of book shopping ............................................................................. 360
  5.8.4 The physical surroundings in the bookshop......................................................... 361
  5.8.5 Personal environment.......................................................................................... 363
  5.8.6 Bookshop impact on emotion............................................................................. 364
  5.8.7 Negative experiences in store............................................................................. 366
5.9 The role of bookselling staff....................................................................................... 366
  5.9.1 Traditional bookshops............................................................................................ 366
  5.9.2 Online bookselling and the bookseller’s role........................................................ 369
5.10 Interaction with others............................................................................................... 372
  5.10.1 Interaction with other customers......................................................................... 372
  5.10.2 Bookseller - consumer relationships online........................................................ 374
5.11 Brand distinction online........................................................................................... 376
  5.11.1 Distinction in identity between online and traditional stores............................ 376
  5.11.2 Advantages and disadvantages of online bookselling........................................ 377
    5.11.2.1 Price, range and convenience .................................................................. 377
    5.11.2.2 The tactile element.................................................................................... 378
  5.11.3 The dominance of Amazon................................................................................ 379
  5.11.4 The personalisation of Amazon book shopping................................................. 381
5.12 The future of bookselling.......................................................................................... 383

Chapter 6 - Conclusions and Recommendations......................................................... 384
  6.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................... 384
  6.2 Discounting and homogeneity ................................................................................ 384
  6.3 The bookshop as a third place................................................................................ 393
  6.4 Expanding the market .............................................................................................. 395
  6.5 The role of the bookseller....................................................................................... 397
  6.6 Cultural obligation and manager autonomy............................................................ 400
  6.7 The impact and role of online bookselling............................................................... 402
  6.8 Relationships online............................................................................................... 406
  6.9 The bookshop experience ...................................................................................... 408
  6.10 The original contribution to knowledge ................................................................ 412
6.10.1 Introduction ................................................................. 412
6.10.2 Bookshop identity .......................................................... 412
6.10.3 The Bookseller ............................................................... 413
6.10.4 The Coffee shop ............................................................. 414
6.10.5 Online marketing ........................................................... 415
6.11 Recommendations ............................................................ 417
  6.11.1 Further research ........................................................... 422
  6.11.2 Implications for industry ................................................ 423
6.12 Future strategy ................................................................. 425
6.13 Final points ........................................................................ 426

References ............................................................................ 429

Bibliography .......................................................................... 453

Appendix I – Publications ....................................................... 471
Appendix II – Interviews with book trade experts ...................... 472
Appendix III – Coding of initial interviews with bookshop experts ................................................ 477
Appendix IV – Interviews with online managers ......................... 482
Appendix V – Coding of interviews with online experts ............... 485
Appendix VI – In-store questionnaires with bookshop customers ................................................ 487
Appendix VII – Online survey with new bookshop users ............. 494
Appendix VIII – Online surveys .................................................. 498
Appendix IX - Focus group question schedule ......................... 506
Appendix X - Coding of focus groups ....................................... 509
Appendix XI - The Approach to the review of literature ............. 516
List of Figures

Chapter 2

Fig. 2.1 Time spent in bookshops 25
Fig. 2.2 Preliminary research questions 28
Fig. 2.3 Inter-supportive objectives 33

Chapter 3

Fig. 3.1 Segmentation, targeting and positioning 78
Fig. 3.2 Decision process model 94
Fig. 3.3 Repeat purchase model 99
Fig. 3.4 Model of reasoned action 100
Fig. 3.5 Maslow’s hierarchy 146
Fig. 3.6 The Long Tail 166
Fig. 3.7 Chapter development 187

Chapter 4

Fig. 4.1.1 Projected bookshop qualities 194
Fig. 4.1.2 Projected store characteristics 195
Fig. 4.2.1 Age of questionnaire respondents 217
Fig. 4.2.2 Gender of questionnaire respondents 218
Fig. 4.2.3 Frequency of bookshop visiting 219
Fig. 4.2.4 Time spent on each bookshop visit 219
Fig. 4.2.5 Frequency of visits to other bookshops 220
Fig. 4.2.6 Favourite bookshop 221
Fig. 4.2.7 Bookshop reputation 222
Fig. 4.2.8 Chain or independent 222
Fig. 4.2.9 Usual behaviour in store 224
Fig. 4.2.10 Important bookshop qualities 225
Fig. 4.2.11 Perceived importance of bookshop events 226
Fig. 4.2.12 Factors influencing book choice 227
Fig. 4.2.13 Factors influencing book choice (women) 229
Fig. 4.2.14 Factors influencing book choice (men) 230
Fig. 4.2.15 Selected factors influencing book choice 231
Fig. 4.2.16 Favourite coffee shop qualities 232
Fig. 4.2.17 Consumer opinion about bookshop seating 234
Fig. 4.2.18 Interacting with others 236
Fig. 4.2.19 Helpfulness of staff 237
Fig. 4.2.20 Staff knowledge 238
Fig. 4.2.21 Interaction with booksellers 239
Fig. 4.2.22 Emotion change in bookshops 240
Fig. 4.4.1 Age of survey respondents 262
Fig. 4.4.2 Period of bookshop visiting 263
Fig. 4.4.3 Frequency of bookshop visiting 226
Fig. 4.4.4 Barriers to bookshop use 265
Fig. 4.4.5 Barriers to bookshop use (newer visitors) 266
Fig. 4.4.6 Barriers to bookshop use (visitors of up to ten years) 267
Fig. 4.4.7 Encouraging more visits 268
Fig. 4.4.8 Encouraging more visits (newer visitors) 269
Fig. 4.4.9 Encouraging more visits (visitors of up to ten years) 270
Fig. 4.4.10 Frequency of purchasing 271
Fig. 4.4.11 Barriers to purchasing 272
Fig. 4.4.12 Barriers to purchasing (newer visitors) 273
Fig. 4.4.13 Brand awareness 274
Fig. 4.4.14 Consumer responses 275
Fig. 4.4.15 Consumer responses (newer visitors) 276
Fig. 4.4.16 Attractiveness of discounting 277
Fig. 4.4.17 Attractiveness of discounting (newer visitors) 278
Fig. 4.4.18 Attractiveness of the coffee shop 279
Fig. 4.4.19 Attractiveness of the coffee shop (newer visitors) 280
Fig. 4.4.20 Attractiveness of sofas 281

Fig. 4.5.1 Characteristics of online bookselling 288
Fig. 4.5.2 Online advantages 289

Fig. 4.6.1 Age of survey participants 295
Fig. 4.6.2 Gender of survey participants 295
Fig. 4.6.3 Frequency of online visits 296
Fig. 4.6.4 Time spent on online visits 297
Fig. 4.6.5 Frequency of purchasing 298
Fig. 4.6.6 Online behaviour 299
Fig. 4.6.7 Numbers purchasing in traditional bookshops 300
Fig. 4.6.8 Comparison of time spent 301
Fig. 4.6.9 Comparison of money spent 302
Fig. 4.6.10 Consumer site preference 303
Fig. 4.6.11 Reasons for preferring traditional bookshops 305
Fig. 4.6.12 Reasons for preferring online bookshops 305
Fig. 4.6.13 Consumer opinion 308
Fig. 4.6.14 Important online facilities 309
Fig. 4.6.15 Favourite online qualities 310
Fig. 4.6.16 Trust 312
Fig. 4.6.17 Tactile quality 313
Fig. 4.6.18 Impulse buying online 314
Fig. 4.6.19 Impulse buying 314
Fig. 4.6.20 Qualities influencing purchase 315
Fig. 4.6.21 Social quality 317
Fig. 4.6.22 Bookseller presence 318
Fig. 4.6.23 Emotion change 319

Chapter 5

Fig. 5.1 Projected bookshop qualities 323
Fig. 5.2 The cultural/commercial dichotomy 343
Fig. 5.3 Consumer behaviour – traditional bookshops 357
Fig. 5.4 Consumer behaviour – online bookshops 358
Fig. 5.5 The duality of book shopping 361

Chapter 6

Fig. 6.1 Changing bookseller role 399
Fig. 6.2 Future strategy model 425
Appendix I

Fig. I Chapter development
List of Tables

Table 2.1 Data collection programme 30
Table 2.2 Data collection methods 38
Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 Current bookselling context
The following research aims to analyse critically the current approach to marketing and branding in the UK book trade, and, more especially, consumer responses to that marketing and branding. The study focuses upon chain bookshops and goes on to look at how online bookshops have adopted – or adapted – the chain bookshop approach. Consumer responses to these bookselling settings are analysed, examining both behavioural and emotional responses to these environments. The research context is, unequivocally, bookselling, and while literature from a range of fields is drawn upon to contextualise the research, its focus is upon bookselling and in particular the responses of bookshop customers, online and offline, to the marketing approaches of bookshops. The originality of the work primarily rests upon the empirical academic research carried out in this area by the current research, and the subsequent contextualising of the findings within existing bodies of literature, scholarly theories and models, and trade data. The research is groundbreaking and extends our understanding of consumer responses to applied marketing in a number of areas within bookselling. It also provides a solid foundation for further research. Details of the original contribution to knowledge and of recommendations for further research are outlined in Chapter 6.

Writing, books and bookshops play an increasingly prominent role in our cultural lives (Manguel, 1996; Zaid, 2004), and much of the marketing that promotes books is becoming more inclusive for a wider segment of the population. For example, the Man Booker prize is now televised and has an increasingly celebrity-oriented panel of judges. The success of ‘The Richard and Judy Book Club’ has been phenomenal (Times, 2006) and has attracted much comment both within the book trade, and in the wider media, regarding the apparent success of attracting casual or even non-readers to read more books. Nevertheless, there is a dearth of scholarly work in this field. Whilst there is a wealth of material in related fields such as retail management and consumer behaviour, which can certainly be used to contextualise a study of the book trade, bookselling specifically has no significant body of academic work which can be sourced for academic study. This has necessitated an approach to the research which draws upon relevant literature in related fields such as marketing, branding and consumer behaviour, as well as literature on publishing. This has served both to underpin the research findings, as well as setting them in the context of the wider research field in order that the relevance of the research findings is clear. The wide
availability of trade commentary and opinion pieces from the book trade has also proved invaluable in focusing upon key issues and concerns in the trade as well as maintaining the currency of the research.

Bookselling itself is a relatively new field in terms of academic research, evidenced by the fact that very little scholarly material on this subject is available. Historically, the book trade has been reactive rather than proactive in many of its business decisions, but if there has been a lack of clear strategically-led planning in the past, bookshops would certainly not be alone amongst the business community in concentrating on other more commercially immediate aspects of trading (Gilbert, 2003). This is gradually changing, due to the competitive nature of the current market; a more professional or ‘commercial’ approach to bookselling and also because of the influx of experts to the book trade from other retail sectors which have been quicker to realise the importance of responding to the needs of their customers. It is important to note that there are qualities inherent to bookselling which define it from other retail fields (Baverstock, 1993; 2000). For example, every new book that is published is a new product to be marketed to the book buying public. Indeed, each new title can be viewed as an entirely new brand (Cooper, 1998) particularly if it is by a new author. While some author or series loyalty from consumers may sometimes make this a little easier, nevertheless, in 2006, Nielsen BookData calculated that 115,522 books were published in the UK (Publishing News, 2007a). Clearly identifying and promoting these titles to the target audience is immensely challenging. The difficulty of predicting what consumers will buy and trying to do this with each individual book, is central to bookselling and publishing and makes the allocation of marketing budget notoriously difficult (Saur, 2003). According to Key Note (2008), few books will sell in excess of 2000 copies. Favourable reviews may engender 10,000 to 20,000 copies, a ‘bestseller’ may get in the region of 75,000 or more, whereas a really successful title can achieve sales of 650,000 copies.

There are aspects of book buying, particularly in traditional bookshops, which are inextricably linked to the whole bookshop experience. The qualities of atmosphere, seating, even the presence of a coffee shop all potentially have a part to play in the consumers’ experiences of bookshops. Again, the impact of these kinds of qualities has yet to be studied in an academic context, further underlining the need for research in the industry. The competitive nature of the book trade as it currently stands in the UK has led to the implementation of many changes, such as the adoption of coffee shops
and a discount-led approach, and has necessitated the need to respond to calls for research in bookselling - specifically consumer responses - both from within the trade (Watson, 2002; Holman, 2007) and from external marketing and research experts (Bookseller, 2007; Horner, 2007a). There is much in the way of common ground regarding what these calls for research actually require; usually, it is to find out what consumers actually want. As Holman says,

> With exhaustive sales data at their fingertips, publishers and booksellers know better than ever before what books are selling and where – but not necessarily why (2007, p.11).

As Holman implies, it is important to remember that the kind of sales data which is readily available to larger stores and to online booksellers is worthless without interpretation and subsequent action. Horner too urges that, ‘(r)ather than hiring hot editors or marketeers, publishers should recruit people to find out what consumers want to read’ (2007a, p.24). It is therefore clear that this research is both timely and appropriate, responding to these calls for research which demand that consumers’ needs, wants and motivations be studied. As part of the identifiable need for research, it became clear that there was a need for the research to look at the motivating factors which prompt unplanned purchases by consumers. While the topic of ‘purchase prompts’ has been addressed to an extent in the past by BML (2007), the current research extends the BML research, discussing this topic in a qualitative context. While there are various marketing approaches taken by bookshops, the research measures the effectiveness of these for consumers. For example, an obvious approach to increase unplanned purchases is that of discounting books, but there are other, broader approaches used to entice customers, such as window displays, top ten sections and ‘staff recommends’ sections. The BML research referred to above found that many purchases were prompted simply because the consumer ‘saw in shop’, thus pointing out the large element of unplanned purchasing which seems to go on in traditional bookshops. The next most influential prompt to purchase found by BML was familiarity with a particular author. While in the past, research has found that ‘word of mouth’ recommendations from friends have been an effective purchase prompt, it seems that more recently this is changing. BML found that ‘recommendation’ accounted for just 9% of unplanned purchases and further research commissioned by The Bookseller found that ‘retail displays and media coverage’ are now the main drivers for book sales (Rickett, 2008). This topic is explored in the research with the consumer and is a key driving force of this unique research examining the various
marketing approaches taken by bookshops and crucially, consumer responses to these. It is also worth noting that, at the early stages of the research, the proposed study was very positively received both by the external advisor of studies Tim Godfray, Chief Executive of the Booksellers’ Association, who felt it was timely and appropriate, and by participating trade experts, one of whom (a branch Marketing Manager) referred to it as ‘extremely welcome and long overdue’.

Established literature makes clear that projected brand identity need not necessarily match the brand image which is perceived by the consumer. As Hall states, ‘values attached to a brand are defined by consumers, not marketers’ (2000, p.22). In an era where bookshops constantly rebrand and redefine image (Downer, 2006; Bookseller, 2006g), and taking into account the new supermarket and online bookselling brands, this research analyses bookshop approaches to branding; the qualities which traditional and online bookshops aim to project and, crucially, how those qualities are interpreted and experienced by bookshop users.

Before embarking upon an examination of bookshop marketing and consumer responses, it is important to examine the socioeconomic environment in which bookselling operates. ‘Book buying is dominated by two important groups — those who are in the AB social grade and those who buy ten or more books a year’ (Key Note, 2008). We can therefore see that, traditionally, those people visiting bookshops tend to be better educated, with a higher income and a higher TEA (terminal education age) than that of a wider cross section of the public. Crucially for the book trade, there is a societal move towards the growth of this socioeconomic group, as ABs and C1s have recently grown in size as socioeconomic groups (from 2002-2006) and are set to continue growing. Furthermore, research from Mintel (2007a) suggests the continued growth of the older generation, particularly those aged 45-54 (the ‘third age’) over the next few years. Recent research by BML also found that book buying was dominated by those aged 45-74, and that ABC1 households, while accounting for 49% of the population, accounted for 60% of all books purchased in 2007 (BML, 2007). Given that specialist bookshops compete for ABC1s ‘especially ABC1 third age consumers’ (ibid) this would seem to be good news for specialist retailers, such as Waterstone’s. (Of course, this assumes that Waterstone’s can still be regarded as a ‘specialist’ bookseller). Nevertheless, the continuing growth of ABC1s and the third age groups would seem to present an opportunity for book retailers.
1.2 Recent bookselling history

While the nation had previously relied primarily upon independent bookshops for their literary and educational needs, the burgeoning of UK bookshop chains in the 1980s and 1990s changed forever our expectations of bookshops. Willie Anderson, MD of James Thin, wrote,

US concepts of book retailing were introduced into the UK by Tim Waterstone, when he opened his first eponymous store in the early 1980s. The idea was that the bookshop should be a larger place where customers could find as wide a range as possible, at times more convenient to them and with the help of a dedicated, knowledgeable and utterly enthusiastic staff (2002, p.147).

The appearance of Waterstone’s and Dillons in UK high streets marked a watershed in UK bookselling, raising the profile of bookselling. At that time, Waterstone’s in particular was responsible for a significant cultural change in high street book shopping. These stores became the new benchmark for chain bookselling, and illustrated how book buying and browsing could be an enjoyable, culturally satisfying experience, rather than the rather stifling, stuffy one it had often been before (Mann, 1971). ‘These stores were unlike anything that had gone before: they were smart, modern, well stocked, well organised, easy to use and fairly spacious. Moreover, they tended to be sited right in the heart of city centres, so each chain had a high profile in the public mind’ (Mintel, 2007a). Ottakar’s appeared contemporaneously, but concentrated on opening bookshops in smaller country towns – a strategy designed to target a rather different market to that of their competitors, Waterstone’s and Dillons who tended to concentrate upon high profile city centre sites. Another key competitor was Blackwell’s, but Blackwell’s did, and still does, concentrate upon the academic market, with a significant profile in University towns. Currently, Borders has 69 stores in the UK and Blackwell’s has 56. Waterstone’s dominates specialist bookselling with 319 stores, a number which has steadily grown in recent years due to acquisitions of other chains like Ottakar’s and Dillons (Booksellers Association, 2008).

More recently, we have witnessed the appearance of Borders in the UK. Borders, a US based store, introduced the concept of the coffee shop in the UK, a marketing tool much copied by competitors. Borders has often tended to site its stores in out of town centres, accessible by car. There are exceptions to this of course, but it highlights another slightly different approach to market segmentation (see Literature Review).
Further changes have overtaken these stores more recently: Dillons was rebadged as Waterstone’s in 1999; Ottakar’s was bought out by the HMV group in 2006 and was rebadged as Waterstone’s; and as recently as 2007, Borders UK was sold by its US owner to a UK entrepreneur: its future in the UK is currently unclear. Blackwell’s too has been subject to recent changes. Formerly a business with strong academic, publishing and bookselling interests, Wiley publishers bought the publishing arm of the business in 2007.

While Waterstone’s and Dillons in particular were once lauded by the broadsheets for their popularisation of bookshops and the transformation of bookselling into an enjoyable experience, there is certainly evidence in the wider media that there is growing discontent with the larger stores and, one might argue, with Waterstone’s in particular. There are several factors which contribute to the current situation. The takeover of Ottakar’s was widely reported as undesirable in the media, and there were and still are worries about reduced choice for the consumer given the dominance of Waterstone’s in bookselling. Indeed the purchase was referred to the Competition Commission for consideration, but was eventually deemed satisfactory. However, comment in both the trade press and the wider media voiced concerns about the resulting lack of choice which seemed inevitable given the looming dominance of Waterstone’s in specialist bookselling (Cheetham, 2006). There also seems to be growing discontent with a perceived prescriptive approach to what is stocked and promoted in store by chain booksellers (reference) as well as general disillusionment when it became obvious that at least some of the books promoted by bookshops, either in store or in catalogues, had been paid for by publishers to be promoted (Hoyle and Clarke, 2007), the emphasis being upon financial incentives, rather than quality.

These changes have taken place gradually in the large specialist stores, at the same time as buying power has gradually been excised from branch managers and booksellers, and more and more purchasing is done centrally. In the early 1990s, booksellers had considerable individual control of their own book sections and the books they stocked. Beyond a ‘core stock’ – a small selection of books which should be kept on the shelves at all times – the remainder of what was usually a monthly budget could be spent, within reason, as they wished. This autonomy has gradually been eroded, as head office personnel have taken more buying power from individual stores, bookshop and bookseller budgets have reduced accordingly and bookshops have adopted a more prescriptive approach regarding what is stocked and promoted in store. This has taken place in the wider context of the reduction in the role of
publishers’ representatives (reps). There had been growing evidence for some time of
the uncomfortable relationship between large specialist chains and representatives of
some smaller publishers (Tonkin, 2002) and this situation has exacerbated as fewer
reps are seen by the chains. Reps have in the past been relied upon to introduce
booksellers to new titles which might otherwise have been missed. However, ‘shifts
towards centralised buying and scale out at the big chains have diminished the need
for sales reps to present lists store by store’ (Rushton, 2005). Overall, there has been
a strong move towards centralised buying and there has been a concomitant reduction
in store autonomy.

The reduction of autonomy in stores, the move towards central buying, charging for
inclusion in catalogues and promotions, and a growing tendency to rely upon
dISCOUNTING as a marketing tool has earned the large chains in particular much in the
way of criticism from the trade press and the wider media. As author and chairman of
Quercus books Anthony Cheetham said of the charges incurred by publishers, ‘it’s
throttling the distribution of a wider range of high-quality books and [perpetuating] the
system whereby you plaster the entire country with copies of the same few books’.
Even writer Alan Bennett urged readers to buy books from independent bookshops,
rather than large chains (naming Waterstone’s) or supermarkets who tend to discount
books.

A further difficulty connected with the reduced role of the publishers’ representative in
larger chains is the problem of smaller publishers gaining access to bookshops,
especially larger bookshops to show and sell their books. Small publishers do not have
the financial wherewithal to employ their own representative, so rely upon independent
reps who carry a mixed list – a range of books from a range of smaller publishers.
However, while even the largest conglomerate publishers are having difficulty gaining
access to stores and are cutting their sales force, one can appreciate the challenges
for independent reps getting a chance to show books from smaller publishers to the
chains, are considerable. This of course is a result of the growth in centralised buying;
an inevitable result is the refusal to stock anything in the least ‘risky; anything that
cannot be seen as a potential bestseller, or discounted title. This has arguably led to a
homogeneity across chain bookshops, and with a similar approach to bookselling, it is
arguably more difficult for consumers to perceive any brand distinction between them.
Whereas independent stores, and even more markedly, online booksellers have the
capacity to capitalise upon ‘the long tail’ (the increasing tendency towards niche buying
- see the Literature Review) chain bookshops have moved firmly away from this ethos,
preferring a centralised approach to their stock. This of course has a detrimental effect upon smaller publishers and is just one of the reasons behind the setting up of the Independent Alliance, a co-operative organisation comprised of independent publishers and booksellers. This is discussed in more detail below. The growing disenchantment with larger specialist stores can be said to have grown over the last few years, as the research has progressed. The attitude of consumers towards chain bookshops is examined in the study.

Just as the appearance of Waterstone's and Dillons signalled a more accessible kind of bookshop for the book buying public, the competitive bookselling market now demands even more accessibility. Waterstone’s - once deemed as heralding a breakthrough regarding accessibility and a ‘welcoming’ bookselling environment – was even referred to by its then MD as having the potential to be ‘intellectually intimidating’ (Lottman, 1999, p.24), particularly in comparison to the relaxed atmosphere demonstrated by some US based chains. Therefore, despite having been seen as pioneering when they first appeared, with an accessible welcoming environment, this perception seems to have changed – at least in some quarters – over the years and this may go some way to explaining why so many chain bookshops have installed coffee shops and undertake so much discounting. This is explored in the following research.

It is worthwhile looking at the chains’ approach to their customers, and how they have approached the segmentation of the market. As detailed earlier, it is well documented that bookshop customers have traditionally come from socioeconomic group ABC1, and that this group tends to be better educated; have higher income and a higher terminal education age than that of the wider general public. However, given the development of online bookselling and the success of supermarket bookselling, this has, at least, increased competition in the market, if not the socioeconomic make-up of consumers. Mintel (2007a) notes that ‘Waterstone’s and other specialist bookshops compete for ABC1s, especially ABC1 third age consumers, who tend to be keen book buyers. Borders appeals most to somewhat younger customers, although also ABC1s. They are all in direct competition with Amazon for their core audience’. Furthermore, while Waterstone’s recently ‘unveiled a new store format designed to appeal more to a wider family audience’, Mintel (2007a) also notes that this approach would seem to place it in direct competition with supermarkets, especially Tesco. Waterstone’s is clearly moving towards appealing to a wider audience with this strategy of ‘family-friendly features’ and ‘lighter décor’ and is actively encouraging a wider market into its bookshops. This does seem to signify an active move away from the rather upmarket
literary links which Waterstone’s could certainly be said to have formerly. Furthermore, Waterstone’s is also trying to strengthen its place in the children’s market, given that Waterstone’s strategists think that children’s books are less likely to be bought online, therefore there is space in traditional bookshops for a stronger representation of children’s stock. Indeed, it aims for ‘18% of the product mix in its stores to be children’s books by 2010). This clearly represents a significant shift in strategy for Waterstone’s, with such a strengthening of the scale of childrens’ books in its stores. However, according to Mintel, this will also mean increased competition with the supermarket trade, something which Waterstone’s must bear in mind. It is also pertinent to note that while Waterstone’s is strengthening children’s and moving towards a more populist approach in store, it is also aiming to strengthen its online presence, and drive more trade towards its website. While Blackwell’s has always focused more upon academic texts, it is noteworthy that it too has undergone some repositioning, as ‘the knowledge retailer’ with new brand logo and signage. At the same time, however, Blackwell’s also stocks chart titles. Borders tends to appeal to a rather younger demographic, but its future is currently uncertain, given that its US owners are currently aiming to leave the UK to concentrate upon the core business in the US. It is currently therefore in a state of flux. John Smith and Son have also historically had a strong academic reputation with a strong presence at campus sites. Its own strategic direction seems to be to build on its strengths in academia, as well as building upon links with professional bodies – a move towards specialisation, rather than the route of diversification taken by so many.

It is clear that the market is in a state of flux with much refocusing and repositioning being undertaken. Given the targeting undertaken by the bookshops, it is interesting to compare this with the segmentation undertaken by Amazon, the key online competitor. Again, the key demographic is ABC1, but with a seeming appeal to a wider age group. With such a comprehensive online range, Amazon does not have to concern itself with what to stock – it represents everything online. It continues to expand, to develop its website and its distribution facilities.

1.3 Non-traditional retailing
While this research does not look specifically at non-traditional retailing, the impact of this growth area of book retailing is worth examining, since it does impact upon bookshops. It is now possible to purchase books in such disparate settings as large department stores and garden centres. This has arguably opened up access to books for a wider cross section of people who do not visit bookshops. The most successful of
non-traditional bookselling outlets is the supermarket and it is important to understand the wider impact of supermarket bookselling and to see its impact upon the current challenges of the book trade. Given the significant changes which have taken place in the field of bookselling in recent years with the disappearance of familiar brand names from the high street, such as Dillons and, more recently, Ottakar’s, and the increasing dominance of the Waterstone’s chain, supermarkets have emerged as serious competitors in the book trade, especially with regard to bestselling titles. The power which the supermarkets have to promote and sell a title cannot be underestimated. As one publisher notes ‘it is nearly impossible to get to number one without the support of Tesco in particular’ (Kean, 2003b, p.23). Asda and Tesco began selling books in the 1990’s. Most fortuitously for them, this coincided with the erosion and eventual collapse of the Net Book Agreement (NBA) in 1995. Previously, this agreement had safeguarded book pricing, preventing undercutting and discounting with strict guidelines. However, in the early 1990s, both Waterstone’s and Dillons began selling books which had been discounted. Furthermore, some large UK publishers also withdrew their support for the NBA. The agreement was examined by the Office of Fair Trading and referred to the Restrictive Practices Court, where it was decided that the agreement was against the public interest and therefore illegal. One of the most important results of this ruling was that supermarkets began deep discounting of titles. The tendency of supermarkets to focus primarily upon bestsellers further increases pressures upon the traditional book trade. The buying power of supermarkets ensures substantial discounts from publishers, discounts which they are rarely prepared to give to the chains, and most certainly not to independent bookshops. Therefore, while supermarkets can offer bestsellers at good discounts to consumers, one can appreciate how this might eventually lead to a diminution of choice from other bookselling outlets – why take the further risk of stocking titles which are not guaranteed bestsellers? It is ironic that those most in need of extra help from publishers - the independents - are those most unlikely to get reasonable trade discount. It is notable that Tesco now has its own book club as well as, perhaps ironically, a range of exclusive titles courtesy of Random House.

Supermarket bookselling is viewed by some as having opened up the market to those formerly less likely to visit bookshops: the supermarket setting can be said to make buying books rather easier, in a more accessible, welcoming setting. Orion group sales director Dallas Manderson acknowledged that, ‘Generally, supermarkets have expanded the market by making it easier for people to buy books’ (Kean, 2003b, p.23).
Supermarket bookselling continues to be a substantial presence in the book trade and the success of Asda and Tesco in particular has changed the face of UK bookselling. There is no sign of any diminution in the impact of the supermarket presence in the trade: indeed they can be seen to be pressing forward with new bookselling initiatives such as book clubs, and stronger links with established publishers.

1.4 Coffee Shops
The huge growth in the presence of coffee shops within bookshops is allied closely to the growth of ‘lifestyle retailing’ and the potential for bookshops to be a ‘third place’ (Waxman, 2006; Kreitzman, 1999b; Clements, 2005). A particular advantage of coffee shops is that they attract mainly ABC1a, and as mentioned previously, ABs are growing as a proportion of the wider population (Mintel, 2007c). It is also interesting to note that while the presence of a coffee shop is perceived as providing a ‘haven’ for the lone book buyer, they are actually more likely to be used by couples. Perhaps most notably and of most relevance for UK bookshops, they are not a particularly ‘youthful’ facility for a bookshop to have - The 34% of 55-64-year-olds who use them is only marginally below the 38% of 18-44-year-olds (ibid). Perhaps most importantly for a section of retailing which traditionally attracts the upper echelons of society, AB consumers are the most likely to use coffee shop.

The idea of bookshops as ‘destination’ stores or ‘lifestyle’ stores has slipped into common book trade parlance (Bookseller, 2003f; Bookseller, 2006h) and often seems to be used to refer to larger stores, usually with coffee shops. Indeed this is a concept which also emerged clearly from the interviews with bookshop experts; the managers were very clear that they wanted their bookshops to be destination stores. However, despite the widespread use of these terms in the bookselling trade, consumer responses to bookshops as destination stores had yet to be studied. Consumer responses to these topics are analysed in this research. The promotion of traditional bookshops as destination stores has been ongoing for several years. Indeed it is now uncommon for any large bookshop to be without a coffee shop. Extending the concept of the bookshop as a destination or lifestyle store, bookshops can arguably fall into the category of ‘third place’ (Oldenburg, 1997; Nozzi, 2004). This description applies to settings which are essentially community based and offer a space for people to use them as required for relaxation, friendship, or simply a place to go. The terms ‘lifestyle’ and ‘destination’ might, one would assume, only be applied to terrestrial bookshops. However, it is interesting to note how much personalisation there is in online
bookshops. Individualised recommendations and invitations to review books online are explored and discussed in some detail in this research, particularly consumer responses to this kind of personalised approach to marketing online. The potential for bookshops to be a ‘third place’ and to provide a destination for local or virtual communities is investigated in this research.

The increased level of competition from supermarkets and online bookselling has focused the need for change felt by many UK chain booksellers. Increased competition between chains, independents and now online bookshops and supermarkets has also had the effect of concentrating chain efforts regarding those basic qualities integral to every good bookshop, such as range, tidiness and customer service. Bookshop takeovers have resulted in the disappearance of some chains and the growth of others into larger stores that now dominate our high streets. This development clearly has implications for our perception of bookshop identity. Many chains have moved away from stocking exclusively upmarket literature, into mass market literature, although the book buying market is still dominated by the best educated highest earning social groups (Mintel, 2005). More notably, most if not all chain bookshops rely heavily upon a discount-oriented approach; often the most visible part of their marketing. This has resulted in a change of identity for some stores; a move away from the higher end of the market. The impact of these changes in approaches to marketing by bookshops are analysed in the research.

1.5 Online Bookselling
Online bookselling, particularly the phenomenal success of Amazon, now has a significant share of the UK book trade. Online bookselling is now accepted as a serious competitor in the field, far outstripping the sales of many traditional bookshops. Teather (2007, p.28) notes that ‘Amazon.co.uk has a near 69% share of traffic to online book sites’. Further research suggests that 5.5 million UK consumers bought a book online in the three months to February 2007 (Mintel, 2007a). These startling figures demonstrate the incredible success which online bookselling, particularly Amazon, has achieved. A formidable competitor in the book trade, online bookselling was initially viewed with suspicion and profound fear by the established specialist trade bookshops. However, as time has passed, it seems that online and traditional bookselling both have a future, albeit one that has become much more competitive. It is understood that these bookselling environments have different qualities to offer the consumer: Mintel (2007a) points out key strengths of online bookselling as being the range and
convenience which it offers, as well as making access to specialist titles (e.g. foreign, second-hand) much easier. Traditional bookselling however, has its own key strengths and should aim for developing distinctiveness and adding value to the book buying experience for consumers, in other ways.

It is thought that online bookselling has grown the market (Mintel, 2007a), and as such, ‘it is wrong to assume that all of the growth in online bookselling has come at the expense of high-street booksellers’ (ibid). Amazon was founded in 1995 and has developed to become the pre-eminent retailer of books and music in the US. It entered the UK market in 1998 and dominates the online book sector (as well as being extremely prominent in other areas, given that it sells such a wide range of products). An important strength of Amazon was that it focused - and still focuses – on customer service and ease of use, as well as investing heavily to achieve excellent delivery standards. Perhaps most importantly, it is capable of representing a phenomenal book range, with around nine million titles available at any one time. It has also continued to invest in innovation. For example, the development of ‘search inside’ in 1995 allows the customer to view selected pages of a book before purchasing it. This is a clear attempt to mirror customer behaviour in bookshops, browsing prior to purchase. However, while Amazon may attempt to mirror customer behaviour in traditional bookshops, looking at pages on a computer screen is patently not the same as holding a book in one’s hand. Furthermore, the advantages of traditional bookselling is supported by research that shows that only a small proportion [of traditional bookshop users] purchase online and three times as many people buy on impulse in traditional stores as online. Research also found that people are more inclined to browse in traditional bookshops, rather than online (Mintel 2007b). BML research found that while traditional bookselling (in the high street) tends to be dominated by those aged 45-74, online, the demographic is rather younger, with the heaviest purchasers coming from the age group 35-44. The current research will examine consumer responses to the online setting in more detail, as well as comparing responses to online and traditional settings.

Other chain bookshops like Blackwell’s have a long established online presence, although they arguably have a less prominent online profile than the more general bookshops. Ottakar’s online site was not commercial in recent years (i.e. one could not actually purchase books online) and since Ottakar’s is now owned by HMV Media, Ottakar’s online has disappeared, and the terrestrial stores have now been rebadged as Waterstone’s. The fact that Amazon operates the online site of Borders and, until recently, Waterstone’s also, highlights their expertise in online bookselling, as well as
the failure of existing bookshops to compete seriously online (Bury and Kean, 2005). However, Waterstone’s recently reclaimed its online site and is now operating it independently of Amazon (Richardson, 2006). Online bookselling is also an acknowledged and respected competitor in the book trade. Amazon in particular has revolutionised the way that consumers approach the book buying process. In order to understand how these changes have affected the book trade, in particular chain and online booksellers, research based upon the study of bookshops both traditional and online was judged to be both relevant and timely.

1.6 Independent bookshops
While the current research does not look specifically at independent bookselling, it is helpful to understand the situation in which independent booksellers find themselves, in order to give a wider context to the study. Independent bookshops face particular difficulties in the current bookselling climate. Since the increased presence of specialist book retailers in the 1980s, the focus has moved away from independent bookselling and the popularisation of the specialist chains has, in the past, taken many consumers with it. Without the financial backing of, for example, Waterstone’s or Borders they have less negotiating power for discounts from publishers. Furthermore, given that they generally have smaller bookshops, they will naturally be purchasing books in smaller quantities so are less inclined to ‘earn’ larger discounts in the first place. With a smaller initial margin, there is much less scope for independents to participate in the kinds of discounting which is so widespread in chain, supermarket and online bookselling. Indeed, it is sometimes more financially viable for small bookshops to buy their stock from the supermarkets’ shelves, as this is cheaper than buying from the publishers, given the kind of deep discounting undertaken by the supermarkets. The supermarkets and larger chains can afford (arguably) to regard this kind of mass discounting as loss leaders, but most independent bookshops do not have the financial scope to participate in this kind of discount-led approach to bookselling. However, in the longer term, it is arguable that the supermarkets may well be stronger competition for the likes of Waterstone’s and Borders, than for the independents, largely because there would seem to be more crossover of stock between supermarkets and chains, rather than supermarkets and independents. Therefore, the chains are perhaps more threatened by the continued success of the supermarkets. Independent booksellers are unable to compete on price alone, so it would seem sensible to concentrate upon ‘added value’ such as local knowledge, community links and excellent service. It is worth noting that the internet may also be
viewed as an advantage by independents and used as a potential method of reaching a wider audience, or as a marketing tool which might allow them to target their existing customers with specific titles which might appeal (Mintel, 2007a).

There is some evidence of those in the trade developing strategies to overcome the difficulties facing the independents. In 2006 The Independent Alliance was formed. This is a group of independent publishers and booksellers who aim to work together to support independent bookshops by providing better terms and promotions. The publishers came together in order to consolidate their sales in the UK in the hope of being able to compete more effectively with the conglomerates. This alliance – initially of publishers - has endeavoured to give more favourable terms to the independents. The publishers within the alliance have also encouraged their authors to concentrate publicity, tours and signings amongst independent bookshops. No other market place in the world is as competitive as that of the UK. Even the US is protected by the Robinson Packman Act which requires that comparable terms are given by all suppliers to all their customers (Franklin, 2006).

While it is widely held that independent bookshops face numerous difficulties largely due to the changes in the book trade in recent years – namely the conglomeration of booksellers (and publishers) and the growth of supermarket and online bookselling, the most recently available data suggests that this trend may be reversing. The Booksellers Association recently revealed figures that show in 2007, while 72 independent bookshops closed, 81 new independents opened (Mintel, 2007a). Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that, despite the intense financial pressures which independents face, it can be argued that independent bookshops can maintain their individuality, as they have no need to adhere to head office marketing plan, or promote particular books each month, or to display their books in the obligatory ‘triangle’ in their windows. Along with online booksellers, they also are in the position of potentially satisfying the ‘long tail’: the growing trend towards individuality by consumers, due to the incredible choice which we are all faced with in today’s retailing sector (Anderson, 2006). With the freedom to stock what they want and promote what they want, they can afford to appeal to more esoteric tastes. Indeed, given the concentration of chain bookshops on similarity of titles the way forward for independent bookshop may well be the specialist direction. Online bookshops are particularly well suited to the development of specialist trends of bookselling, given the freedom which the removal of bookseller costs, bookshop costs and stock costs gives them. One has only to consider the way in which online bookselling has revolutionised the second
hand market, to realise the scope of specialisation. Of course specialisation by independents does not just extend to the books they stock. Independents are in the unique position of being able to genuinely get to know their local community and can be perceived as genuinely locally relevant. This development of local links may be important with regard to loyalty and developing a strong customer base.

1.7 Book Clubs
The traditional mail order book club is in decline, and has been in difficulty for the past few years (Neill, 2008). This is largely attributed to the advent of online bookselling; a more sophisticated approach to purchasing books remotely than the route taken by book clubs (Mintel, 2007a). There are clear advantages to online bookselling, with so much book information being available in advance, as opposed to the rather outdated approach of book clubs. With the growth of online bookselling in particular, it is difficult to see any competitive advantage which the traditional book club can offer. The change in consumer behaviour marked by the success of online bookselling seems to suggest that mail order seems to be dying off, and a natural consequence of this is that book clubs are moving their business online as well. It is unfortunate for the book clubs that online they must compete with online booksellers.

The decline in traditional book club sales can also be attributed to the growth of other book clubs of a rather different nature: those at bookshops, libraries, supermarkets and on television and radio. These book clubs are of a different structure, in that they encourage a genuine ‘club’ and the discussion of books and sharing of opinions is possible, if desired (online, at www.richardandjudybookclub.co.uk or at www.tescobookclub.com). The popularisation of the book club in a modernised format leaves little room for the traditional structure to continue. Given the difficulties faced by the traditional book club, it is hard to envisage how they might begin to prosper again, given that all the evidence points to them being an outmoded way of purchasing books.

Many of these changes have taken place during the course of this research and the dynamic nature of the bookselling and publishing sectors has meant currency of trade and research information has been vital, in order to ensure the integrity of the research. Many other independent online bookselling sites are in operation, some affiliated to terrestrial stores, such as Foyles or The London Review of Books, others operating solely online. Online bookshops such as www.abebooks.com and the second hand search facility in Amazon have also served to revolutionise the second hand and antiquarian book market, making the search for titles much simpler and swifter and
arguably removing the need for even visiting a terrestrial bookshop. Even eBay has provided another comprehensive market place for collectable books. Clearly the advent of online bookshops has far reaching consequences for the traditional book trade, not only in simple terms of book sales, but also in a more deep seated experiential sense; the experience of shopping for books online is very different to shopping in the high street for many reasons, which are explored in the following research. As a comparatively new entrant to bookselling, online bookshops are not perceived as facing the same trading difficulties as the chains. For example, there is no historic view of them as being inaccessible, or needing to welcome newer users. Furthermore, online bookselling is providing the competition for the existing traditional book trade. As such, online booksellers are entering an existing market place, and are in the stronger position of providing competition, rather than having to respond to it, as the traditional bookshops have to do.

1.8 Digitisation
‘With the Internet has come the digitisation of books. A growing number of publishers are building a digital library of their books, especially their so-called back list: some out-of-print books are now only available in digital form and can only be bought by printing on demand’ (Mintel, 2007a). Further competition is now present for the book trade with the emergence of the e-book. At present, this seems not to have captured the imagination of the public in the way other formats have (such as the Apple Ipod and MP3 players) and there is an essential difference with access to books, compared to access to music. Nevertheless, publishers are becoming much more proactive in providing access to e-books, particularly via their own websites. One key problem which has yet to be resolved in the industry is the format for the e-book. While some material is available to download to pc, this is clearly not portable. Therefore, there is still an array of e-book readers such as the Sony eBook reader and the Kindle from Amazon. The problem with the choice of e-book readers available is that the downloadable material is not necessarily compatible with every format. There needs to be standardisation of format for the e-book to become more successful. This brings its own challenges for the book trade, and publishers in particular. Should the e-book become more popular, this would seem to foretell a drop in the sales of printed books. Nevertheless, there is a substantial amount of downloadable texts available, especially from the larger publishers’ websites. Digitisation is also taking place on a wider scale and is being pursued by Microsoft, Google and Amazon. Permission has been given by some of the most prestigious libraries in the world (Princeton, Harvard, and the
Bodleian in Oxford) for their entire content to be digitised. This points out the scale on which digitisation is taking place, and how it will inevitably impact upon the book trade in due course.

There is no study which examines the symbiosis between traditional and online bookselling, neither is there any study looking at consumer responses to these two different book shopping environments in an academic context. This research examines the qualities inherent to the brand which chain and online bookshops wish to project, and the strategies which they adopt in order to achieve this. Consumer responses to these strategies are examined and analysed, paying particular attention to any gap between the aims of the bookshops and the perceptions of the consumers. The resulting effect upon consumer behaviour of the various strategies adopted by chain and online bookshops is also analysed. Given the dynamic state of the book trade in the UK, and the lack of research in this area, this is judged to be both relevant and timely.

1.9 Future bookselling
Many of the changes outlined above: supermarket bookselling, online bookselling, digitisation etc. have been the basis of profound change in the bookselling trade. Furthermore, given the technological developments of digitisation in particular, the defining lines between bookselling and publishing are becoming more blurred. As publishers move towards direct selling to consumers via websites, instead of via the intermediary of bookselling, new business relationships are developed and new skills must be developed by publishers – not only technological skill, but consumer relationship skills, given that direct business between consumer and publisher has not often taken place before.

The results of the intense competition in the book trade are hard hitting. While it is easy to depict the chains as being more focused upon competition than quality, one can understand the need to compete with deep supermarket discounting. Financial difficulties have arisen from the discount-led approach adopted by bookshops. As pointed out by Mintel (2007a), while sales and turnover are predicted to increase, if bookshops continue to give away precious margin in ‘3 for 2’ offers or by cutting bestsellers to half price, it is hard to see how a profit can be made. The current situation is certainly untenable. Looking at the chains in particular, it is worthwhile examining the results of a strategic review held by Waterstone’s in 2007. Along with the
simplification of the supply chain with a centralised system, Waterstone’s are working on ‘refocusing of the product range on more populist books’ and ‘the development of a new Internet channel to grow online book sales’ (ibid). It therefore seems that they will continue a populist approach, rather than diversifying, but are looking to further develop their online site, presumably to offer the consumer a wider choice, that will not necessarily be found in their stores.

Key Note (2008) predicts that ‘the value of retail book sales in the UK will rise by 13.6% between 2008 and 2012’. However, it is vital to note that while a healthy increase in sales value is expected, profitability is predicted to remain slim. This is primarily due to the deep discounting that is so widespread across the book trade and has been much discussed in the trade press. Why booksellers seem so unwilling to address this problem, or to move away from discounting is a moot point. This research however, will examine consumer responses to the discounting that exists. While there is scope for growing volume sales of books, despite the existing market being a mature one, book retailers can still increase purchase frequency from established markets, especially ABC1 groups, ‘third age’ groups and women (Mintel, 2007b). Crucially, differentiation from competitors is vital - ‘they need to offer real added value, whether through expert advice, a specialised list, welcoming personal service’ (ibid). The potential distinctiveness of traditional book retailers, as well as their ability to offer these personalised aspects of service, are identified by Mintel as real strengths that the traditional trade has over newer entrants to bookselling. However, the convenience and range offered by online competitors are also seen as strengths for the trade, and offer scope to grow specialist markets more easily than the traditional trade can do.

1.10 Publications
In order to test the intellectual rigour of the approach taken amongst peers, several publications have been generated throughout the course of the present research, and a list of these can be seen in the appendices (Appendix I). The first article was a desk-based piece of research and helped to set the scene for the ensuing empirical research, as it was based upon relevant literature in the area. The second article was based upon the initial interviews undertaken with book trade experts in the field, exploring their views and interpretation of their companies’ strategic direction. The third article was developed from a conference paper given at the International Conference of the Book, 2005 and draws upon research findings from the interviews, questionnaires
and focus groups carried out at that stage. Therefore, much of the work included in this thesis has already been peer reviewed in the wider academic community.

1.11 Research Aim and Objectives
Having reflected upon the calls for research, as detailed above and the context of the study, the following research aim was developed.

To evaluate the effectiveness of applied marketing in bookshops and to develop an understanding of consumer responses to that marketing.

The following research objectives were developed, with a view to satisfying the above research aim in the most appropriate manner.

Objective 1 – To evaluate the interpretation and application of marketing techniques used by bookshops and bookshop managers, and to analyse the methods by which they establish and maintain their brand identities.

Objective 2 – To analyse critically the impact of these branding and marketing strategies on customer perception of the bookshop identity, perception of bookshop marketing procedures and the resulting impact on customer behaviour in the bookshop setting.

Objective 3 – To evaluate the factors contributing to any sense of the ‘culture’ or ‘community’ of the bookshop experienced by bookshop users, again examining any resulting impact on customer behaviour.

Objective 4 – To evaluate whether or not the marketing and branding strategies adopted by bookshops are effective at attracting new customers.

Objective 5 – To evaluate the degree to which the application of marketing techniques and approaches to branding by traditional bookshops have been extended to online settings with a view to assessing any differentiation which bookshops make between traditional and online customers.

Objective 6 – To critically analyse customer perception of the marketing and branding strategies of online bookshops, including any sense of online
community experienced or perceived by online bookshop customers; the resulting impact on behaviour in online bookshops, and to evaluate the degree to which those who do not regularly use traditional bookshops are attracted to online bookshop facilities.

Given the dearth of academic research within the book trade, each of these steps is important in expanding knowledge of the book trade and aims to unearth information useful for academics and practitioners alike. The objectives set out in this chapter are discussed in more detail regarding their inception and the methods adopted in order to satisfy them, in the following Methodology chapter. There then follows a review of the literature relevant to the study, drawing both upon academic writing, underpinning the study as well as trade literature highlighting current issues and concerns in the book trade. The results of the research follow, and then, an in-depth discussion of the most important results in the light of the literature follows in the Discussion chapter. Finally, the Conclusions chapter sums up the main findings and sets out recommendations in the light of these findings.
Chapter 2 - Methodological Approach

2.1 The Research Questions and Research Objectives

2.1.1 Research rationale
As pointed out in the introduction, the field of bookselling is relatively new to academic study. While the researcher’s managerial background in the book trade ensured a broad range of interests in trade related topics, it is vital to understand the rationale for following the particular route of this research. One of the challenges of this research was the narrowing down of available areas of research, given that much of the book trade and bookselling is unresearched, and focusing on a particular area which was valid in terms of an identifiable gap in knowledge, and which could ultimately contribute to an original contribution to knowledge. Regarding the aforementioned lack of academic study within the bookselling environment, there was, and indeed still is, a broad scope for academic investigation. However, current knowledge of the book trade and a preliminary study of academic and trade material identified several strong reasons for the current research, and provided a robust rationale for the route taken.

A valid factor supporting the rationale for the direction of the research was the clear calls for research coming from the book trade. These refer specifically to consumers in bookshops and what consumers want, as well as the lack of research in this area. These calls for further research were coming from respected and experienced book trade experts such as Anthony Forbes Watson, criticising the promotional techniques used by the book trade (Clee, 2002) as well as pointing out the lack of understanding of consumer wants and needs in the book trade; ‘we appear to have made little use…of qualitative market information over recent years. How could we continue to spend such paltry sums marketing each of them [books] if we understood the consumer’s purchase decision?’ (Watson, 2002, p.25). Holman, another book commentator, points out that while EPOS (electronic point of sale) systems allow retailers to see in detail what people are buying, it crucially does not tell them why (2007, p.11). Horner, a marketing expert with roots outside the book trade notes that ‘(r)ather than hiring hot editors or marketeers, publishers should recruit people to find out what consumers want to read’ (2007a, p.24). Further support for more qualitative research in this area, comes from the first conference organised by The Bookseller, the leading book trade journal. Entitled ‘Closer to the Consumer’, the conference clearly set out its focus upon understanding book buyers, their motivation and responses to marketing (Holman,
Furthermore, at the 2007 Booksellers Association conference, at a session looking at consumer behaviour and retailing, a speaker urged booksellers to ‘re-evaluate their in-store marketing strategies’ (Bookseller, 2007, p.12). There is therefore a frequent focus upon, and identification of, problems in the trade centering upon marketing and how it is handled in bookshops, and the lack of understanding around consumer behaviour and response in bookshops.

Given that these problems had been clearly identified in the trade, it seemed appropriate and timely academically as well as professionally to study these topics in an academic context. Specifically, to look at the approach to marketing in bookshops, and at how consumers behave and respond in such an environment. Closely related to this area of study was the frequent speculation in the trade press that many chain bookshops were developing into destination or lifestyle stores, and were tending to adopt sofas, browsing areas, encourage the reading of newspapers, and installing coffee shops (Sanderson, 1999: Smith, 1999). The strong links between the introduction of this ‘lifestyle’ approach to marketing by bookshops and the as yet unresearched impact upon consumers had particular currency for the research and merited further investigation as well as being appropriate and indeed necessary to incorporate into the study. The concepts of culture and community as outlined above, remained of interest within the context of bookshops, especially given the identification in the trade of the burgeoning prominence given to coffee shops, browsing areas, sofas, and the general ‘lifestyling’ of bookshops, especially in chain bookshops. Given the emphasis upon bookshop marketing and consumer response, it became clear that the research questions needed to encompass an investigation of these kinds of concepts, and to explore marketing approaches and consumer responses to the newer marketing techniques of ‘lifestyle’ in bookshops.

Considering the impact which online bookselling has had upon the book trade (see the Introduction chapter), an examination of how the marketing techniques used in traditional bookshops have been adapted by online bookshops was also proposed. This would allow a comparison with results from traditional stores - which had not been carried out before - as well as allowing the research to have particular currency, given the considerable impact which online bookselling has had and continues to have in the wider bookselling environment, competing directly as it does, with the predominant specialist book chains (Mintel, 2007a). A study focusing upon bookshop marketing and
consumer responses would therefore be incomplete without due consideration of the online setting.

It is worth noting that, at the early stages of the research, the proposed study was very positively received both by the external advisor of studies Tim Godfray, Chief Executive of the Booksellers’ Association, and by participating trade experts. Further interest in the study has also been shown by practitioners in the trade (manager of a chain of bookstores in Malaysia) as well as others studying bookshops in an academic context (contact has been made with a student looking at bookshops and marketing in Germany, and further publication details passed to a fellow academic in Sweden). The chain bookshops participating in the study were all willing to do so and had a genuine interest in the research, and in sharing their experiences of marketing and consumer behaviour. It is therefore clear, that while statistics and research already exists on the book trade, from the Booksellers Association, Book Marketing Limited and market research bodies such as Key Note and Mintel, there is still a clear demand for further information on this topic. It is also important to note that while BML carry out valuable research on the trade, much of the information is expensive to access, and if, as is the case, a marketing manager with a leading UK bookstore comments that the current research is ‘extremely welcome and long overdue’, one has to be reasonably happy that the current research is indeed, just that.

2.1.2 Provenance of the research questions
The original focus of the research was, as set out below, developed from an interest in the issue of consumers spending long periods in bookshops. The connection between this topic and the idea of the bookshop as a lifestyle or destination store is clear and in time this developed into the planned exploration of interrelated issues such as the bookshop as a third place, and the role of the bookshop in the community. Again, the strong connection between these areas and the proposed research into bookshop marketing and consumer responses is clear. Below is a figure (2.1) setting out the original series of questions emanating from the research interest, and shows the basic question and sub questions (Creswell, 2003, p.105). However, while these formed the starting point for the development of further questions and eventually the research objectives, it is important to note that, in typical nature of research, the question illustrated centrally below, was not ultimately central to the research. The figure below serves only to illustrate a snapshot of a single point on the research journey, and demonstrates the emergent research design at this point.
Fig. 2.1 Time spent in bookshops

While the first question and the following sub-questions certainly acted as a catalyst for the development of the objectives and ultimately the development of the thesis into what it deals with, it is interesting - indeed crucial - to note at this point, the many changes which the research has undergone throughout the process of the research journey. While at the commencement of the research, the idea of spending long periods in store and the ‘culture of bookshops’ seemed to be central to the thesis, it has developed into an altogether different thesis, much more concerned with consumer responses to bookshop marketing; consumer experiences in traditional and online bookshops and the development of the traditional chain bookshop into a ‘retail destination’ or third place. Nevertheless, it is also important to realise that while some questions have emerged as more important than others, and that the emphasis has become stronger in some areas and waned in others, this is not necessarily problematic. Indeed, it is rather typical of a qualitative study. As Wolcott says,

Part of the strategy of qualitative enquiry – a key advantage of the flexibility we claim for it – is that our research questions undergo continual scrutiny.
Nothing should prevent a research question or problem statement from going through a metamorphosis similar to what a researcher experiences during the course of a study (2001, p.40)

Therefore, while the questions and sub-questions outlined above certainly formed the starting point for the PhD, the final thesis developed into an altogether different piece of work, much more concerned with bookshop applications of marketing; consumer behaviour in and responses to bookshops and marketing and an investigation of the bookshop as a ‘third place’.

2.1.3 Development of the research aim and research objectives
Upon further discussion and examination of the potentially influential factors underlying these questions, in particular consumer responses to bookshops, it became clear that in order to analyse the sorts of experiences people have in bookshops, an examination of bookshops would have to take place. If consumer behaviour within bookshops was at all influenced by the bookshops themselves, then a logical way to proceed was to examine the perceived image of bookshops. Thinking more deeply about ‘image’ and what it meant in the context of bookshops, it was determined that ‘image’ could be seen to be closely linked to the projected identity of a bookshop and the marketing techniques used to project that identity (Temporal, 2002).

Gradually, various observations and starting themes developed and evolved to form a more structured approach to investigating bookshops. The research questions gradually came to embody:

1. an exploration of the marketing techniques used in various book trade environments
2. the underlying strategy - or interpretation of strategy - determining those techniques
3. an analysis of how consumers respond to those techniques.

Reflecting upon the core interests of the research, in due course, this resulted in the adoption of the working title which was:
Bookselling culture and consumer behaviour: 
Marketing strategies and responses in traditional and online environments.

The development of the research objectives was underpinned by the research questions as they gradually came to be conceptualised. In a raw form, these can be summarised as:

*What are the influencing factors for consumer behaviour in bookshops?*

*How do bookshops market themselves (and the brand) and their goods?*

*Is there a sense of community among bookshop users, or a ‘culture’ of bookshops?*

*How do consumers respond to these marketing and branding techniques?*

At a slightly later stage in the research a further question appeared, having emerged from an initial review of literature in and around the areas to be examined:

*Are the marketing strategies adopted by bookshops successful in attracting people who don’t normally visit?*

This was a relevant question to ask, since some of the trade literature at the time was beginning to call for further research in order to explore how the market for books could be expanded (Forbes Watson, 2002; Davies, in Rickett, 2003a; Book Marketing Limited, 2005a, 2005b).

Further questions began to emerge in the context of online bookselling, such as:

*How do consumers respond to online facilities?*

*Why might some customers prefer to shop online and others in traditional bookshops?*

Gradually, these questions grew from the initial, elementary question into a more complex structure, detailing the further research questions which were required to be asked. These are represented below:
Fig. 2.2 Preliminary research questions

The research questions were honed in order to develop an overall research aim; a vital step in the progress of the research, giving essential structure to the overall research progress and providing a touchstone in order to keep the research focused. Drawing in all of the constituent questions in figure 2.2, the research aim developed and became:
To evaluate the effectiveness of applied marketing in bookshops and to develop an understanding of consumer responses to that marketing.

Clearly, there is much detail encapsulated within the aim which needs to be made clear in the objectives. The objectives also need to set out plainly how the aim is to be achieved. The research questions were developed into formal objectives, providing a basis for the research project, as well as a practical starting point for achieving the aim as well as satisfying the research questions. In due course the objectives became:

Objective 1 – To evaluate the interpretation and application of marketing techniques used by bookshops and bookshop managers, and to analyse the methods by which they establish and maintain their brand identities.

Objective 2 – To analyse critically the impact of these branding and marketing strategies on customer perception of the bookshop identity, perception of bookshop marketing procedures and the resulting impact on customer behaviour in the bookshop setting.

Objective 3 – To evaluate the factors contributing to any sense of the ‘culture’ or ‘community’ of the bookshop experienced by bookshop users, again examining any resulting impact on customer behaviour.

Objective 4 – To evaluate whether or not the marketing and branding strategies adopted by bookshops are effective at attracting new customers.

The first four objectives above would be satisfied by undertaking research in a traditional bookshop environment. These objectives were then reconsidered in an online context, resulting in the development of the following four objectives:

Objective 5 – To evaluate the degree to which the application of marketing techniques and approaches to branding by traditional bookshops have been extended to online settings with a view to assessing any differentiation which bookshops make between traditional and online customers.

Objective 6 – To critically analyse customer perception of the marketing and branding strategies of online bookshops, including any sense of online community experienced
or perceived by online bookshop customers; the resulting impact on behaviour in online bookshops, and to evaluate the degree to which those who do not regularly use traditional bookshops are attracted to online bookshop facilities.

The table below sets out the programme for data collection and how it relates to the research objectives.

Table 2.1 – Data collection programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective No.</th>
<th>Objective Description</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Context to be studied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Evaluate application of bookshop marketing &amp; branding</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>Traditional Bookshops (offline)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Analyse consumer responses to the above</td>
<td>Face to face Questionnaires</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Analyse consumer responses in more detail</td>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Evaluate whether bookshop techniques attract a new market</td>
<td>Online questionnaire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Evaluate adoption of marketing and branding techniques online</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>Online Bookshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Analyse effect of online strategies on consumers and their responses</td>
<td>Online questionnaires</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.1.4 The use of chain bookshops - rationale

UK chain bookshops were selected since the observations and experiences which had formed the inspiration for the research had emanated from that environment. However, in addition to this direct experience of the chain bookshop environment, further more practical aspects supported their use in the research. The larger budgets held by chain bookshops suggested more likelihood of them employing dedicated marketing and branding managers. Independent bookshops are more likely to have a manager who doubles as marketing manager; human resources manager; press officer and possibly
more. While this in itself was not a problem, using chains would also enable respondents – both managers and consumers – to comment not only on comparisons across different chain bookshops, but also the aspects of local identity and community responsiveness from one chain branch to another within a single chain. Furthermore, chain bookshops appeared more likely to have adopted coffee shops and browsing areas in their stores. Certainly, there was more comment on the chains’ adoption of these facilities in the trade press, than that of the independents (Sanderson, 1999; Cardew, 2004; Clements, 2005). Obviously many independent bookshops can and do have coffee shops, if the size of the store permits, but again, the use of chains allowed a comparison of the adoption of coffee shops and browsing areas across the different branches and would allow for more commonality of experience from respondents, rather than a more individualised approach where focus group participants and questionnaire respondents might be talking about very different experiences in different independent bookshops. In order to facilitate a response to a common cross section of bookshops, chain bookshops were deemed the most suitable bookselling environment to examine.
2.2 The Choice of Methods

2.2.1 Rationale
The research questions were developed into objectives in a clear and logical manner and from this point, more detailed thought was given to the methodological approach to be taken. The objectives as detailed above laid the foundations of the methodological approach and in many ways, illustrated the methodological route to take. Indeed the methodology had already been put in place from the inception of the very first research questions: every step forward from then was conceptualised both as part of the methodological approach as well as simultaneously dictating the future methodology, since intrinsic in the research questions and objectives is both the philosophy and the foundations of the research. As Clough and Nutbrown (2002) say,

A characteristic purpose of a methodology is to show not how such and such appeared to be the best method for the given purposes of the study, but how and why this way of doing it was unavoidable – was required by – the context and purpose of this particular enquiry (p.17).

There is therefore an inevitability to the methodological approach: it is dictated by the questions which need to be answered, and the desire to do this as effectively as possible in turn ‘chooses’ the best method.

2.2.2 The ‘pragmatic researcher’
Onwuegbuzie and Leech advocate the development of ‘pragmatic researchers’ – researchers not blinkered to the use of either qualitative or quantitative research, but aware of the advantages and disadvantages of both paradigms, as well as how they can often be used in a complementary fashion.

Pragmatic researchers are more likely to be cognizant of all available research techniques and to select methods with respect to their value for addressing the underlying research questions, rather than with regard to some preconceived biases about which paradigm is a hegemony in social science research (2005, p.385).
The methods used at each stage of the data collection have been driven by the objectives and how best these can be satisfied. As stated above, in many ways, the objectives can be seen as dictating the choice of method, since in most cases it is clear which method will be the most effective at satisfying a given objective. The objectives were considered in a logical, sequential way, considering both how effective a given method would be at satisfying the intrinsic questions within the objective, as well as how the methods chosen would sit with the following objectives in the sequence of work to be carried out. This was an important consideration, given the developmental nature of the work, and the intrinsic links between each objective as the work progressed. Indeed the progress of the research can be visualised as shown in the following diagram, with each objective strongly linked to each of those that follows, providing their foundation as well as influencing their design. Simultaneously however, each objective is further provided with underpinning from the literature review, ongoing throughout the course of the data collection and the methods used therein.

Fig. 2.3 Inter-supportive objectives

2.2.3 A developmental approach
From an early stage in the research design, prior to the choice of methods to be used, the emerging structure of the research was becoming clearer. Just as each research
question had evolved from the one before, so each objective evolved and developed from the one before it in a logical, evolutionary sequence, with the findings from each part of the data collection impacting on the next objective, as well as necessitating a reflective, holistic approach. This reflective approach meant that analysis was an ongoing process, with findings from earlier parts of the research impacting upon the questions and focus of the later data collection. Indeed, this reflective approach, coupled with the evolutionary nature of the research project led to the alteration of objectives at a later stage of the research in order to maintain the clarity of focus of the project. (See ‘Ongoing Assessment and Evaluation of the Research Process’, section 2.4). This holistic approach has resulted in a range of methods being employed in order to most effectively satisfy each of those objectives stated above. The view taken was that these methods would be complementary to each other and together would give a fuller more rounded set of data with which to work.

2.2.4 Mixing methods

Undertaking research in the bookselling environment has necessitated a methodological approach which is both exploratory and holistic, due primarily to the lack of scholarly research within the bookselling environment to date. The overall approach to the proposed research was one of enquiry rather than hypothesis. This suggested a qualitative approach to the research since one of the chief reasons for taking such an approach is if the subject is relatively unexplored. ‘This means that not much has been written about the topic or the population being studied, and the researcher seeks to listen to the participants and build an understanding based on their ideas’ (Creswell, 2003, p.30). This seemed to be a sensible way to proceed with a relatively unexplored subject area. Denscombe (1998) presents a pragmatic case for the qualitative approach, pointing out the various advantages and disadvantages associated with qualitative research. He says that while qualitative research has a richness and detail to the data, there is nevertheless ‘tolerance of ambiguity and contradictions’ (p.220) leading to the prospect of alternative explanations during the process of analysis. Furthermore, the often less wide ranging breadth of qualitative research means the data may be less representative and the interpretation may be ‘bound up with ‘the self’ of the researcher’ (ibid, p.221). However, one must bear in mind that qualitative research ‘is better able to deal with the intricacies of a situation and do justice to the subtleties of social life’ (ibid). This need not indicate any sort paradigmatic clash between quantitative and qualitative methods. As Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) say, ‘there are overwhelmingly more similarities between quantitative
and qualitative perspectives than there are differences’ (p.379). Brannen also comments on the significant potential overlap between the qualities of quantitative and qualitative research:

The claims that qualitative research uses words while quantitative research uses numbers is overly simplistic. A further claim that qualitative studies focus on meanings while quantitative research is concerned with behaviour is also not fully supported since both may be concerned with people’s views and actions. The association of qualitative research with an inductive logic of enquiry and quantitative research with hypothetic-induction can often be reversed in practice; both types of research may employ both forms of logic (2005, p.175).

2.2.5 The quantitative-qualitative continuum
Creswell comments that quantitative and qualitative research ‘are not mutually exclusive. Most research will exist somewhere on the continuum between the two’ (2003, p.4). Over the course of the development of the research and reflecting upon the development of the research questions, this has certainly proved to be the case and while the initial approach to the research project had been a qualitative one, as it developed, it became clear that quantitative methods would have a significant role to play, in answering the research questions. Commenting on the historic pull between quantitative and qualitative methods, Clough and Nutbrown say, ‘The issue is not so much a question of which paradigm to work within …but how to dissolve that distinction in the interests of developing research design which serves the investigation of the questions posed through that research’ (2002, p.19). Similarly, Brannen (1992, p.xiv) refers to Hammersley’s argument that ‘rather than being derived from philosophical or methodological commitments, choice of method should be based on the goals and circumstances of the research being pursued’. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) go further, advocating that ‘all graduate students learn to utilize and to appreciate both quantitative and qualitative research’ (p.376) in order to become what they have termed ‘pragmatic researchers’. ‘Pragmatists… contend that a false dichotomy exists between quantitative and qualitative approaches’ (ibid, p.377). They go on, ‘Pragmatists ascribe to the philosophy that the research question should drive the method(s) used… in any case, researchers who ascribe to epistemological purity disregard the fact that research methodologies are merely tools that are designed to aid our understanding of the world’ (ibid). This serves to support the approach taken to
the choice of methods in this research project, with the research questions driving the choice, rather than an adherence to any presupposed research paradigm.

It became clear that the research project was suited to a mixed approach of both quantitative methods (to gather a broad range of opinions and responses, forming a basis for further exploration in a qualitative forum) and qualitative methods (in order to draw out rich description from interviewees and focus group participants regarding personal opinion). This approach was directed by the kinds of questions which were being asked, and an assessment of how each question or group of questions could be asked and answered most effectively. Therefore, the approaches used, with the adoption of interviews, questionnaires and focus groups have been deemed the most suitable ‘in the interests of developing research design which serves the investigation of the questions posed through that research’ (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002, p.19).

2.2.6 The interaction of the methods
It has been noted that some writers on methodological approach warn of the potential pitfall of adopting a range of methods. Silverman (2000) for instance warns of the danger of ultimately saying ‘a little about a lot’ (p.99), and of choosing to adopt the use of a range of methods purely in the hope that the aggregate will amount to something of note. With regard to this particular research, the range of methods has been employed at each stage of research evolution, in order to answer the research question and sub-questions (see section 2.1.1) in the most effective and efficient way possible. This has resulted in a well structured and meaningful piece of research. Greene, Caracelli and Graham (in Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.41) having reviewed several mixed-method evaluation studies, proposed that such studies can ‘help sequentially (results of the first method inform the second’s sampling, instrumentation, etc.) and can expand the scope and breadth of a study by using different methods in different components’. Sieber (in Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.41) also points out some of the advantages from mixing methods in a study:

Quantitative data can help with the qualitative side of a study ... during data collection by supplying background data, getting overlooked information, and helping avoid the “elite bias” (talking only to high-status respondents). During analysis quantitative data can help by showing the generality of specific observations... and verifying or casting new light on qualitative findings.
Miles and Huberman also point out that qualitative data can help support quantitative data in a similar fashion (ibid, p.41). Brannen (2005) supports the use of qualitative and quantitative methods in single studies, but highlights the fact that this need not necessarily lead to one approach supporting the other. While different approaches may corroborate each other, they may just as easily contradict, elaborate, or prove to be complementary. In the current research, the methods were not primarily selected in order to provide triangulation, although this has proved to be the case in some instances. Indeed, reflecting upon the whole of the project, the methods chosen have corroborated, elaborated and complemented, while they seem never to have contradicted. Upon further reflection, the methods employed have been considered in relation to each of the objectives, setting each method in context and making clear its applicability and relevance in each section of the research.
### 2.3 The Methods

The following table illustrates the data collection methods used; their sequence and the numbers of participants at each stage.

**Table 2.2 – Data collection methods**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Details</th>
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| 1. Interviews           | • Two chain bookshop managers (in person)  
                          | • One chain bookshop marketing manager (in person)  
                          | • One chain bookshop marketing director (by ‘phone)  
                          | (Overall, covering three different chain bookshops) |
| 2. Questionnaires       | A total of 100 questionnaires carried out face to face with bookshop users across the same three chain bookshops |
| 3. Focus groups         | Three focus groups (of five, six and seven participants)                                                                                   |
| 4. Online questionnaires| Gathered via online newspaper and film sites -70 respondents                                                                                      |
| 5. Interviews           | Three managers of online bookshops (two chains and one independent) were interviewed by telephone                                               |
| 6. Online questionnaire | Gathered via an online book group and by posting a link on an online bookshop. 88 respondents                                               |
2.3.1 The use of interviews

2.3.1.1 Rationale
In order to establish the approaches to marketing and branding adopted by bookshops, as well as their implementation, it was proposed that semi-structured interviews be carried out with experts – a variety of managers - in the book trade. It was envisaged that the use of interviews would allow the researcher to get to the heart of the issue of the application of marketing with each interviewee and the semi-structured approach would allow pertinent issues to come forth naturally in a free-flowing environment. Given the evolutionary design of the research project, it was also proposed that the use of interviews would provide a rich source of data (Miller and Brewer, 2003; Kvale, 1996; Silverman, 2000), which could potentially be utilised in the design of the subsequent stages of data collection (Hakim, 2000, p.37). The interviews were given a starting structure in order to give interviewees a point from which to move forward and to allow the interview to open in a structured way, while leaving space for fuller commentary and more detail towards the end of each topic under discussion. The questions (or starting points) were structured as quite open, searching questions, each exploring themes of the research, with the aim of leaving the way open for interviewees to add their own thoughts feelings and comments to the researcher’s themes. The starting themes were drawn from a thorough familiarity with and reading of trade literature on marketing and branding in bookshops, particularly with reference to newer marketing techniques introduced in recent years. This gave a starting point based in real bookshop experience for the interviewees.

It is important to bear in mind that while the contribution of bookshop experts at this stage, as well as at the later stage of interviews with online managers, was extremely important, it was primarily useful for scene setting; giving context to the later fuller data collection which was to be carried out with consumers. Information gathering from the managers was vital in so far as it outlined manager knowledge of head office strategy, and also set out the range of approaches to marketing which were being adopted by chain bookshops at that point. This aided the subsequent research design with bookshop consumers, as it made clear the marketing approaches which were being undertaken by bookshops, as well as illuminating areas of concern raised by managers in some cases about these approaches.
2.3.1.2 Potential interview bias
While inevitable bias occurs while interviewing due to the interviewer's own background and experience (Denscombe, 1998; Clough & Nutbrown, 2002), nevertheless Kvale says that 'rather than attempt to eliminate the personal interaction of interviewer and interviewee...[we can] regard the person of the interviewer as the primary methodological tool' (1996, p.287). Indeed, Kvale says that familiarity with the environment in which the interviews are to take place, is essential. The researcher's own experience within the book trade certainly influenced the inception of the research and personal interest, but it is felt that by making clear her own background within the trade, as well as many years experience therein, the interviews were in some cases made easier, due to establishing mutual respect and because interviewees were able to use jargon and refer to book trade events which had taken place over the years, in the knowledge that the interviewee would recognise these references. In this respect the researcher can be viewed as a 'methodological tool' as prior knowledge and experience has enabled the smoother operation of certain parts of the data collection. However, one must bear in mind that the interviewer must be considered objectively – as one would any other methodological tool for data collection – and consider all the advantages and disadvantages that they bring to the research. It is also worth bearing in mind that the topic under investigation is not a hugely emotive, or controversial one, so it is unlikely that personal strongly held views or bias will have had a major impact on the execution of the research. Kvale also suggests that a good guide to one's own objectivity as an interviewer, is that if someone else were to go back and carry out the same research, the same answers should be reached (1996, p.65). The researcher is satisfied that this would be the case for the interviews carried out as constituent parts of this research project.

2.3.1.3 Selecting the participants
With regard to the first objective: Objective 1 – To evaluate the interpretation and application of marketing techniques used by bookshops and bookshop managers and to analyse the methods by which they establish and maintain their brand identities, it was judged that bookshop managers would be the most appropriate interviewees, since they can be seen to bridge the gap between the strategists (in head office) and the booksellers who are seeing the strategy in place and facilitating its implementation. Creswell (2003) notes that in qualitative research one should ‘purposefully select’ the individuals for the proposed study, since ‘(t)he idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select your sites or subjects that will best help the researcher understand
the problem and the research question’ (p.185). Bookshop managers receive the instructions about bookshop strategy such as marketing plans, strategic direction and current issues from their head office, while still being aware of feedback from the booksellers as to the implementation and effectiveness of these plans, and any feedback from customers.

It was decided that ideally interviews would be carried out with a selection of book trade experts from a range of chains. The choice of three UK chain bookshops was made since this number seemed to represent a cross-section of UK chain bookselling as well as being a practical number to explore for the researcher. Indeed, the considerable degree of overlap of responses coming out of the interviews carried out would suggest that the selection of this number of interviews and range of chains was a valid one. Kvale concurs that when the responses one gets in interviews are being duplicated and nothing new is coming up, then the interviews are probably coming to the end of being useful or being able to generate any new material (1996). The aim was to collect data representative of UK chain bookshops rather than being specific to one particular chain. It was felt that limiting the data collection to one chain would have implications both academic and commercial. It was anticipated that the resulting data from a range of bookshops would be more likely to be of academic and commercial relevance.

2.3.1.4 Interview design and administration
Semi-structured interviews were designed with a view to drawing out information on the key themes of:

- Brand identity
- Marketing strategies and tools
- Any recent developments or changes in the branding or marketing strategies
- Customer experience in store, especially in relation to staff interaction
- Local identity

The starting point for the development of these themes came from a thorough reading of trade literature. These particular themes were drawn from discussion in the trade literature and were identified as being current and relevant to the research. They served as starting points for eliciting information covering these and other topics on current issues affecting the book trade. Nevertheless an effort was made to keep the
interviews as open as possible, and to engender an atmosphere of openness in order to draw out new, unanticipated information in the ensuing discussions. The interview schedule is Appendix II.

2.3.1.5 Carrying out the interviews
Two pilot interviews were carried out (one with the manager of a local academic chain bookshop, the other with the former manager of a chain bookshop) in March and April 2004. The range and depth of responses were encouraging and the final interviews went ahead after minor amendments. Two chain bookshop managers, one chain bookshop marketing manager and one chain bookshop marketing director were interviewed in June and July 2004. These were semi-structured face to face interviews lasting around one and a half hours each, with the exception of the interview with the marketing director, which was a telephone interview, lasting approximately 40 minutes. The interviews were generally felt to have drawn out interesting and relevant information – some expected and some unexpected - although one branch manager was unable to give much background or depth to his responses. However, the marketing director of that particular chain was also interviewed so it was felt that the lack of depth in the first interviewee’s responses was largely covered by the director’s knowledge of the business. This discrepancy between the views of the manager and that of the director in fact provided material which served to illuminate some of the other interviews carried out. The interviews were tape recorded since, as Patton says, ‘the raw data of interviews are the actual quotations spoken by interviewees’ (2002, p.380). Patton implies that every word spoken is important at the stage of interpretation and analysis, given that a single word or inflection can subtly change the meaning of a response. The taped interviews were promptly transcribed, enabling the researcher to note the impressions gained during the course of the interview, and notes were made of any observations which struck her during the interview period as well as initial themes coming through from the interviews. Kvale (1996) encourages prompt transcription, since this ‘is not a mere clerical task, but an interpretative process’ (p.182).

2.3.1.6 Approach to the analysis
The approach to the analysis of data has been ongoing, with overlap back and forwards at each stage of the research. By virtue of the evolutionary nature of the research project, the approach to the analysis has had to be a dynamic one. Because several different methods have been utilised and there is overlap and interlinking
support back and forwards across this developmental research, data analysis has been taking place since the very first data was gathered. This has been necessary since, for example, the findings from the initial interviews fed into the design of the following questionnaires. This strongly interlinked, developmental, design of the project has necessitated a dynamic approach to the analysis as an ongoing vital element central to the development of the research. The approach to analysis - and indeed the whole research project - has been ‘an holistic endeavour that requires prolonged engagement, persistent observation and triangulation’ (Onwueguzie and Leech, 2005, p.383). A welcome ‘side effect’ of using mixed methods has been the resulting triangulation, and the way each method has served to support or inform the other methods in the project.

2.3.1.7.1 Observation and notes
The sequence of the first interviews was two pilot interviews (face to face), followed by three further face to face interviews and one telephone interview. The instinctive approach to the analysis was to transcribe promptly and, in most cases simultaneously, to go through the transcript and make notes on what was felt to be important themes or areas of interest both explicit and implicit in the text as these emerged. This approach preceded any formal note taking process and was an instinctive approach to the data gathered, in order to record what was fresh and uppermost in the researcher’s mind. In the case of the telephone interview, notes were taken at the time and written up promptly in order that any additional material was not forgotten. As Miles and Huberman (1994) point out, ‘The temptation during a write-up is to slog along, converting raw notes into a coherent account. But that method misses an important resource: the field-worker’s reflections and commentary on issues that emerge during the process’ (p.66). Indeed the notes made following the interviews were on many and disparate memories and impressions of the interviews; the quality of the relationship formed with the interviewee (which would clearly have an impact on the candour of responses); observations of other occurrences at the time, due to the presence of other people in the room(s) and other conversations going on at the same time; and also impressions of the validity of the material drawn from the interviewee (ibid, p.66). Margin notes were then made on each transcript and subsequently, more detailed notes were made, while reflecting upon some of these margin notes. This basic analysis of the initial interview data allowed key themes and topics of interest - as well as new topics - to be drawn out of the interview data and to be used in the design of the next part of the data collection; the questionnaires. The key areas emanating from the research were threaded through the whole of the ongoing data collection and this
matrix of important themes and ongoing ideas helped to draw each part of the data collection together.

Glazer defines a memo as ‘the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding... it exhausts the analyst’s momentary ideation based on data with perhaps a little conceptual elaboration’ (in Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.72). While ‘memos’ per se were not adopted (since memos, according to Glazer, occur simultaneously with the process of coding) nevertheless, the initial notes made were elaborated and made more detailed, so Glazer’s description of ‘conceptual elaboration’ was indeed adopted. The detailed elaboration of notes was inspired by a fuller, inductive analysis of the margin notes on the transcripts. These detailed notes served to expand on the salient points raised in the focus groups. The approach to the note-taking was an expansive one, with the brief margin notes serving as a catalyst for further development of ideas and themes and further exploration of these themes and topics. As Mills (in Miles and Huberman, 1994) says, ‘Writing... does not come after analysis; it is analysis, happening as the writer thinks through the meaning of data in the display. Writing is thinking, not the report of thought’ (p.101). This expansive approach to the writing of notes has been used both in the analysis of the interviews and of the focus groups and has proven useful both for clarifying issues as well as inspiring explanation and further ideas.

2.3.1.7.2 Coding the interviews
A detailed, analytical reading of the interviews was undertaken and initial codes were assigned to each of the transcripts. It is important to note that codes were not only produced for frequently occurring themes, or expected themes, but were also produced for the unexpected and infrequent emergent themes, if they were considered to be of potential interest or significance to the wider study. As Miles and Huberman note (1994) it is important that the approach to coding is not simply one of counting the number of selected words or phrases.

You thus are assuming that the chief property of the words is that there are more of some than of others. Focusing solely on numbers shifts attention from substance to arithmetic, throwing out the whole notion of “qualities” or “essential characteristics” (p.56).
Furthermore, given the foundation that the initial interview survey was to form for the subsequent data collection, it was deemed important that material not just of relevance to the particular objective being addressed by the interviews was coded, but that a holistic approach was taken and that an inclusive approach be taken to the analysis and coding. The codes formed naturally into different groupings, according to broad subject area. This structuring and reduction of the data into chunks which could be made sense of, allowed the interviews to be analysed in a structured way; allowed important themes to emerge, and enabled the narrative within the interviews to flow. This reduction of the data has facilitated the most meaningful elements of the interviews to emerge and has allowed these elements to be expressed more cogently. The coding scheme relating to the interviews is Appendix III.

2.3.2. Further use of interviews

2.3.2.1 Rationale

Interviews were also carried out at a later stage of the research, when the data collection was concerned with online bookshops. Objective 5 was: To evaluate the degree to which the application of marketing techniques and approaches to branding by traditional bookshops have been extended to online settings with a view to assessing any differentiation which bookshops make between traditional and online customers.

In order to satisfy this objective, it was proposed that an assessment of the kinds of marketing and branding approaches adopted online would have to be carried out. As at objective 1, this was carried out using semi-structured interviews, but on this occasion the interviewees were online experts. Semi-structured interviews were assessed to be a suitable method in this instance, in order to focus upon the issues which required answers (online marketing and branding) while adopting an open approach in order to facilitate a fullness of response and to draw out unanticipated material from the respondents. Again, an interview schedule was designed (Appendix IV), drawing upon the questions asked at objective 1 and also drawing on some of the issues raised in the interim stages of data collection - in particular the focus groups - with regard to online bookselling and online book buying. This would allow comparisons or contrasts with high street bookshop marketing and branding techniques to be made, as well as enabling the analysis of how online strategists distinguish between online and offline customers, if at all.
2.3.2.2 Carrying out the telephone interviews
Telephone interviews were carried out in November 2005: two with the online manager of a chain of UK bookshops and another with an independent bookshop which also had an affiliated online site. A further brief telephone discussion was undertaken with one other manager of an independent online bookshop, again with an offline site. This provided useful supplementary material. A pilot interview was not undertaken, due to the scarcity of online bookselling sites, particularly chains (see section 2.3.2.3).

2.3.2.3 Overcoming problems of access
A problem arising at this stage was that of gaining access to online bookshop managers. Given the dominance of Amazon and the fact that Amazon at that time managed the online sites of Waterstone’s and Borders, this automatically limited the potential number of suitable interviewees with relevant knowledge of online strategy and its implementation. Access to interviewees did prove to be a problem, and considerable time and persistence was required to gain access to those people who did eventually participate. Nevertheless, despite further persistence with personnel at Amazon, Waterstone’s and Borders for information regarding their online sites, this was not successful. Amazon was unable to take part in an interview because of their ‘strategic confidentiality policy’. The unwillingness of Amazon to share operational information has been commented on in the press (Stross, 2006). This was unfortunate, but did not negate the value of the subsequent questionnaires: simply, care had to be taken in their design. Further discussion of this, and other methodological considerations takes place in section 2.5, reflecting upon the whole methodology.

2.3.2.4 Analysing the interviews with online experts
A similarly detailed approach was taken to the analysis of the interviews with online experts, the main difference being that these had taken place by telephone. Once again the recorded interviews were promptly transcribed and notes were taken about the impressions given and the main emerging topics. Again, an open, inductive approach was taken to the coding with each separate transcript being coded separately, then each set of codes being collated, with care being taken not to sideline any less frequently used codes. The codes appear as Appendix V.
2.3.3 The use of questionnaires

2.3.3.1 Rationale
The key themes emerging from the interviews carried out to satisfy objective 1, fed into the next stage of the research – questionnaires with bookshop customers. Although it was felt at the outset of the research that the overall approach to be taken needed to be qualitative, the developmental nature of the research pointed towards the use of questionnaires in order to satisfy the second research objective. This is:

To analyse critically the impact of these branding and marketing strategies on customer perception of the bookshop identity, perception of bookshop marketing procedures and the resulting impact on customer behaviour in the bookshop setting

It is perhaps helpful to consider this particular research objective in tandem with objective 3:

To evaluate the factors contributing to any sense of the ‘culture’ or ‘community’ of the bookshop experienced by bookshop users, again examining any resulting impact on customer behaviour

Clearly, both of these objectives involve the examination of consumer responses to the key themes and findings emerging from analysis of the interviews carried out at objective 1. However, while reflecting upon these objectives it was plain that the issues of ‘culture’ and ‘community’ referred to in objective 3 suggested a more qualitative approach than those at objective 2. With this in mind, in order to satisfy objective 2 a questionnaire was deemed appropriate, while focus groups were proposed for objective 3, with a view to pulling the more complex issues emerging from objectives 1 and 2, into the design of these focus groups.

Questionnaires were selected as a method with a view to drawing responses on the key findings from the previous interviews, from a reasonably large number of people. Denscombe (1998) points out that questionnaires are the most appropriate method to use when a large number of respondents need to be dealt with, and the information to be extracted is reasonably straightforward. It was proposed that, in tandem with the subsequent focus groups, this approach would provide a well rounded body of responses to the issues raised in the initial interviews. Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to the inbuilt bias frequently present in ‘focussed’ qualitative research, due to the
tendency by researchers to rely on the responses of predominantly ‘elite’ respondents. It was felt that by using the questionnaire process rather than simply relying on focus groups, this would give the researcher the best opportunity of avoiding this tendency, since the questionnaire data would hopefully be gathered from a wider section of bookshop users. Questionnaires were deemed the most suitable method for this stage of data gathering since it would allow standardised questions to be asked of a reasonably large group of people, allowing them to give up a very small amount of their time (around five minutes) as well as retaining anonymity (Munn & Drever, 1995). More detailed consumer preferences in bookshops were to be investigated in more detail in the subsequent focus groups.

2.3.3.2 Awareness of potential bias
Solomon (2002) points out the level of awareness which the researcher needs when carrying out any research which needs human response.

People tend to give ‘yes’ responses to questions, regardless of what is asked. In addition, consumers often have an eagerness to be ‘good subjects’ by pleasing the experimenter. They will try to give the responses they think he or she is looking for (p.94).

This “halo effect” is well documented across research literature (Denscombe, 1998), and should be borne in mind. Nevertheless, in the context of this particular research, care was taken not to elicit ‘wished for responses’ from interviewees within the book trade, by allowing plenty of time and space for responses to be expressed to the open questions, as well as encouraging opinions about related topics or offshoot ideas to emerge. Similarly, the questionnaire design (see Appendices II, IV and VI) was such that the respondents were not being led towards any particular kind of response. Indeed they were rarely asked to agree or disagree with any particular statement but were more usually asked to express their personal responses to various book trade attributes.

Although it may initially seem as if questionnaires offer a completely objective approach to data collection, it should be borne in mind that they are ‘always a learning experience for the respondent’ (Peterson, 2000, p.8). This would seem to imply that simply by being exposed to the questions within a questionnaire, the respondent is potentially being subjected to questions and ideas which they have not thought about
or encountered before. The very nature of this exposure may cause a deeper consideration of some topics and may impact upon the kinds of answers which the questioner gets. Indeed ‘some questionnaire answers are constructed at the time of asking – participants may use ‘clues’ from previous answers’ (ibid, p.9). Other factors of which the questionnaire designer should be aware are the effects of some questions. For example some participants choose an option simply by virtue of its being there (the ballot effect) (ibid, p.39). In a similar fashion some options will be chosen because they are physically at the top of a list (position effect) (ibid, p.41). The questionnaire design was such that it took into consideration the potential for these effects and aimed to overcome them insofar as is practicably possible. For example, options for the respondent to choose from were mixed, so as not simply to present a range of choices from good through to bad. Other questions were asked in a different way – at a later stage in the questionnaire, allowing the answers to be compared in order to ensure integrity of response.

2.3.3 Selecting the participants
It was felt that a more representative cross section of bookshop users could be reached by carrying out the questionnaires face to face, rather than by self selection (with a view to avoiding a predominantly ‘elite’ response, as pointed out above). Czaja and Blair (1996) comment that face to face surveys can sometimes have the effect of eliciting ‘socially desirable responses’ (p.48). However, given that the subject of book buying is relatively innocuous, face to face surveys were deemed to be entirely appropriate and gain a better response rate than postal surveys, or leaving the surveys for self selection. This clearly leaves the option for bias emanating from the researcher, given that the respondents were selected by the researcher. This was borne in mind while carrying out the research and a reasonable effort was made to select respondents from a range of ages and gender as far as this was practically possible. Although a relatively ‘random’ selection of respondents was made while carrying out the surveys, this was nevertheless within a very focused environment – that of a bookshop - and while it is hoped that the sample may be representative of bookshop users, it should be borne in mind that bookshop users themselves tend to belong to specific socioeconomic groups and are not representative of the general public (Mintel, 2005).
2.3.3.4 Questionnaire design and administration

The questionnaires were designed to last no longer than five minutes and to be easy to understand and enjoyable to complete. Given that the focus of the questionnaires was the consumer responses to marketing and branding strategies in bookshops, it was proposed that the questionnaires be carried out in various chain bookshops. In fact, they were undertaken in the same three bookshops where the first interviews had taken place.

The questionnaires were designed with clarity in mind. Given that it was proposed to carry out the questionnaires with around 100 respondents, it was plain that in order to have integrity of response, clarity must be the key focus of the questionnaire design (Munn & Drever, 1995). Other crucial considerations for the design was the timing: it was felt that taking up anything over five minutes of people’s time might lead to resentment towards the researcher and perhaps even the staff and management of the bookshop where the questionnaires were taking place. Given that the researcher wished to maintain good relations with the participating bookshops in order to facilitate the later data collection, it was important that this be avoided. It was also deemed to be important that the questionnaires be of interest to the respondents. This was a relatively easy object to satisfy, since the questionnaires were on the subject of bookshops and the prospective participants would most probably be interested in that topic, given that the criteria for selection to participate was that they had been inside a bookshop at the time.

The questionnaires were designed, drawing on the issues raised and discussed at the interview stage, as well as asking basic demographic questions of the respondents in order to aid analysis and any patterns developing along demographic lines. They were designed visually with clarity and ease of reading in mind. Although they were designed to be read out by the researcher, it was felt that they should look both professional and accessible so that respondents should be able to read and understand them easily if they so wished. Structurally, they began with the simplest, easiest to answer questions first, moving on to the more complex, thought-provoking questions at a later stage. The questionnaire was split into four sections, giving order to the appearance and the question sequence. It also allowed respondents to make additional comments at several stages of the questionnaire, if they wished to add anything which might have been missed. The questionnaire is attached as Appendix VI.
2.3.3.5 Carrying out the questionnaires
The questionnaires were piloted during October 2004 with 15 respondents in one of the participating bookshops. The pilot went smoothly with no refusals to participate. A few minor issues arose: questions which were ambiguous were clarified; and questions about other bookshop users to which respondents felt unwilling to respond, were deleted. 100 questionnaires were completed in three different bookshops across three different cities between November 2004 and January 2005. The response rate was very positive, with very few people refusing to participate when approached. Most respondents seemed genuinely interested in the research and were happy to participate.

2.3.3.6 Analysis of the questionnaires
Since the first set of questionnaires were carried out face to face by the researcher, it was clear as they progressed that certain patterns and themes were emerging very clearly, whilst some were a little more difficult to analyse. Once all the raw data had been gathered, notes were written on the overall impression of how the questionnaires had progressed, including impressions of how people had responded to being asked about their opinions in bookshops and how easy it had been to recruit respondents (particularly comparing impressions across the different bookshops and different cities used). The data gathered was input to the statistical package SPSS and by virtue of inputting this data, even though no ‘analysis’ had taken place, certain patterns were emerging regarding consumer responses to the questions asked. The intimate knowledge of the data collected up to this point (interviews and questionnaires) allowed the design of the subsequent focus groups to take place.

2.3.3.7 Using SPSS
Initially, basic frequency tables were used to give an overall impression of the patterns and trends of the data which had been gathered. However, due to the design of the first questionnaire, it was often necessary to use the ‘weighted cases’ facility in order to clarify more complex multi-choice questions, where the participants were able to tick as many boxes as applied to them for each question. Charts and diagrams were also used in order to present a visual representation of the results which in turn served to clarify the findings. In some instances cases were selected (on the basis of gender for example) in order to explore the possibility of any significance underlying responses.
2.3.4 Use of online questionnaires

2.3.4.1 Rationale

Online questionnaires were used for data collection at two different stages of the research, in order to satisfy objectives 4 and 6. While the decision taken to use online questionnaires for these objectives was reached in different ways, this method was deemed appropriate in both cases. The rationale for using questionnaires is set out above and much of that reasoning applies to this choice of method for the final stage of the data collection. However, there are many subtle distinctions between surveys carried out face to face and those which are online. Evans and Mathur, (2005) present a comprehensive overview of the various advantages and disadvantages of carrying out surveys online, and compare these to those of other data collection methods. They point out many advantages, and in the context of this particular survey, the most pertinent advantage is convenience. Hogg, in Evans and Mathur (2005, p.198) points out ‘instead of being annoyed at an inconvenient time with a telephone survey, a respondent can take an online survey whenever he or she feels it is convenient’. As the surveys used to satisfy objectives 4 and 6 were also essentially self–selection surveys, with links posted on websites which potential respondents might use, they would obviously click on the link only if they actually intended to complete the survey, therefore cutting out all potential annoyance and inconvenience. Other key advantages noted by Evans and Mathur include:

- the relative ease of administration (cutting out fieldwork, travel and paper costs)
- speed of data gathering
- reaching a wider potential geographic demographic.

In their comparison of online and postal data collection methods, McDonald and Adam (2003) concur with some of these highlighted advantages, particularly administration costs, although they do go on to point out that online methods should not be viewed as a direct substitution for more traditional data collection methods. As Evans and Mathur also point out, there are advantages and disadvantages to any method, and the best approach is to consider which method best suits the research project which is in progress. While online surveys largely cut out the personal contact which is sometimes useful for drawing out detailed responses from questionnaire respondents, nevertheless it also serves to cut out the potential bias which inevitably comes from personal contact (Denscombe, 1998; Clough & Nutbrown, 2002).
2.3.4.2 Potential difficulties with online methods
Mann and Stewart (2000) point out some of the main issues to be borne in mind when carrying out research online. Firstly, access to computers is correlated to higher household income as well as the higher echelons of socio-economic background (p.33). Furthermore, there is evidence of gender inequality and age bias with regard to computer access. Specifically, more men have access to computers than women and computer use is still dominated by a younger demographic. With reference to this particular research the problem of reaching only those people with computer access was outweighed by the advantage of reaching a wider group of people, specifically those which the researcher needed to reach, i.e. newer users of bookshops for the first online survey. With regard to the second online survey, where users of online bookshops were targeted, clearly, this particular group would need to have access to a computer in any case, so this point is not an issue.

Nesbary goes on to make an interesting point with regard to the use of electronic data collection methods:

Familiarity with technology can lead to a bias toward that technology and a bias against other forms of communication and data analysis (2000, p.42).

This comment was made in the context of his own research, where he found that respondents who were technologically literate were largely in favour of research carried out in this way. This may have a bearing on results gathered from the final online survey, particularly those questions which ask about the bookshop preferences of online bookshop users. For instance, it may be anticipated that many of the respondents to this survey will prefer online bookshops, since they are obviously used to buying books this way.

Gunter et al (2002) note that the interactive element of online surveys might lead to the respondent being more engaged with the questionnaire and therefore give fuller responses to open-ended questions. It might also be suggested that in the case of this particular research, the use of online surveys to target technologically literate respondents with regard to the use of online bookshops is a particularly appropriate use for this form of data collection, since one is automatically excising those who do not have computer access.
2.3.4.3 Using online questionnaires at objective 4
At the objective 4 stage, the original sequence of progress of the data collection is laid out below. The eventual decision to use online surveys was partly directed by the failure of previous methods to reach the target population. However, the explanation of how this decision was reached is set out logically below.

2.3.4.3.1 Postal surveys
The aim of this objective (4) was: To evaluate whether or not the marketing and branding strategies adopted by bookshops are effective at attracting new customers. However, it was also hoped that information gathered at this stage might help to identify the factors which deter people from visiting bookshops. A postal survey was proposed in order to reach a wider range of potential respondents. It was hoped that a postal survey would reduce the ‘elite’ response (Miles and Huberman, 1994) of dedicated bookshop users and reach those people who were perhaps new to bookshops or less frequent bookshop users. Nevertheless, it needed to be borne in mind that by using an online forum to gather data, those potential respondents without computer access were automatically eliminated from the data collection (Evans and Mathur, 2005).

2.3.4.3.2 Pilot postal surveys
Pilot postal surveys were designed with this aim in mind, and 50 pilots were sent out to random addresses in Aberdeen. Clarity and ease of completion were key considerations given that the questionnaires were going to a range of households, many of whom could reasonably be assumed not to be bookshop users. 14 responses were received. Although the response rate was encouraging, further examination of the responses revealed that all but two of the respondents were habitual, long term bookshop users. Bourque and Fielder note that self-administered surveys are suitable for motivated respondents, but also, when using a self-administered questionnaire, the researcher has no control over who responds (1995, pp.16, 19). This is often the case in research where the respondents are effectively self-selecting whether or not they respond, and need not be a problem, depending on the aim of the research question. However, in the case of this particular piece of data collection which aimed to reach newer or non bookshop users, the methodology needed to be redesigned.
2.3.4.3.3 Street surveys
Clearly it was desirable to reach a larger group of people who were either new to bookshops or did not use bookshops, if the particular research objective was to be fulfilled. It was therefore proposed that the researcher would carry out street surveys, selecting respondents herself rather than relying on self selection which had resulted in only those long term users of bookshops users responding. However, the street surveys also proved unsuccessful. A sufficiently busy thoroughfare was selected in order to have sufficient footfall of potential respondents, but this presented the further problem of market researchers and charity workers being present, also competing for the attention of the public. Despite experimenting with different locations, the general public were not willing to stop and complete questionnaires.

2.3.4.4 Online questionnaire design and administration
It was decided to experiment with online surveys in an effort to reach the desired target group. This approach was successful and is outlined below. Online surveys were used for objective 4 since it was proposed that it might be possible to target people who were interested in books, but not to the exclusion of other, perhaps keener interests, therefore reaching the mix of people which was required. Using www.sondage.online.be, the survey was loaded onto the web in May 2005. It was publicised in the local press as well as the local online press and an electronic link to the survey was published. In addition, a link to the survey was posted on the books thread of Empire online (www.empireonline.com). This is an online cinema website which allows subscribers to chat online about various topics of interest. It was proposed that this would be a suitable way to proceed since those using the site in the first place might not have books as their primary interest. As explained above, this had been a problem with the first pilot study. Initial examination of the results received revealed a mix of respondents and included both people who had been long term users and newer users of bookshops, as well as demonstrating a range of opinions regarding online bookshop and in-store bookshop facilities. On these bases, it was decided that it would be appropriate to proceed with this study. The link to the questionnaire was left to run for six months although the responses tailed off significantly after three months and no more were received after four months. 70 questionnaires were completed. The online questionnaires used can be viewed at Appendix VII.
2.3.4.5 Using online questionnaires again
At the final stage of data collection (for objective 6) the objective was:

To critically analyse customer perception of the marketing and branding strategies of online bookshops, including any sense of online community experienced or perceived by online bookshop customers; the resulting impact on behaviour in online bookshops, and to evaluate the degree to which those who do not regularly use traditional bookshops are attracted to online bookshop facilities.

Given that consumer responses were also sought to the rather more complex issue of online community, the questionnaire was designed in such a way as to enable respondents to add their own comments about this aspect of online book buying (if they felt it existed). Indeed, the whole of the questionnaire design was undertaken with a view to facilitating extra, qualitative information from participants, in order to enrich the response gained from the more quantitative aspect of the questionnaire. As mentioned before, using an online questionnaire immediately limits one’s respondents to those that are computer literate. This is clearly not an issue in this case, since the respondents sought were those who used online bookshops. Drawing from each of the previous sets of data collection and focusing on consumer response to the marketing and branding used by online bookshops as well as any ‘social’ aspect of online bookselling, the questionnaire was duly designed and was set up to run on a Robert Gordon University web page, accessible via its own URL from April 2006. This questionnaire is Appendix VIII. With a view to reaching relevant respondents, contact was made with two online book discussion groups and two media web sites affiliated to TV channels. The media web sites affiliated to the television channels had specific book discussion pages where it was felt online bookshop users might be reached. However, the media web sites refused permission to post a link to an external page and of the book discussion sites contacted, only one replied. Nevertheless, a link was posted to the survey from the participating book discussion site and an encouraging response of 36 completed surveys was received. The responses drew to a close after this so contact was then made with the website manager of a UK bookshop chain with a view to posting a link on that site. Given that the particular chain contacted does not have a site from which one can actually purchase books, it would therefore be impossible to bias the results since no respondent would be able to cite the host of the survey as a ‘favourite online bookseller’ in their response. The link to this site proved very effective and a further 52 completed surveys were received.
2.3.4.6 Analysing the online questionnaires
As these were online questionnaires, clearly, impressions about the respondents and their interest or otherwise in the survey could not be recorded. However, the raw data was collated and input into SPSS. Frequency tables were generated, followed by the production of charts and diagrams. A slight difference in the design of the final questionnaire had been the increased scope for respondents to input qualitative information to the survey, in order to expand on their responses to the quantitative questions, if they so wished. A qualitative analysis of these responses was undertaken, although many of the responses were broadly similar.

2.3.5 The use of focus groups
2.3.5.1 Rationale
Objective 3 – To evaluate the factors contributing to any sense of the ‘culture’ or ‘community’ of the bookshop experienced by bookshop users, again examining any resulting impact on customer behaviour - was conceived of as being closely allied to objective 2, as they both assess consumer responses to the themes emerging from the initial interviews. However, a more qualitative approach to objective 3 was taken in order to:

- Explore complex ideas in more detail e.g. culture, community, feelings.
- Explore the issues covered in the questionnaires, but in more depth
- Satisfy the overall qualitative focus of the research – exploratory, empirical.

Across the research methods used in this project, the focus group is unique in so far as it uses the interaction between people as a means of drawing out information (Denscombe, 1998. p.115). As Morgan says, ‘the reliance is on interaction within the group, based on topics that are supplied by the researcher’ (1997, p.2). Indeed, in this research, it is not necessarily the participants per se that we are interested in, but in any discussion which may be initiated by the format of the focus group which will allow ideas to be ‘bounced off’ the participants and hopefully initiate further discussion (ibid, p.11). Krueger (1994) points out that ‘evidence from focus group interviews suggests that people do influence each other with their comments and in the course of a discussion the opinions of an individual might shift’ (p.11). Morgan says that focus groups ‘typically add to the data that are gathered through other qualitative methods’. Stewart and Shamdasani say, ‘Focus groups…have been proven useful following the analysis of a large-scale quantitative survey’ (1990, p.15). They ‘produce a very rich
body of data expressed in the respondents’ own words and context’ (ibid, p.12). When one uses more than one qualitative method in a research project, the purpose is to unearth new information with each method. Indeed, in this project whereas the interviews were used to draw out opinions as well as strategies from the managers, the focus groups were more concerned with drawing out experiences and opinions from groups of customers. The format of the focus group was used in order to facilitate more information, since it was envisaged that the presence of several people would allow more information to flow and elicit more material from each of the participants.

2.3.5.2 Awareness of potential bias
Some possible sources of bias in focus groups have been identified as a tendency towards conformity, where ‘participants withhold things that they might reveal in private’ and conversely, polarisation, where ‘some participants express more extreme views in a group than in private’ (Morgan, 1997, p.15). However, one would expect these effects to be more prevalent in the presence of controversial issues, rather than the topic of bookselling. As for the actual practicalities of undertaking focus groups, many guidelines exist for good practice. Practical considerations such as using a suitable environment (not too distracting) and gender of group participants can have an impact on the outcome or success of the groups (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990 p.47; Krueger, 1994, p.78). Even socioeconomic differences or physical characteristics have been identified as impacting upon results (Stewart & Shamdasani, p.37). However, given the practical difficulties that can be encountered in getting suitable participants to agree to take part, it was impractical to reject participants on the grounds above. Furthermore, these considerations of socioeconomic status and gender groupings are more important when undertaking research into these subjects, or at least, subjects of a more controversial nature than bookselling.

2.3.5.3 Recruiting focus group participants
Recruitment of participants for the focus groups was to have been partially fulfilled by recruiting those people who had completed the previous questionnaires. However, this only recruited a single participant for one of the groups. Given that the only prerequisite for participation in the groups was that one had visited bookshops and was willing to speak about the experience, it was proposed that an acceptable way to proceed would be to contact university staff and students. Although academic staff and students are arguably not a representative cross-section of the book buying public - although book buyers do belong predominantly to socioeconomic group ABC1 (Mintel, 2005) -
nevertheless, if one accepts that respondents to any call for information will by necessity be those most interested in the subject for discussion, the focus group participants were entirely appropriate. Those focus group participants who did take part were able to give confident, intelligent responses. It is a moot point that anyone agreeing to participate in such a discussion will in all likelihood be more experienced, more opinionated and more interested in the subject up for discussion, in any case. Morgan (1997, p.35) describes the ‘segmentation’ of participants as the controlling of the composition of the group to match ‘carefully chosen categories of participants’. This results in homogeneous groups. While the focus groups for this particular project have not been segmented, the selection process has been such that only bookshop users have been invited to participate. Given that an in-depth discussion of bookshop experiences was desired, this seemed the sensible path to take.

2.3.5.4 Successful moderation of focus groups
Morgan (1997) gives several practical tips and hints for running a focus group as smoothly and effectively as possible. He suggests the establishment of ‘ground rules’ covering the basics of politeness (p.48), basic introductions from each of the participants, and a wide-ranging ‘discussion starter’ covering the topic in a broad fashion, which could then be focused upon in more detail as necessary. Other hints for success include fostering interaction between participants in order to cover the widest possible range of relevant topics, in the greatest possible depth with those topics being dealt with in a personal context (ibid, p.45). This would seem to suggest that it is personal experience which is more relevant to an effective focus group, rather than necessarily just opinion. Krueger (1994) points out that if the atmosphere is ‘non-judgemental, then participants will reveal more of themselves’ (p.11). The moderator (in this case the researcher) must be alert to topics which need further exploration, as well as being able to tactfully move the discussion on to areas which need to be covered, if the discussion is floundering or stuck on an irrelevant point.

2.3.5.5 Focus groups – design and administration
The interviews and questionnaires already carried out were re-examined and emerging themes were collated with a view to examining them in the forum of focus groups. Rather than having ‘set’ or fixed questions to which an answer was required, the focus group schedule was rather one of themes or subject areas which needed to be explored. The focus group schedule is Appendix IX.
Focus groups were duly organised, with themed groups of questions forming the structure of the topics to be discussed. Krueger suggests that around six participants is both practical to manage and conducive to getting participants to be 'open' in their responses (1994, p.ix). The three focus groups undertaken had five, six and seven participants respectively. It was made clear to the focus group participants that particular issues would be raised and explored. Stewart & Shamdasani, (1990) support this use of focus groups, encouraging their use to follow up quantitative research. In this context they say ‘the focus group facilitates interpretation of qualitative results and adds depth to the responses obtained in the more structured survey’ (p.15). This has certainly proved the case, with several issues touched on at the questionnaire stages (such as consumer responses to coffee shops and discounted books) able to be explored and discussed in more depth within the focus groups. Nevertheless, several new and interesting issues were indeed raised.

2.3.5.6 Carrying out the focus groups
Three focus groups were carried out in February and March 2005. Given the problems of recruiting participants for the groups, a pilot was not carried out. However, upon completion of the third focus group, it was felt that there had been a significant degree of repetition and assent across each group, so the lack of a pilot was not felt to have hampered the effectiveness of the focus groups. As noted by Kvale in the context of interviews, it is time to call a halt to focus groups when the material being produced by the participants is largely similar across each group (Krueger, 1994, p.96). Like the interviews, the focus groups were tape recorded, allowing an accurate record of responses to be kept and referred back to at the stage of analysis.

One problem which arose at the first focus group was that of background noise. It had been proposed that it might be useful to carry out the focus groups in a coffee shop (within a bookshop) in order to focus the participants upon a key subject to be discussed; the atmosphere in store, and also to make more immediate the facilities and qualities which they might like or dislike about such a venue. While some background noise from the coffee machine in the bookstore where the first focus group was being carried out proved rather distracting at the commencement of the group, it lessened as time passed and did not hinder the taping or the transcription of the discussion. Nevertheless, subsequent focus groups were carried out in seminar rooms at The Robert Gordon University and an informal atmosphere was engendered with coffee and biscuits provided for participants.
2.3.5.7 Analysis of the focus groups
Following each of the three focus groups, general notes were made about overall impressions of the information gleaned, as well as the communicativeness of the participants and the atmosphere engendered in each group. (This is similar to the approach taken to the analysis of the interviews). The taped focus groups were then promptly transcribed. Upon transcription, notes were made in the margins of the transcripts, upon key themes and topics. Many of these themes and topics had been raised before in the interviews and in the questionnaires and with the benefit of hindsight and a fuller collection of data gathered, a more holistic, informed approach was able to be made to the broad body of people’s responses to the research questions. Nevertheless, some of the data emerging from the focus groups was new.

Notes were made with the objectives of the whole project in mind, namely; issues relating to community and culture within bookshops; issues relating to marketing and branding within bookshops. These issues were highlighted via the note-making process and given that there was a considerable amount of feedback in the focus groups on online bookselling, this too featured heavily in the notes. As with the interviews, the focus groups were coded, using an inductive, open approach. Once each transcript had been coded, each of the three sets of codes were re-examined and collated into a workable whole, giving a single set of codes encompassing each of the emergent themes from the focus groups. A broad similarity of approach can be seen when comparing the analysis of the interviews with that of the focus groups. Namely, prompt transcription, detailed note-taking, and an open, inductive approach to coding. The codes emerging from the focus groups appear as Appendix X.
2.4 Ongoing assessment & evaluation of research progress

2.4.1 Introduction

Part of the strategy of qualitative enquiry – a key advantage of the flexibility we claim for it – is that our research questions undergo continual scrutiny. Nothing should prevent a research question or problem statement from going through a metamorphosis similar to what a researcher experiences during the course of a study (Wolcott, 2001 p.40).

Wolcott’s statement encapsulates the spirit of enquiry with which this research has been undertaken. A reflective approach has been taken throughout the progress of the whole research in order to ensure the continued relevance of reading, methodology and data collection. This approach has afforded the opportunity to assess the ongoing progress as well as the opportunity to re-examine the stated objectives, in the light of data which was collected. This reflective approach has resulted in the alteration of objectives set out at the commencement of the research.

2.4.2 Observation in-store

It had originally been planned to use observation work ‘in order to establish the degree of use of sofas, browsing areas and coffee shops by customers’ and to identify ‘interaction with staff … [and] with other people in the shops’. The observation work was originally to have been closely linked to the in-store questionnaires (objective 2) and the focus groups (objective 3). However, as the data gathering progressed, it became clear that the issues which the observation was to have covered had already been largely addressed by the interviews, questionnaires and focus groups. The design of the questionnaires included specific questions about respondents’ use of and opinions about the sofas, as well as several detailed questions about their opinions and use of the coffee shops (notwithstanding the given disparity between what people do and what people say they do). Also included in the questionnaire were questions about the degree of interaction between staff and customers as well as between customers themselves. These issues have also been explored in more detail in the focus groups, giving further information about these specific areas of interest. It was therefore decided, upon reflection, that the observation work would be largely superfluous to the overall project. The aspect of ‘self-awareness’ of sections in which people find themselves has been explored to a limited extent in the focus groups, but has turned
out to be a topic in which participants are unwilling to engage. Given that this is a minor aspect of the research, it was decided that the level to which it has been investigated within the research to date, is appropriate at this time.

2.4.3 Consolidation of objectives
One further change made to the research at this juncture was to the remaining objectives, (5 – 8) to be carried out in an online setting. It was clear at this point that a considerable amount of data had already been collected (interviews, questionnaires, focus groups and a web survey). Bearing in mind the need to limit data to a manageable volume as well as the time constraints implicit within a PhD research setting, the remaining four objectives were revised appropriately. The essential aim in this revision was to retain a rigorous level of academic enquiry while ensuring the remaining data to be collected would link back logically to the data already gathered, and would result in a manageable amount of information to be analysed and written up effectively. With this in mind, objective 5 was to remain the same as originally planned, but objectives 6, 7 & 8 were consolidated.

Objective 5 – To evaluate the degree to which the application of marketing techniques and approaches to branding by traditional bookshops have been extended to online settings with a view to assessing any differentiation which bookshops make between traditional and online customers.

Objectives 6, 7 & 8 were originally set out as follows:

Objective 6 – To critically analyse the effect of the strategies on customer perception of the online bookshop, and the resulting impact on behaviour in online bookshops.

Objective 7 – To critically analyse any sense of online community experienced by online bookshop customers while visiting online bookshops or in their perception of online bookshops.

Objective 8 – To evaluate the degree to which those who do not regularly use traditional bookshops are attracted to online bookshop facilities, with a view to assessing the profile of the visitors.
It had originally been proposed that both online questionnaires and online focus groups would be used to elicit information from online users of the participating sites. However, upon reflection of the aims implicit within the above objectives, it was decided that they would be effectively achieved by the use of a carefully designed online questionnaire. The questionnaires used at earlier stages of the research had worked well. Indeed, unexpected information was drawn out from participants by using this method. In order to achieve a greater depth of response than might otherwise be achieved with the use of questionnaires, it was proposed that respondents be permitted to give their own responses in selected sections, in order to provide more qualitative responses to such issues a community or online culture, and the quality of the online experience. Therefore the new objective became:

Objective 6 – To critically analyse customer perception of the marketing and branding strategies of online bookshops, including any sense of online community experienced or perceived by online bookshop customers; the resulting impact on behaviour in online bookshops, and to evaluate the degree to which those who do not regularly use traditional bookshops are attracted to online bookshop facilities.

Other changes made to the data collection techniques which were necessitated by the circumstances encountered on the research journey have been outlined in a sequential approach within the Methodology chapter.
2.5 Methodology – a Critical Reflection

2.5.1 Introduction
A critical reflection on the progress and development of the research methodology is useful in so far as it serves to illuminate not only the advantages and disadvantages of each of the data collection stages with the benefit of hindsight, but it also reveals how the methodological design in this case has served to change the focus of the thesis, moving it away from what it originally aimed to achieve, towards a rather different end. The dynamic nature of research is well documented in methodological literature and is in many cases an inevitable part of the research journey (Creswell, 2003; Silverman, 2005; Wolcott, 2001). However, it is helpful to reflect upon the methodological approach, its impact upon the conclusions and to understand how the methodological design has influenced a shift of focus in the research.

2.5.2 Data collection
In a research interview situation, safeguards need to be in place in order to ensure integrity of response from research participants. This is particularly important in the context of a PhD where the researcher is usually the sole collector of data and the first point of contact with research participants. Areas of bias inevitably emerge in any study as the research progresses, and while this is in many cases unavoidable, it is important to be aware of these biases in order to factor them into the conclusions (Denscombe, 1998). Some areas of potential bias have already been pointed out in sections 2.3.1.2, 2.3.3.2, 2.3.5.2 and 2.3.5.3 where the interviews with bookshop experts; the questionnaire design; focus group behaviour and focus group recruitment were referred to. However, reflecting in more detail upon the methodological approach and with the benefit of hindsight, it is helpful to examine the impact of the execution of the methodology upon the conclusions.

At the first stage of interviews, initial contact was made with potential participants by letter, explaining the background to the research and underlining the fact that the research had no commercial affiliation and was funded solely by The Robert Gordon University. Assurance was also given that all responses would be treated in the strictest confidence, and that research participants would not be identifiable from the PhD, nor from any published work emerging from the PhD. This assurance was reinforced further by supplying each interviewee with a document to this effect (Appendix II). Every assurance was therefore given, and every procedure followed,
including the open approach of the interviewer, to ensure integrity and frankness of response from the key informants concept. Four in-depth interviews were undertaken, and it was felt that the considerable amount of overlap in areas of response justified this number. Clearly if many new areas of discussion had emerged with each new interview, then there would have been a methodological imperative to continue the interviews with other experts, or to change the research in order to explore different stores’ approaches to the areas of discussion. However, this was clearly not the case (Kvale, 1996) therefore, the decision was taken that ample data had been amassed in order to satisfy the first objective.

Approaching the questionnaire participants in store at the second stage of data collection presented another instance of trying to ensure as far as possible their integrity of response and to remove any suspicion in the minds of the customers of the questionnaire being commercially motivated, or affiliated in any way to the ‘host’ store. The researcher wore a clearly visible student identity card and referred to this when approaching potential questionnaire participants. The scope and aims of the research were briefly explained, as was the fact that responses were confidential (contact details were given voluntarily, if participants were interested in participating in the following focus groups). Efforts were made by the researcher to select a range of participants, as far as possible, and this is explained in section 2.3.3.3.

As detailed in section 2.3.5.3 focus group participants were largely drawn from staff and students at The Robert Gordon University. Issues arising from this potentially limited group are also explored in that section. However, a range of responses emerged and there were clearly a wide spread of readers participating in the focus groups – readers that were solely interested in textbooks, or ‘chick-lit’, predominantly children’s’ buyers – certainly, there was no perceptible focus on ‘academic’ or ‘high level’ topics in these focus groups. The participants ranged in age from early 20s to early 50s and were interested in very different reading topics, as well as different aspects of the reading experience (e.g. one who hated coffee; one who bought predominantly in supermarkets; one guided solely by price; another interested only in politics books). Upon reflection it was felt that, as far as was possible, a good cross section of bookshop visitors had been reached.

The aim at objective 4, was to reach new or newer bookshop users. As detailed in section 2.3.4.3, problems were encountered at this stage, in particular with reaching a ‘new’ or ‘newer’ section of the book buying public. This is perhaps unsurprising given
the tendency towards elite response and the natural inclination of the most interested parties only to agree to participate in research which piques their interest (Miles and Huberman, 1994). As is referred to in the subsequent Results and Conclusions chapters, one must treat limited numbers with caution and not be overly hasty in drawing conclusions. Indeed, particular care was taken in the Results chapter to make clear the smaller numbers in this section. For example, the charts displayed reflect numbers of participants, rather than percentages which might be construed as misleading when dealing with smaller numbers. While preliminary conclusions may be drawn from these results, they have provided a starting point for further research in this area, i.e. research investigating how new/newer bookshop users respond to the marketing tools used by chain bookshops.

Investigating consumer experiences of online bookshops revealed the dominance of Amazon as online bookseller. As section 2.3.2.3 points out, Amazon chose not to participate in the research, and this inevitably changed the focus of the results emerging from interviews with online experts, since feedback about online bookselling sites had inevitably to come from a smaller chain and one independent manager. Some of the more surprising results emerged at this stage from the online managers, particularly their focus upon interaction with consumers, as well as their focus upon their online sites as providing an alternative conduit for bookselling for existing customers (rather than necessarily looking to expand the market). In particular, the incorporation of feedback from the manager of the independent store might be viewed as outwith the interest of the research, given the focus upon chain and online stores. However, in this section of data collection it is clear that the gap between Amazon and other online stores is much greater than any expected gap in the feedback coming from the chain and independent online store. It is furthermore made clear in the Results and subsequent Discussion chapters that some data from an online manager is incorporated into the thesis. Nevertheless, it is much more important to be aware that it is the overall feedback from the online managers which is more surprising, given the ‘small scale’ approach to their operation. It is also vital to realise that the important part of the research (reflected in the Discussion and Conclusions) is the feedback from consumers about their responses to online stores.

One might speculate that an interview with Amazon would have produced very different results, given that direct contact with Amazon and consumer is very rare, and that by definition, they have built their market by reaching new consumers, rather than catering for an existing, brand-loyal, group of consumers. It would be very interesting to carry
out research with Amazon, examining their aims and strategy regarding their consumers and their consumer profile. However, this currently needs to be consigned to plans for future research.

The final section of data collection was a questionnaire with online bookshop consumers. The design ensured that participants were able to add qualitative information to any of their responses if they so wished. Indeed this proved an effective method for drawing out further response and comment from online bookshop users and some very rich data was gleaned this way. This section of the data collection provided a wealth of information which afforded solid data for triangulation with the existing material and allowed comparison and contrast with data from traditional bookshop users, as well as enabling the construction of a profile of online users.

### 2.5.3 Methodological limitations – impact upon Conclusions.

In the course of the unfolding of the methodology, there emerged two main issues which have impacted upon the results and, in due course, the conclusions. Namely, the smaller numbers of ‘newer’ participants reached at the Objective 4 stage, and the failure of Amazon to participate with the study interviews at Objective 5.

Regarding the smaller numbers of participants at the Objective 4 stage, care had to be taken in relating these results as well as the impact upon any conclusions. The particular focus of this part of the research was to ‘evaluate whether or not the marketing and branding strategies adopted by bookshops are effective at attracting new customers’. In essence, we can say that they seem to be, but that further research is required. Specifically, as detailed in section 6.4, these findings form the basis of further research. As detailed in section 5.3.1, the presence of discounting seems to make bookshops more attractive for a broad cross section of the book buying public. However, discounting seems to have even more of an impact upon newer bookshop users, making them more inclined to enter bookshops. A similar effect was noted with the presence of coffee shops; again the presence of coffee shops seems to signal accessibility to the wider cross section of bookshop users, although this effect does seem to be more notable in newer bookshop users. In summary, the limitations at this stage of the research did have an impact upon the confidence with which one can state ‘discounting encourages newer bookshop users to frequent bookshop’, or ‘the presence of a coffee shop encourages newer bookshop users to frequent coffee shop’. However, it is worth remembering that these questions were not simply asked on a single occasion of the research participants. The design of the questionnaires at this
stage was such that questions relating to, or including the topic of discounted books for example (one of the focuses of this particular questionnaire) were couched in three or four different ways (see Appendix VII). This provided a ‘layer’ of answers relating to these topics, each supporting each other and enabling any conclusions to be stated more confidently, despite the smaller numbers of ‘newer’ respondents. Therefore, we can state the findings from this stage of the research tentatively (as they have been stated in the Conclusions chapter) and accept that they form the foundations for further research in the area of encouraging bookshop use. It is also important to remember that while small numbers of newer bookshop users took part in this part of the research, this particular survey (objective 4) overall reached 77 people, adding more valuable data to the overall survey. Therefore, clearly not every result from this section of the data collection needs to be viewed with caution.

It seems clear that, had Amazon chosen to participate with the interviews at objective 5, designed to find out the strategic marketing aims of online bookshops, a very different slant would have been given to this stage of the results, and the ensuing conclusions. Given that Amazon has a phenomenal range, is convenient and that ‘continual and often pioneering upgrades to its technology make the customer experience easier’ on the Amazon site (Mintel, 2007a), it is clear that Amazon is ahead of the online competition by some considerable margin. Looking at the results which did emerge from interviews which were undertaken (with chain online managers and one independent online manager), themes emerging were the provision of an alternative site for book buying; the continuation of special offers which were available in the bricks and mortar site and the maintenance of a service to loyal customers. More surprisingly, a finding from these interviews was the capacity that online bookshops have to foster relationships between customers and their point of contact. In particular, regular online customers were easily identifiable by the bookshops interviewed (due to the relatively small numbers of customers they deal with, as well as the relatively small numbers of online staff) and frequent telephone contact was made.

The research found that the bookshop managers interviewed had a small scale, even local focus in their aims. I.e. they focused upon catering for existing customers, maintaining brand identity and loyalty across traditional and online presence and often fostered an individual, personal relationship with consumers. One can speculate about the impact which participation by Amazon would have had at objective 5. (At the time the research was carried out, both Waterstone’s and Borders’ online sites were operated by Amazon, and despite approaches to these stores, no participation was
possible). Providing an alternative book buying environment for consumers is clearly not a consideration for Amazon, given that there is no ‘bricks and mortar’ presence. Furthermore, the finding that direct contact and familiarity with customers might occur is again not relevant, since telephone contact seems to be extremely difficult via Amazon – e-mail contact is preferred. Although Amazon did not participate, it is important to remember that the main body of analysis and research regarding online bookshops and feeding into the conclusions actually was drawn from the subsequent part of the research – objective 6, where questionnaires were completed by online bookshop users. In this case, the bulk of information was elicited from the consumer, relating their own opinions and experiences of online book shopping. Obviously in this instance, the bookshop they experience is not censored, and in most cases, the consumers were relating their experiences of Amazon. Therefore the material most relevant to the research regarding online bookshops – i.e. the consumer response - emerged at the objective 6 stage.

There are certain challenges inherent to the adoption of a mixed method approach, which have emerged over the course of the research. Clearly, it is more straightforward and less time-consuming when carrying out empirical research, if only one or two data collection methods are used. It is self evident that when using a mixed method approach, as with the current research, and using semi-structured face to face interviews, telephone interviews, face to face surveys, online surveys and focus groups, that the researcher involved must develop competence in each of the methods used. Time for carrying out pilot studies must also be factored in, as must extra time for reading relevant methodological literature on the range of methods adopted. Therefore, extra time is a consideration which those using mixed methods must allow themselves. Furthermore, as well as developing skills in the analysis of qualitative research, such as coding of data, one must also develop the necessary skills in handling quantitative data which in this research involved using SPSS. However, given the approach adopted, and given that the scope and scale of the results demonstrate its success, the need for familiarity with different data collection methods and their eventual analyses can be viewed as necessary challenges, even advantages, as they broaden the research experience.

Viewing the methodological progress holistically it is clear that caution is required when stating conclusions connected to newer users of bookshops, given the smaller numbers of participants at objective 4, as outlined above. While the results from objective 5 (interviews with online managers) did not include Amazon, one can view
these results discretely, with its own intrinsic value. While it does not reflect the strategy at Amazon, it does give a flavour of other online approaches to marketing, and this has been reflected in the conclusions. Given the benefits of triangulation, one can therefore be confident about the Conclusions chapter, given that the conclusions drawn have emerged from data at several stages (e.g. interview, questionnaire, focus group) resulting in a comprehensive study.

2.5.4 Methodological strengths
While it was anticipated that a helpful side effect of such an approach would be triangulation, the experience of this triangulation was much more helpful and illuminating than had been expected. For example, on the topic of coffee shops, the managers provided anecdotal comment on coffee shops saying they provided an ‘experiential’ element to bookshops, and that they ‘added, hugely’ to the ambience of bookshops, without being able to say how or why, in any detail. The subsequent bookshop questionnaires clarified this, pointing out in some detail the specific experiential qualities, such as drinking coffee ‘in a bookshop’ and drinking coffee and reading ‘at the same time’ which consumers liked best about coffee shops. The focus groups expanded again upon these data sets as well as, vitally, detailing the reservations consumers had about this approach to bookselling. A further example of the benefits of triangulation resulting from this mixed methods approach is when the questionnaires raised the issue of online book buying and the results pinpointed the percentages of traditional book buyers also buying online. However, it was not until the later online survey had been carried out that it became clear that many more online buyers use traditional bookshops than vice versa. A further example of the illuminating effect of triangulation is that of choice in bookshops. While the traditional bookshop managers emphasised the importance of choice and range in bookshops, the focus groups demonstrated that these are indeed important qualities for consumers, but these qualities are not always experienced in chain bookshops. The online surveys then showed that consumers are enthusiastic about online bookshops for many reasons, but breadth of range online is vital and is a key advantage that online bookshops have over traditional bookshops. A mixed methods approach in this research therefore meant that the results of one chunk of data could be examined through the illuminating lens of another set of results. This has implications for the subsequent discussion and conclusions, as it provides the research with a solid base for making firm statements and reaching solid conclusions, given that each of the
topics has usually been examined in the context of several different stages of the research, as shown above.

There are further advantages to the particular methodological approach adopted. Using both managers and consumers to participate in the research has given the benefit of two perspectives to the research and has allowed topics to be probed both from the managers’ perspective as well as that of the consumer, testing convergence between the two, testing convergence between the two. The breadth of data collection has also strengthened the thesis by allowing interaction with consumers on different levels: the questionnaires enabled the development of clear results with regard to numbers of bookshop visitors, preferences and responses to specific marketing, while the focus groups allowed new material to emerge in a more exploratory environment, as well as providing a setting to probe consumers in more depth. The overall developmental, evolutionary design of the research and the range of methods used have allowed the freedom to change methods and data collection design as the research has progressed. Overall, a mixed methods approach has helped the development of a holistic perspective towards data collection, and allowed a clearer view of the advantages and disadvantages of each approach.

It is also useful to bear in mind the sheer scope and scale of the research. In-depth interviews were carried out with seven bookshop experts; three focus groups were carried out, and the results of 258 questionnaires analysed. This is a substantial piece of research, rigorously analysed and discussed in the light of relevant literature. The depth of the analysis and the knowledge and application of relevant literature ensures that the conclusions reached are sound.

2.5.5 Holistic reflection
Reflecting upon the methodological development of the PhD upon completion, it becomes clear that the research has developed and changed along the way. While each of the objectives has been satisfied in the course of the data collection, it has emerged that the focus of the PhD has gradually shifted from that of marketing and branding strategy per se, towards that of consumer responses to that strategy. Just as the first, perhaps ‘foundation’ objective has been altered to better demonstrate the development of the PhD (to reflect that it deals with bookshop experts’ interpretation and application of strategy), so an holistic view of the methodology reveals how the focus has shifted towards consumer response to marketing, rather than marketing
strategy itself. Upon reflection it is clear to see that the methodological design has contributed to the resulting change in focus: With such considerable emphasis upon consumer opinion (questionnaires, focus groups, two sets of online surveys) it was perhaps inevitable that the final thesis would place a stronger emphasis upon consumer response to marketing in bookshops, rather than marketing strategies per se. Furthermore, the decision to interview bookshop managers, rather than head office strategists at the commencement of the research also ensured that it was bookshop manager interpretation and application of strategy which would provide the starting point for further investigation, rather than the fundamentals of marketing strategy which might have emerged had the interviews been carried out with head office strategists themselves. It is important to realise however, that the interviews with the bookshop managers most certainly gave the thesis the foundation which was desired. The thesis is about people and their responses to marketing and that includes the bookshop managers. It is their interpretation of marketing approaches which the thesis concerns itself with, i.e. how is marketing practically applied in bookshops? While marketing and branding by both online and traditional bookshops remains vital to the thesis, the overall final focus has shifted towards interpretation of that strategy by bookshop experts and, ultimately, the responses to the implementation of that strategy by consumers. This change has taken place gradually (in tune with the overall developmental, evolutionary nature of the research) and, vitally, has been driven by the consumer responses themselves, generating as they have, a wealth of interesting and important material. The title of the thesis still reflects what is encompassed within its pages, but it emerges that the PhD is less concerned with analysis of a purely business oriented approach, than human interpretation, implementation and response. This has involved revisiting the original objectives in order to refocus upon the direction the thesis has taken; indeed, the direction which was probably inevitable given the focus of the data collection upon consumer response. This refocusing of objectives is also a fairer representation of the original overall aim of the research:

To evaluate the effectiveness of applied marketing in bookshops and to develop an understanding of consumer responses to that marketing.
2.6 Conclusion
This chapter has set out the methodological approach to the research project, from its inception to the development of research questions and then objectives. The methods adopted have been driven by the research objectives and a thorough examination of the methods adopted and well as their advantages and disadvantages has been undertaken. Both qualitative and quantitative methods have been adopted as these have been considered the most effective ways of satisfying the research objectives. The philosophical approach has been taken that an ideological divide between research paradigms does not exist, since the methods adopted, have been dictated by the research objectives and their requirements. It is believed that quantitative and qualitative research methods exists on a continuum (Creswell, 2003) and are tools at the disposal of the researcher to be used when appropriate. The study therefore adopts a mixed method approach using interviews (both face to face and telephone), questionnaires (both face to face and online) and focus groups.

The thesis now proceeds to review literature relevant to the project, which serves to provide theoretical and scholarly underpinning for the research findings, as well as examining relevant trade commentary in the context of the project.
Chapter 3 - Review of the Literature

3.1 Introduction
This section reviews relevant literature from a range of fields appropriate to the research. As discussed in the Methodology chapter, the dearth of scholarly literature on the book trade necessitated a wider trawl of academic sources. Given the focus of the research upon book trade marketing and branding, and upon consumer responses, scholarly literature was reviewed in a range of relevant areas which could be drawn upon in order to underpin the research.

The section entitled Marketing, Branding and Store Layout examines some fundamental marketing literature, theory and models. An appreciation of this literature is important in order to underpin the thesis, as well as informing certain sections of the Discussion chapter. This section also looks at how marketing has been approached within the book trade. For instance, there is much emphasis on discounting in the trade and literature examining the effects of this is studied. The intrinsic problems of marketing in the book trade are examined; in particular, books as brands and how this sits with the vast range of new books published every day. Bookshops and authors as brands are also considered. Brand integrity and maintenance is examined: this is particularly apposite considering the predilection for rebranding among bookshops. The vital contribution to brand made by staff (booksellers) is also examined. Store layout examines the topic of atmospherics and the importance of store surroundings in the context of bookshops as well as how consumers respond to their surroundings. Consumer relationship management is vital in the context of bookselling given the current competition within the market and the need to win and retain customers. The advent of online stores has changed the concept of CRM; indeed has made the relationship between retailer and consumer entirely different to that in a traditional context. Consumer profile is examined as well as the importance of consumer perceptions. The section entitled Shopping looks at some of the motives we have for taking part in this activity, beyond those of basic need. Much of the literature in this section looks at the affective aspects of shopping and our many complex social needs, some of which are fulfilled by shopping. Closely linked to these needs, is the role of the bookshop in the community, or the bookshop as a third place. This section looks beyond the bookshop as a mere seller of books and looks at the role of the chain bookshop as a destination and as a venue for wider social intercourse. Aspects of culture, community and local relevance are also examined, as well as the influence of supermarkets and efforts by traditional bookshops to broaden their readership. The
section looking at Online Bookselling examines the important differences between online and traditional bookselling, in the context of consumer experiences. For example, do consumers miss the tactile experience online? Do they miss booksellers? The efforts to personalise contact between bookseller and consumer online is also examined, as is the wider relationship between online and offline bookselling. Further details outlining the preliminary approach to the review of literature and the selection of sources are included in Appendix XI.

3.2 Marketing, Branding and Store Layout

3.2.1 Introduction
In essence, this research examines and analyses how consumers respond to the various marketing techniques used by chain and online bookshops. Inherent in the study therefore, is an analysis of the kinds of marketing that these bookshops undertake as well as the key literature and strategy supporting these approaches. Closely allied to the marketing of chain bookshops is the projected brand identity and, once again, the tools used by these bookshops to support and maintain that brand. It is therefore clear that literature underpinning the subjects of marketing and branding must be examined with regard to the research questions and data collection. Given that branding and marketing are, initially at least, very much focused upon physical impressions of particular stores, it was also deemed relevant to look at the subject of store layout and how this can affect consumer behaviour and/or response to the store environment.

Looking more specifically at the book trade, UK chain bookshops have gone through a period of dynamic change over the past few years. Intense competition from supermarkets and internet bookselling has seen the disappearance of some chains as they have been swallowed by competitors and the change of others from upmarket stores concentrating on ‘high brow’ literature, into retail stores where focus is devoted to what might be regarded as mass market literature. Socioeconomic group ABC1 – encompassing the most affluent and highly educated in our society – still forms the main core of book buyers in the UK (Mintel, 2005). Nevertheless, whereas some specialist bookselling chains may formerly have seen themselves as serving primarily this sector of society, many changes have taken place regarding the image of bookshops in the high street over the past few years. Indeed Alan Giles, while Managing Director of Waterstone’s acknowledged that in the past the chain may have
been ‘intellectually intimidating’ for some sections of the community (Lottman, 1999, p.24). There has been an active effort by chain bookshops to dispel this image. Most chain bookshops have adopted a discount-oriented approach to bookselling with tables covered in various promotional offers. Indeed there is arguably a broadly similar approach to marketing taken by many chain bookshops in the UK, evidenced not only by the emphasis on discounting, but by the prevalence of ‘top ten’ shelves near the entrance; staff recommends sections; and a focus upon paperback bestsellers, again near the front of any given store. While some research on buying patterns has been undertaken in a commercial context in the trade (Book Marketing Ltd., 2003, 2005a, 2005b), nevertheless, no research has been undertaken which examines consumer responses to the specific marketing approaches which chain bookshops undertake.

3.2.2 Segmentation, Targeting and Positioning
The use of segmentation, targeting and positioning essentially allows marketers to market their goods or service more effectively, as they are targeting an appropriate market. Segmentation, targeting and positioning are steps traditionally undertaken in the marketing process, in order that marketing is sensibly targeted at appropriate groups of consumers, and that any ineffective dissipation of marketing costs and efforts to inappropriate groups of consumers, is minimised. Below (fig. 3.1) is a basic diagram setting out the steps undertaken in the overall segmentation process, and the constituent steps of segmentation, targeting and positioning.
Segmentation
1. Consider variables for segmenting market
2. Look at profile of emerging segments
3. Validate segments emerging

Targeting
1. Decide on targeting strategy
2. Decide which and how many segments should be targeted

Positioning
1. Understand consumer perceptions
2. Position product in the mind of the consumer by communicating the desired position

(Dibb, 2006, p.226)

Fig. 3.1 Segmentation, targeting and positioning

It is useful to understand that historically, this process was much less frequently adopted, simply because a mass marketing approach tended to be undertaken, where a product is promoted to the whole market, and was usually effective, given the relative lack of choice of products and services available to consumers. However, current societal changes mean that consumer groups are becoming more and more splintered with disparate interests and a more individualised approach to understanding consumer identity (Ferrell, 2008, p.163). One can certainly see this reflected in the multitude of choices available particularly in online bookshops, and represented by the
phenomenon of the long tail (Anderson, 2006). A marketing approach which incorporates the analysis inherent to STP (segmentation, targeting and positioning) is therefore usually more likely to succeed than one which takes a ‘one size fits all’ approach to marketing.

The necessity to segment, target and position assumes a heterogeneous market, where consumers have different requirements (as opposed to the mass market, undifferentiated approach, effective in the past, where consumers are assumed to have broadly homogenous needs). Dibb (2006) points out that ‘it is much more usual for a differentiated approach using market segmentation to be followed’ rather than a mass marketing approach (p.223). Ferrell (2008, p.163) concurs, saying

By offering a standard product to all customers, the organization becomes vulnerable to competitors that offer specialized products that better match customers’ needs.

As well as this undifferentiated, mass market approach, businesses can pursue a partially differentiated approach. This is very common, involving as it does some segmentation of the market in order to pick out consumers more likely to want a business’s product or service. A differentiated approach can either describe the multisegment approach, or the market concentration approach. The market concentration approach involves identification of an appropriate segment and in due course targeting and positioning for that segment only. This approach focuses on a single market segment and allows firms to concentrate all their resources on very particular needs. However, by also ‘putting all its eggs in one basket’ there are inherent risks to this approach, since the marketing is concentrated rather than spread. This might be exemplified by the difficulties which many academic bookshops find themselves in, given that students are now more inclined to buy books second hand, or use online resources for study. This also explains some academic bookshops’ increased concentration upon general interest titles (Blackwell’s for example). Therefore, if that particular segment of consumers, for whatever reason, does not require that product or service any longer, the business concerned is potentially in a very exposed situation. A sector or segment of the market identified by this market concentration approach consequently ‘needs to have growth and profit potential, but is not so appealing that it attracts competitors’ (Ferrell, 2008, p.166). The multisegment approach therefore, can be seen as a safer option. While the multisegment approach also involves segmentation of the potential market, the business in question however,
will ‘seek to attract buyers in more than one market segment, by offering a variety of products that appeal to different needs’ (ibid, p.165). The firm in question is therefore aiming to appeal to the heterogeneous needs of different segments. This is the most widely used segmentation strategy used in medium to large sized firms (ibid).

It is relevant to note that new approaches to segmentation have emerged as technological advances have been made. As information about consumers has become more and more detailed through information gathered using electronic point of sale (EPOS) technology and also online where detailed purchase records, even online search records can be compiled and analysed, the ultimate in market segmentation - one-to-one marketing - has emerged. Ferrell (2008, p.106) points out that Amazon in particular is an exponent of this approach with a meticulous approach to customer record development facilitating its ability to target customers with ‘personal’ recommendations and pointers towards other similar customers’ purchases.

In today’s economy, segmentation is often mandated by customers due to their search for unique products and their changing uses of communication media. The end result is that customer segments have become even more fragmented and more difficult to reach. Many firms today take segmentation to the extreme by targeting small niches of a market or even the smallest of market segments: individuals (Ferrell, 2008, p.163).

This individualisation of the consumer is also noted by Anderson (2006, p.5.) as he comments that ‘increasingly the mass market is turning into a mass of niches’. This observation certainly lends support to the growing incidence of niche marketing, and even one-to-one marketing that can be seen online.

Pausing at this point to reflect upon these approaches, it would initially seem that many UK chain bookshops seem to adopt this multisegment approach, promoting their products to different sections of consumers. Of course, bookshops are different in that they are promoting not just a single product, or even a fixed, finite range of products. It is an ever shifting range increasing in number, and very difficult for any bookshop to monitor (Zaid, 2004). The range of products is comparatively vast, but their overall approach to promotion seems to be the promotion of different product types to different groups. However, we can also see in the approach to marketing, that as well as promoting these specific genres, the actual marketing approaches adopted such as the discounted approach seems to be focused upon newer buyers, but still capitalising
upon other more experienced readers. (For example, the research findings clearly illustrate the popularity of the discounted approach not only to newer bookshop users, but to more experienced book buyers also). This is debated in more detail in the Discussion chapter. It is also interesting to consider niche marketing, and one-to-one marketing in the context of the current book trade, especially with regard to online bookselling. Their approach online, with ‘personalised’ recommendation, ‘other customers who bought that, bought this’ concentrates upon one-to-one marketing. One-to-one marketing is the ultimate extension of niche marketing, yet Amazon still manages to carry it out extremely effectively and on a large scale. Technological capability allows them to track purchase patterns, and that knowledge makes individualised approaches to marketing easier to carry out. Dibb says that ‘one-to-one marketing involves developing long-term relationships with individual customers in order to understand and satisfy their needs’ (p.227). One must insert a caveat here, and make clear that it is a virtual relationship which is developed in order to administer one-to-one marketing effectively, although it draws on a very traditional and indeed historic model.. This relationship is developed between the consumer and an automated marketing response, rather than a real person. It will be interesting to see how this approach by online booksellers is perceived by consumers in the current research; whether they miss the presence of a real bookseller and a ‘real’ relationship with an in-store advisor. It is also worth noting that customers in niche markets will typically pay more for products that match their particular needs. It would therefore seem that online booksellers have cornered a lucrative market. One can also see this reflected in the success of other niche book markets online, such as second hand and antiquarian, both markets which have been revolutionised by online search technology.

Ferrell goes on to explain more about the segmentation approach to marketing (2008, p.163)

From a strategic perspective, we define market segmentation as the process of dividing the total market for a particular product or product category into relatively homogeneous segments or groups. To be effective, segmentation should create groups where the members within the group have similar likes, tastes, needs, wants, or preferences but where the groups themselves are dissimilar from one another.

Therefore, the overall market segmentation approach is an attempt to reduce the heterogeneity of consumers by segmenting them into smaller more similar,
homogenous groups in order that any marketing can be targeted as effectively as possible to a group with very similar needs. This results in marketers being better placed to develop products or services more appropriate for these distinct groups of consumers. There are many ways in which customers can be grouped, and markets segmented. Segmentation variables, or bases, are the ‘dimensions or characteristics of individuals, groups or businesses that are used for dividing a total market into segments’ (Dibb, p.226). These variables can be based on a wide range of characteristics. As developments in technology make it easier to capture customer information, there is generally a move towards more sophisticated segmentation variables, with minute details of consumer preferences allowing more detailed segmentation. Some examples of common segmentation variables used to divide potential groups of consumers include the following:

**Behavioural segmentation**

Ferrell (2008, p.172) notes that while gaining this kind of powerful insight into the behaviour of potential consumers can be very useful, it is actually very difficult to carry out in practice since it involves measuring complex consumer perceptions such as values and image. Kotler notes that this approach divides buyers into groups based on their ‘knowledge, attitudes, uses, or responses to a product’ (2006, p.200). Kotler also notes that many marketers believe that looking at behavioural response provide the best starting point for building market segments. Nevertheless, one can certainly appreciate that some in-depth research and therefore, financial investment, will be necessary in order to build up this kind of consumer knowledge. Whether booksellers have the financial means to invest in this kind of research, is debatable.

**Demographic variables**

One can immediately see that with some basic demographic information about age, gender, occupation, income or social class, perhaps gained via EPOS systems, one might have very useful basic information about consumers. Of course there is an inherent compromise, since one has to make judgements which assume that people of similar ages or occupation are going to like or purchase similar products. However, as Kotler points out (2006, p.197) this is the most popular segmentation variable, since it is the least expensive to administer and ‘consumer needs, wants, and usage rates often vary closely with demographic variables’.
Geographic variables
Again, one can see how it is fairly straightforward for businesses to segment this way, as it can be undertaken in a straightforward manner, with no real analysis of consumer behaviour required. One can also see how this was an approach adopted to a preliminary extent by both Waterstone’s and Ottakar’s, given Waterstone’s concentration upon prime high street sites, and Ottakar’s tendency to concentrate upon sites in smaller market towns, ensuring that each was targeting a different market.

Psychographic variables
This segmentation variable is again rather difficult to measure, analysing as it does areas difficult to categorise, such as personality attributes, motives and lifestyle (Ferrell, 2008, p.173), as well as dividing buyers into groups based on social class, lifestyle, or personality characteristics (Kotler, 2006, p.199). As Kotler goes on to point out, while people may share the same demographic group, they may have very different psychographic makeup. The costs involved in segmentation using behavioural or psychographic variables may be justified if the business in question is pursuing a market segment with high spending power. Again, the applicability of this to the book trade is very difficult to quantify, given that books are relatively low value items. While there are certainly some consumers who are high spenders and will purchase several books over the course of a year, this still does not begin to approach the value of, for example, most electrical goods, or cars. It would certainly seem to make financial sense for bookshops to use demographic and geographic variables as a starting point in order to segment customers, even if the real usefulness of this kind of segmentation is arguably rather limiting.

Mintel (2007a) underlines the focus upon demographic segmentation variables, telling us that while Waterstone’s and other specialist booksellers tend to cater for ABC1 consumers in their third age, Borders tends to appeal to rather younger consumers, albeit they are still predominantly ABC1. While one can see how this kind of data is useful up to a point, it does not necessarily tell us much about the needs and wants of these consumers, or about the kind of books they wish to buy. Mintel lays out the ‘key segmentation identified by the key players in the UK book market’ in a table which sets out some basic tenets of the segmentation identifiable, such as it is. Mintel itself points out the limitations of this segmentation, stating that it is ‘worthy of considerable further analysis’ (ibid).
Following the identification of segments, the next step in the sequence of segmentation, targeting and positioning is to consider the identified segments. The business in question may decide not to pursue any of the segments at all, if they are not considered appropriate. However, if the segment is pursued, the segmentation process has, hopefully, helped the business better to understand customer needs, wants and other characteristics. ‘The sharper focus that segmentation offers, allows those personal, situational and behavioural factors that characterise customers in a particular segment to be considered’ (Dibb, 2006, p.225). Dibb goes on to suggest that, having identified appropriate potential segmented markets, any business in question must then ensure that the segments are viable. Accordingly, she suggests that the following criteria are satisfied (ibid, p.240). While some other marketing scholars suggest slight variations on these, they do provide a useful summary of criteria for businesses to bear in mind, before embarking on targeting and positioning. Dibb suggests that any potential segment should be measurable, substantial, accessible, stable and useful. In order to be measurable, any potential segment must be easily identifiable, and its size measurable. Connected to this, it must be substantial enough to ‘justify the marketing spend that is about to take place on their behalf, developing and maintaining a specific marketing mix’ (ibid, p.240). Clearly a segment which is to be concentrated upon must be accessible and easy to reach using the suitably developed marketing mix. Dibb suggests that a segment must be stable enough that it is simply in existence for a reasonable amount of time, in order that it is financially viable for the business concerned. Finally, the segment must be useful; meaning that it must be ‘meaningful’ for those involved in targeting it, and that a business should be able to see a potential profit in it.

Targeting

Following successful segmentation and the identification of the segments which should be targeted, the targeting stage involves marketers in decisions about which market segment(s) a business should prioritise for its sales and marketing efforts. It is a stage of evaluation, where appropriate segments are selected for targeting. The three basic targeting strategies adopted are undifferentiated, concentrated and differentiated.

Undifferentiated strategy (or mass marketing) is the promotion of a product to a market which has been identified as having very similar sets of needs. This works if large numbers of customers in a total market have similar needs for the product. A marketer using a single marketing mix (see following section) for a total market of customer with a variety of needs would find that the marketing mix satisfies very few
people (Dibb, 2006, p.242). Also, the organisation must be able to develop and maintain a single marketing mix that satisfies customers’ needs. As Kotler says, this approach focuses on what is common in the needs of consumers, rather than upon what is different (2006, p.210).

**Concentrated strategy**

In this case, if a business directs its marketing efforts towards a single market segment creating and maintaining one marketing mix, it is employing concentrated strategy. It is therefore concentrating its strategy towards a specific segment of the overall market (Dibb, 2006, p.243). An advantage of this approach is that it allows specialisation, but large sales volume needs to be generated by this segment, since it is the only segment being targeted by the business. Certainly the bookshops identified in this study used elements of concentrated strategy, but generally tended to take a much wider, multisegmented approach adopting various strategies to target various segments.

**Differentiated strategy**

When differentiated strategy is employed, ‘a firm decides to target several market segments, and designs separate offers for each’ (Kotler, 2006, p.210). In this instance, a company directs its marketing efforts at two or more identified target segments, by developing a marketing mix for each segment selected. Therefore, the business has clear and distinct marketing mixes, developed specifically to suit each target segment. In some ways, this can be seen as a ‘safer’ option, in that it minimises risk, should one segment collapse. Conversely, it also dilutes the marketing budget which has to be split between the selected target segments. One can certainly see how this approach resonates with chain bookshops in the high street. While the main marketing budget seems to go on the bestsellers and the promotion of discounted titles and books by authors currently in vogue, this arguably would seem to be aimed at capturing the newer ‘floating’ shopper. Meanwhile, if it is a particular more established subject area which is of interest, or an author outwith those currently promoted, there is scope for those shoppers too, although they may have to work a little harder to find what they want, since these kinds of books tend not to be promoted as strongly.

Kotler includes another category, that of **Micromarketing**. Within micromarketing are two further sub-categories, local marketing and individual marketing. Micromarketing is the process of tailoring products and services for individuals and locations (2006, p.212). This immediately brings to mind the approach of chain bookshops, and their efforts to ‘tailor’ stock in order to make it more relevant for local communities, and local
customers. The effectiveness of this approach is considered in the Discussion chapter. Individual marketing, as mentioned above, is one-to-one marketing, as used by Amazon. It is interesting to note that while Amazon takes the micromarketing approach, they do it on a massive scale. Kotler refers to this as mass customisation (ibid, p.214); the process of individualising consumer needs, but doing it not just for a few consumers, but on a grand scale. He says:

As the trend toward more interactive dialogue and less advertising monologue continues, self-marketing will grow in importance. As more buyers look up consumer reports, join internet product discussion forums, and place orders via phone or online, marketers will have to influence the buying process in new ways. They will need to involve customers more in all phases of the product development and buying processes, increasing opportunities for buyers to practice self-marketing (2006, p.214).

Kotler therefore predicts a more interactive process of marketing and shopping, involving consumers every step of the way. In the book trade, it is Amazon who comes closest to this model of shopping, allowing easy access to sales records, online ordering, recommended titles and customer reviews.

Dibb expands on some of the factors which might influence the choice of targeting strategy. These factors consider some practical considerations, even limitations which companies may be facing. For example, simply the resources of the company may have a limiting effect on the kind of targeting they undertake. Financial limitations may dictate that a most attractive segment of the market is beyond the scope of their marketing budget. Furthermore, if they have a small, or even dwindling share of the market, then perhaps it is wise to consolidate, rather than speculate on targeting a new market segment. Dibb notes that intensity of competition is an important factor influencing the choice of targeting approach taken by companies. This is particularly apt in the book trade given the current competitive trading conditions. This may have the effect of making companies less inclined to take financial risk, or to target any segment of the market which is not going to give a guaranteed return. Nevertheless, while Amazon has cornered the online market, Waterstone’s recently invested in reclaiming their online site, previously outsourced to Amazon. Waterstone’s are therefore prepared to invest in their online identity in the endeavour to reclaim or expand the online book buying market. Given their familiar brand, this may prove successful for them. Another factor mentioned by Dibb (2006, p.245) which is
particularly apt for the book trade is ‘production/marketing scale economies’. One must remember that consumers cannot always be easily categorised into segments, and even when they can, they do not always stay within that segment. Consumers can change interest, and there can also be considerable overlap between identifiable target segments. This allows companies – and certainly those in the book trade – to capitalise upon marketing scale economies. For example, ‘3 for 2’ offers may ostensibly be there to target newer consumers, but they are also attractive to many established book buyers also. While economies of production have certainly allowed the book trade to produce books in bulk cheaply in the past (and conversely, smaller print runs have pushed prices up) this will arguably be less of a consideration in the future given the developed of print on demand technology. The final, and perhaps most important factor noted by Dibb which influences the choice of targeting strategy, is that of the needs/wants of end users. This seems particularly important in the book trade, especially in the light of the current research which suggests that bookshop customers are not always getting what they want. There seems to be a need for bookshops to refocus upon their customers, not only regarding stock, but also regarding service and in-store facilities. This is deliberated in further detail in the Discussion chapter.

**Positioning**

Having identified the segments in a market and decided upon which segments to target, a company must position its product, service or idea. Positioning is the stage at which businesses must decide where and how within the targeted segments to aim their product or service. This is the stage at which the marketing mix becomes active, since ‘positioning involves implanting the brand’s unique benefits and differentiation in customers’ minds’ (Kotler, 2006, p.216). The consumers’ view of the product and where it is positioned relative to the competition is particularly critical. The public does not always perceive a product the way a manufacturer wants it to be perceived. Dibb concurs, saying ‘positioning is not what is done to the product, it is what is created in the minds of the target customers’, (p.247).

An important part of the positioning stage is the creation of a distinct identity in consumers’ minds. The product or brand in question must have distinct differences and advantages over that of its competitors if it is to be marketed effectively. It is notable that Dibb also comments on the necessity of in-depth market research, especially depth interviews or focus groups, ‘if customer motivations and expectations in a particular market are to be fully understood’ (p.248).
Dibb sets out her assessment of the necessary steps for successful positioning:

1. Define the segments in a particular market
2. Decide which segments to target
3. Understand what the target consumers expect and believe to be most important considerations
4. Develop a product/products catering specifically for their needs and expectations.
5. Evaluate the positioning and images, as perceived by target customers, of competing products.
6. Select an image that sets the product apart from the competition
7. Inform target consumers about the product. (p. 249)

Looking at these as a whole, it is worth noting that most of these stages depend on communication with consumers. Successful positioning depends upon intimate knowledge of consumer needs wants and motivations and cannot be carried out in isolation of this knowledge. Steps 1 and 2 have been carried out at the stage of segmentation. Step 3 underlines the importance of consumer opinion regarding the product or service. This underlines the importance of communication with the consumer and of developing knowledge of the customer. It is clear that online bookselling has the advantage here, given the ease with which they can track buying patterns and build up a consumer profile. It is also interesting to note in step 4, that product development ideally comes after consumer consultation, so the product responds to the consumer, rather than the product or brand being presented to the consumer as ‘this is what we are, what do you think?’ Therefore, it should be demand, rather than supply driven. While it might be argued that this is what the book trade does (especially publishers) when they continue to supply more ‘misery memoirs’, celebrity autobiography and ‘chick lit’, it seems nevertheless that these publications emanate form the publishers, rather than as a response to consumer needs and wants. Step 5 outlines the importance of evaluating consumer responses to competing products, or in the context of the current research, consumer responses to other bookshops. This enables business to provide what the competitors are failing to do, as well as avoiding what the competitors do, but which the consumers do not like. Regarding step 6, again, it is not clear that bookshops actually do any marketing research in this area; certainly the similarity of marketing techniques adopted by chain bookshops does not support the idea of unique corporate identity. The focus group discussion in the Results chapter also suggests that there is little in the way of brand distinction in the minds of
consumers either. Finally, communication with the consumer (step 7) about what the product/brand is about is vital. Again, one can see how, in order to develop any kind of strong brand identity and to maintain a competitive advantage, that this is an important stage. It is at this point that the marketing mix is used.

Overall, the approach of segmentation can certainly be seen to be useful in the context of the book trade and specifically bookselling. The recommended approach of identifying a target market, or markets, would seem to be a useful one, especially given the current approach of chain bookshops which is to try to appeal to everyone in equal measure – a point emerging from the interviews with bookshop managers. The segmentation process emphasises the importance of having a distinct identity and of emphasising corporate difference from competitors and individuality of appeal. This certainly resonates in the context of traditional bookshops, given the similarity of marketing approach which is perceived by consumers. While one might argue that chain bookshops are taking a kind of multisegment or differentiated approach, by trying to appeal to different sectors of the market, nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that what they are doing is effective. Consumers certainly seem to have reservations regarding what is promoted by bookshops, as well as the blurring of brand identity across chain bookshops especially. There is certainly an argument that can be made for chain bookshops taking a different approach which might be more effective. This is considered in more detail in the Conclusions chapter.

The success of Amazon emphasises the effectiveness of micro-marketing; getting to know the individual consumer and effectively targeting their wants and needs. Of course technological capability allows this kind of focusing to be done relatively easily, after the initial financial and technological investment has been undertaken. It does emphasise the kind of potential which the book trade has to cross into new environments. While Borders has promoted this kind of individualised marketing in its approach to customers (as indeed have other chain bookshops) nevertheless, constraints of time and staffing costs mean that it is very difficult for traditional bookshops to adopt such an approach effectively.

Segmentation variables, as pointed out by Ferrell, are potentially helpful aids for any business hoping to get to know its consumers better, and to target segments more appropriately. However, given the financial investment required in order to identify psychographic and behavioural variables, one can well understand why any business with a budget might avoid such an undertaking. There is a drawback to reliance upon
geographic and demographic variables in order to establish segments however, and as pointed out above, these variables assumes similarity of consumer behaviour dependent upon where one lives, or age, or gender. While these might be helpful at some level in establishing some very basic similarities across these groups, one would have to question the genuine usefulness of these variables, particularly in such a diverse area as book choice.

3.2.3 Marketing Mix

The marketing mix according to Dibb (2006) is the ‘tactical toolkit’ of the marketing programme; product, place/distribution, promotion, price and people variables that an organisation can control in order to appeal to the target market’ (p.20). Or, as Kotler puts it, ‘the marketing mix consists of everything the firm can do to influence the demand for its product’ (2006, p.50). The marketing mix is applied when a company has been through the stages of segmentation and targeting and allows a business to effectively position a product or service in the minds of its customers, usually targeting a particular segment of consumers. Traditionally, the marketing mix has comprised of the ‘4ps’ of marketing:

- **Product**
- **Place**
- **Promotion**
- **Price**

These elements of a targeted marketing approach would each be adjusted by any marketing team in order that the product or service in question was uniquely appropriate to an identified target sector. Traditional approaches to marketing have implemented this approach, of concentrating upon the 4ps, designed to focus any marketing team upon key consumer desires. If one accepts the usefulness of this approach (and it is not without its critics) then the marketing mix of these essential elements must endeavour to match the needs of identified target customers in order to satisfy their requirements. However the marketing mix must also communicate the desired brand or product positioning as well as emphasising the advantages which a product has over that of its rivals. This is a vital element of the marketing mix. It is important to point out that the development of a marketing mix and specific focus on its constituent parts should come after a company has carried out significant preliminary research into a potential market. The mix should be designed to target a particular
market, and obviously segmentation and targeting approaches should precede this. As Kotler points out, ‘once the company has decided on its overall marketing strategy, it is ready to begin planning the details of the marketing mix’ (2006, p.50). The marketing mix helps the implementation of the positioning stage. Marketers therefore must first establish the forces influencing the marketing environment such as customer buying behaviour; competitors’ strategies and their own organisational capabilities before developing the marketing mix.

The different components of the marketing mix should be altered in order to be most appropriate for a target segment, however, the practical implications of changing these components, or even just emphasising some over others, can be very challenging. Any marketing team may agree that it would be beneficial to adjust a price point in order to appeal to a particular target market, or to gain access to a target sector by selling in a more appropriate place, but there are practical limitations within which any business must work. Most of these are ultimately financial.

As mentioned above, the traditional approach using the marketing mix has been criticised in the past, as promoting a rather limiting approach, and not necessarily being focused enough upon the consumer. Kotler himself recommends using the 4Cs instead of the 4Ps, since the traditional approach ‘takes the seller’s view of the market, not the buyer’s view’ (2006, p.51). Therefore, he suggests substituting Product, Price, Place and Promotion with Customer Solution, Customer Cost, Convenience and Communication respectively. This certainly goes some way to moving the traditional view of marketing towards a more customer centred approach. We also frequently see other updated versions of the 4ps, most notably the seven Ps most frequently used in the context of service providers. However as Kotler says, the issue is not so much the number of Ps involved, as developing a useful framework to guide the development and design of marketing programmes (ibid, p.50).

Whereas historically, the marketing mix was referred to as consisting of the 4ps – product, place (or distribution) promotion and price, increasingly ‘people’ is viewed as the ‘5th p’ and an equally vital element of the overall mix. In the context of the book trade, it is useful to recognise the potentially important role of ‘people’ in any marketing setting and to extend the traditional 4ps approach to encapsulate people also. As Judd (2002) puts it, ‘people-power’ or capturing the power of employees to develop relationships with consumers in order, ultimately, to develop marketing success (see CRM section). The ‘5th P’ (Judd) is introduced into the marketing mix in order to
achieve customer focus, but also recognises the power of a company’s people, in particular those dealing directly with customers, to influence consumer behaviour either directly or indirectly. This recognition of the potential importance of the role of people is important for any customer-facing business, and bookselling is no exception. Certainly traditional approaches to bookselling have emphasised the importance of good customer service and engaging with customers. Borders emphasise ‘hand-selling’ – the development of a relationship, albeit a short one, with customers in order to be able to recommend for that customer specifically. One can see how this resonates with micro-marketing and targeting individual customers, as discussed in the previous section. However, one is also struck by how much more effectively online booksellers can do this, especially those like Amazon which have the technological capability to provide ‘individualised recommendations’ more effectively than even the most well-read bookseller could do. Of course there is a social aspect which is missing from an online recommendation which one might hope to get from a bookseller. The vital question in the context of this research is to ask whether the role of the bookseller – the ‘5th p’ in this context – is still as important to the consumer. This is debated in the Conclusions chapter.

Reflecting on the marketing mix, it is useful to review the separate elements in the context of the book trade. The products in this case can be goods, a service or an idea. While the products are obviously books in this case, the current research is more concerned with how we might want to apply elements of the marketing mix approach to bookshops, particularly in the context of ‘differential product advantage’. This would certainly seem to underline the vital importance of competitive advantages across bookshops, and of the development of distinct identity, thus enabling consumers to clearly understand the advantage which one bookshop has over the other regarding its specialisms - those features which contribute to its individuality and difference.

The variable of place is also a vital one in this research, given the brand identity of the bookshop and in particular the impact which online bookshops are having. In the case of bookshops, there is some overlap between product and place when applying the marketing mix; the way that books cover a bookshops can influence how it looks and feels (as customers commented in the Results chapter) However, there are vital practical elements of place to be considered, such as layout, lighting, accessibility and space. Some of these elements are discussed elsewhere in the Literature Review chapter, in the context of Kotler’s paper on atmospherics. There is certainly a focus
upon place, ambience and atmosphere by consumers, and this emerges in the Results chapter as well as being explored in further detail in the Conclusions chapter.

The promotion variable refers to the ‘communication activities’ used to inform one or more groups (target groups) about an organisation and its products. Marketers may often refer to this facet of the marketing mix as ‘marketing communications’. Bookshop promotion can sometimes take the form of television advertising or catalogue distribution at key sales periods, but most of the communication is done in-store (or online, in the case of the online bookshops). Much in-store promotion is window based, focusing on a book of the month or sometimes, a locally-based author. More is undertaken in store with much emphasis on price-based promotion, even when it is themed. For instance, even if a bookshop is promoting crime novels, it seems that currently, it is impossible to promote a genre without price-cutting to go alongside it.

Price relates to the establishment and maintenance of pricing policies. It is worth noting what Dibb says on price;

(T)he shrewd marketer should endeavour to minimise price cutting and discounting. In most cases the only short term beneficiary of a price war is the consumer. Indeed the business, its distributors, the brand or the long-term flexibility of the marketing mix may suffer as a consequence (p.666).

Pricing and discounting is discussed at length throughout the thesis, given how central it is to the current approach to marketing taken by chain bookshops. One of the most important effects of pricing is the image it creates in the consumers mind. The negative implications of the ‘discount effect’ is discussed elsewhere in the thesis, and of course the other effects of consistent discounting and low pricing, simply because it is a strongly pursued strategy by so many bookshops, has arguably led to the perception of homogeneity by consumers.

People reflects the level of customer service, advice, sales support, and after-sales back up provided by a business. This is an interesting part of the marketing mix to consider in the current state of the book trade, simply because the growth of online book shopping, where there is obviously no bookseller present seems to imply that the role of the bookseller in particular is not as important as was once thought. Again, this is discussed in the context of the results, in the Conclusions chapter.
3.2.4 Decision process model

The decision process model (sometimes called the purchase decision model) is a model which sets out the stages which a consumer passes through, during the process of making a purchase. It is an important model to understand with regard to the retail environment, and it may help to illuminate some behaviour in bookshops. Fuller (1999, p.321) says:

Understanding the customer’s buying process (what the typical customer goes through) will inspire marketing mix decisions by sellers that will facilitate the movement of the customer through the process to a favourable conclusion – completion of a transaction rather than abortion or postponement.

While there are several slightly different models of this process (Fuller suggests a similar model comprising of four stages), Dibb (2006, p.164) accords with the one set out below, as do Solomon (1999, p.208) and Kotler, (2006, p.155), a fairly standard example.

![Diagram of the decision process model](image)

(Kotler, 2006, p.155)

Fig. 3.2 Decision process model
This model proposes that these are the stages which consumers may pass through, as they move towards a purchase, and sets out the overall approach to purchasing. It is important to note that the actual decision to purchase is just a single stage in this model: the actual process began several stages before the purchase with the identification of a need. It is also important to realise that not every consumer passes through every stage in this model; stages may be omitted altogether, or revisited several times. Furthermore, the process may be aborted at any stage with no purchase made. The purchase decision model exists to explain consumer behaviour and to help strategists understand the entire purchasing process of consumers, as well as helping them devise suitable marketing strategies which encourage the consumer to reach the stage of purchasing. It is potentially useful to consider this model in the light of the current research, particularly with reference to the earlier stages in the model – need recognition, information search and evaluation of alternatives – since these stages may help us to understand the kind of choosing mechanisms, or some of the browsing patterns which take place both in traditional and online bookshops. The stage of ‘information search’ would seem to be particularly applicable to online settings, whereas ‘evaluation of alternatives’ may help to explain how consumers distinguish between bookshops (online as well as traditional) and decide which is best suited to satisfy their needs. In particular, we can see how the ‘evaluation of alternatives’ may go some way to explaining the long periods of time which consumers sometimes spend in bookshops. We can call this browsing, but perhaps in some consumers it is an evaluation process before purchasing.

To explain each stage of this model in more depth, at the initial stage of Need Recognition, the consumer identifies a gap between the existing situation and their desired situation (Ferrell, 2008, p.152; Dibb, p.164, 2006; Engel, p.146, 1995) This may be as basic as identifying thirst or hunger, or, as Solomon suggests (1999) it can be more sophisticated and broadly described as the identification of something which will improve a current situation. In modern society, we can often be said to be dealing more often with more subtle, social or psychological need, rather than basic utilitarian definitions of ‘need recognition’. Solomon calls this ‘opportunity recognition’ since it is rather more sophisticated than the identification of a more basic need, such as thirst or hunger. In the context of the current research, an example might be when straightforward need is satisfied by the purchase of an essential university textbook. A book for pleasure however, means that the selection process and the ‘problem recognition’ stage is rather more sophisticated. Therefore, it is an extended choice model, rather than a limited choice model (Jobber, 2007, p.124). Given that browsing
and the choosing mechanism is so vitally important for bookshop visitors, there must be other motivating factors at work here. Certainly, none of us actually need the latest Ian Rankin or Margaret Forster. The motivating factors are more subtle, nebulous and to do with self-improvement, psycho-social need and are arguably better illustrated by higher levels of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, rather than a traditional business-oriented approach (Solomon, 1999, p.208). As Solomon says, ‘the traditional approach is hard- pressed to explain a person’s choice of art, music or even a spouse’ (ibid, p.209). Instead the experiential perspective stresses the ‘gestalt’ or totality of the product or service.

**Information search**

At the second stage of information searching and evaluation of that information, Kotler (2006, p.157) notes that the most effective sources of information tend to be personal sources, such as family and friends. ‘Commercial sources normally inform the buyer, but personal sources legitimize or evaluate products for the buyer.’ Solomon too (1999), notes that consumers trust internal and personal sources of information more than external sources. This suggests that a personal recommendation, perhaps from a friend, is more effective than an external one, perhaps from an advertisement. This brings to mind the ‘staff recommends’ sections in traditional bookshops, as well as the ‘personalised’ recommendations and customer reviews available online. While bookshops aim to personalise these recommendations, it is unclear as to whether we say that consumers view these recommendations in that way. The research addresses the relevance of this to the results in the Conclusions.

Ferrell (2008) notes that the amount of time and effort expended at this stage of the ‘information search’ depends upon ‘risk’. For example, one can assume that time spent searching for information on a new car would be more in depth and take more time than that devoted to searching for information on a book, since the risk of making an unsuitable purchase in a bookshop does not carry the financial and practical repercussions that the purchase of an unsuitable car will have. In the context of book buying, the difficulty is the location of valid information to satisfy a valuable defined need. Furthermore, despite the relatively low price and low risks involved in book purchasing, the wide availability of book reviews suggest how important this is as a component of finding the ‘right’ book. There is an economic aspect to this stage of information searching, which one can also see referred to by Anderson in his work on the long tail (2006). Anderson notes how online risk is reduced, as is time spent searching, as we can be more focused and sure of gaining the information required,
even with the most obscure of items online. Another factor influencing the time dedicated to this information search is the experience which the consumer has with the particular product category, and economic factors related to time and money. Prior knowledge ensures less time need be dedicated to the search.

**Evaluation of alternatives**

This is a vitally important stage in terms of the current research, simply because for most people, there are so many alternatives when it comes to purchasing, both in terms of product, and in terms of purchase setting. One of the most important points to note for the current research is that ‘choice of a suitable merchant may actually take precedence over the choice of a specific product’ (Ferrell, 2008,p.152). Reflecting on this statement by Ferrell in the light of what else he says about evaluation of alternatives, noting that consumers evaluate products (and, by extension, bookshops) as ‘bundles of attributes’ (ibid, p.151) such as brand, product, aesthetics and price, this has important implications for brand identity of the bookshops studied as well as making clear the import of competitive advantage and brand distinction of each of the bookshops.

**Purchase**

At the purchase decision stage, Ferrell reminds us that the purchase intention is distinct from the actual act of buying and that several factors may prevent any purchase from taking place at all.

**Postpurchase evaluation**

Finally, following a purchase, postpurchase evaluation takes place, an important stage as it can have an impact upon the development of a long-term customer relationship with a given product (ibid, p.151). The postpurchase evaluation is the outcome of the purchase and examines how the consumer feels about any purchase made. Ferrell (2008, p.155) notes that delight, satisfaction, dissatisfaction or cognitive dissonance (postpurchase doubt) may be experienced by the consumer. Postpurchase evaluation is an important stage in the overall purchase decision process since dissatisfaction may impact upon future behaviour in relation to the product purchased.

The question therefore, is whether this model might be usefully applied to book buying, in order to help explain some aspects of consumer behaviour. Given the emphasis by consumers in the following Results chapter upon some experiential aspects of book buying (coffee shops, bookshops as a potential social venue) particularly in traditional
settings, it seems that we can. Furthermore, if one moves away from applying this model to product choice, but takes a broader perspective – that of Solomon – to that of choice of bookselling venue, one can see the potential relevance of certain aspects of the decision process model. Reflecting upon this model in terms of the current research, the first three stages of the purchase decision model seem to be the most relevant, since much of the research is concerned with consumer behaviour and responses to marketing in bookshops, whether they are online or traditional. Therefore it is the stages of problem recognition, information search and evaluation of alternatives that are most relevant to the current study. ‘Evaluation of alternatives’ – part of the selection process – would seem to have relevance to the current research and merits further consideration in the context of browsing in particular. However, ‘evaluation of alternatives’ can also be applied to the choice of bookshop and evaluating their respective competitive advantages and competitive distinction. Looking at the initial stage of need recognition, this seems potentially to have a connection with the part of the current study looking at the bookshop as a third place; at the role of the bookshop in satisfying a deeper need for the consumer, perhaps a social need rather than simply the need to buy a book. The stage of need recognition may have more to do with the bookshop as a retail destination, rather than somewhere to purchase a book. This model is certainly worthy of further discussion in the light of the results of the data collection, in the Conclusions chapter.

3.2.5 Model of reasoned action
Examining motives for purchasing can be competently explained using the purchase decision model (see fig. 3.2). However, another way in which to understand consumer approaches to purchasing is to understand whether a limited choice model or an extended choice model might be applied to consumer behaviour. For example, a simple instance of a limited choice model might be when a person is thirsty, sees a vending machine selling soft drinks, purchases one and is then satisfied. This is an instance when there has been little consideration of alternative courses of action, little thought of the options available. It is a simple process: a consumer is thirsty and can satisfy that thirst easily. It is also imperative to realise that this is a low-risk process. This can easily be understood by looking at the purchase decision model discussed earlier. Alternatively, it can be understood by considering an even simpler model – that of Ehrenberg and Goodhart.
A contrasting example of purchasing, where there are more complex aspects to be considered, might be when purchasing a car. This is a relatively high-risk process, where there is a higher potential financial risk, more aspects of the purchase to be considered – looks, fuel efficiency, handling, comfort, as well as a considerable financial outlay. This is an example of an extended choice model. However, Fishbein and Ajzen (ibid, p.123) also suggest that as well as considering the set of attributes which the consumer believes the potential purchase to have, consumers will also ‘evaluate the extent to which important others believe that they should or should not buy the brand’ (ibid). The beliefs of these important others may not necessarily accord with those of the buyer. Consequently, the opinions of important others may influence whether a purchase is made or not. Fishbein and Ajzen suggest that in a case like this, consumers are highly involved in the purchase to the extent that they evaluate the consequences of the purchases and what others will think about it (Jobber, p.123).

The Fishbein and Ajzen model suggests that consumer attitude towards a brand is based upon a set of beliefs about the brand’s attributes (e.g. value for money and durability). One might suggest perception of quality, or aesthetic appeal as attributes which consumers might look for on occasion when they buy books. ‘Attitude’ is the degree to which the consumer likes or dislikes the brand overall. However, as well as beliefs and attitudes, Fishbein and Ajzen suggest that consumers have normative beliefs about how others might respond to potential purchases. For example, a consumer might anticipate their spouse’s disapproval were they to purchase a ‘gas-guzzling’ car. According to Fishbein and Ajzen, others’ attitudes are the subjective norms. So, if a close friend or parent is believed to be disapproving of the purchase of a very expensive television for instance, this may conflict with the personal beliefs and attitudes of the consumer. Depending on whether consumer attitudes and beliefs or the subjective norms affected a stronger influence on the consumer, a purchase may or may not take place.
Fig. 3.4 Model of reasoned action

In complex, involved purchases, for example buying a new car, then we can see how the Fishbein and Ajzen model explains consumer behaviour. As well as requiring lots of information about the potential purchase, the consumer also considers the opinions and attitudes of others, including their experiences and opinions about the car, and anticipates how people would respond, post purchase. Contrast this with the Ehrenberg and Goodhart model, which might be applied to buying a sandwich for example: the consumer feels hungry, goes to the canteen, buys the sandwich and this ends the process. It is a much less complex, less involved purchasing process and is far less likely to take on board the opinions of others.

It is interesting to consider how these models might apply to book purchasing. The Fishbein and Ajzen model assumes an involved, complex purchase which is influenced by subjective norms – the opinions of others. It is applied to extended problem solving (a complex purchase) rather than a simple, limited approach to problem solving (a straightforward purchase). Given the time spent browsing on some purchase occasions, particularly in traditional bookshops, one might see that this model is applicable. However, one would have to accept that one of the reasons for the time spent browsing is the consideration of the attitudes of others towards a potential purchase. One can certainly see how the purchase decision model discussed elsewhere, and the Ehrenberg and Goodhart models can be applied to swift, functional purchases in bookshops, even online, particularly to academic textbooks or ‘must have’ books where little personal consideration or browsing has been involved. These simpler models can also explain the functional approach taken to ‘3 for 2’ purchases at holiday time. The Fishbein and Ajzen model assumes a more sophisticated consumer.
involved in a complex purchase decision process who is at least partly concerned about peer opinion or perceptions.

3.2.6 E – marketing

3.2.6.1 New strategies
Kotler (2006, p.552) notes that,

Recent technological advances have created a new digital age. Widespread use of the Internet and other powerful new technologies are having a dramatic impact on marketers and buyers.

While Kotler notes that many marketing approaches commonly used in traditional business setting, such as mass marketing, media advertising and in-store retailing will still be relevant, nevertheless, ‘marketers will also have to develop new strategies and practices better suited to today’s new environment’ (ibid). Taking Amazon as an example of how effective e-marketing can be, it is interesting to note what founder Jeff Bezos says about their strategy:

If you focus on what customers want and build a relationship, they will allow you to make money (Kotler, 2006, p.551).

This is a comment worth reflecting upon as it emphasises the similarities between traditional and e-marketing approaches. Although Amazon reach their customers online, the overall aim of giving customers what they want, is the same as that aspired to by many traditional businesses.

3.2.6.2 Information sharing
An online presence can enable companies to reach a much wider audience. The technology has facilitated easy global communication and lowered the associated costs. However, one of the clearest advantages of e-marketing is that it enables the quick and efficient sharing of information between different interested parties. This occurs most obviously between business and consumer (B2C), but also it eases the sharing of information and data between businesses themselves (B2B) and increasingly between consumers (C2C). Therefore, effective e-marketing need not be solely about selling, it can also be about building stronger relationships between businesses, consumers, and even across online communities. This strengthening of
online relationships can in itself ease the way for more effective e-marketing. In the context of the current research, we can see how this is vital regarding the sharing of book information between online bookseller and consumer, but Amazon also shows us how easy it is for consumers to share information with each other through the use of customer reviews, and also via external book sites and blogs. Within the wider book trade, the relative ease with which businesses can now reach a much wider audience, has made it more straightforward for publishers to begin an online relationship with consumers: something they have not been able to easily do in the past, simply because booksellers have always been the conduit through which publishers have worked. This aspect of e-marketing allows publishers to develop their own websites and sell their books directly to consumers, or at least to publicise them directly to interested parties. As Dibb notes,

One of the most important benefits of e-marketing is the ability of marketers and customer to share information (2006, p.102).

A wealth of information is easily accessible and for many consumers, it is often easy to give feedback via customer review pages. Crucially for the businesses concerned, disgruntled customers will often raise any problems in consumer forums, sharing problems regarding products or customer service. One can see how this also has an impact on the quality of goods and services available to the public: no business wants negative publicity for its products and services and the swift feedback which consumers can share on the quality of their experiences can expedite changes to product or service quality. Regarding the current research, the sharing of information seems to be a key advantage which Amazon and, potentially, other online sites have over traditional bookselling approaches. This is discussed in more detail in the context of the results.

3.2.6.3 Customisation
Another important advantage which the digital economy and in turn e-marketing offers us as consumers is the ability to customise our purchases. Whereas the ‘old economy focused upon standardisation of production, products and business processes’ (Kotler, p.554), the new digital economy revolves around information, and the sharing of information, rather than products in isolation. These technological advances have made it easier for businesses to individualise their products and services according to consumer needs, often based upon consumer purchasing records. However, vitally relevant to the current research, ‘customization, involves more than simply taking the
initiative to customise the market offering. It also means giving customers the opportunity to design their own offerings’ (Kotler, 2006, p. 554). Although one cannot design what one wants re book content – yet – one can see how Amazon is well suited to dealing with this kind of customisation of consumer needs. The wealth of information available online makes it easier for the consumer to ensure that what they purchase is what they want. In the wider book trade this element of customisation can be seen in the growth of pod (print on demand) titles and self-publishing, where consumers are demanding more control over what they read as well as more control over their own publications.

Kotler says that ‘Traditional marketing targets a somewhat passive audience. In contrast e-marketing targets people who actively select which websites they will visit and what marketing information they will receive about which products and under what conditions’ (2006, p.559). This allows businesses to be more focused upon their consumers, and to behave more interactively regarding how consumers want their products to be. According to Kotler, it is this proactivity of the consumer that marks out e-marketing as distinct from traditional marketing. E-marketing enables the consumer to select what they want more easily. The way in which the internet enables consumers to select their own products has also had the effect of easing C2C communication. Therefore, there has been huge growth in the use of blogs and discussion forums covering a host of interests. In the context of books, there is a wealth of book related blogs, referring to books which are reviewed and recommended, but also to bookshops and experiences therein.

It is perhaps ironic to note that the internet can be a ‘powerful tool for customer relationship building’ (Kotler, p.556). Although the communication is electronic, it is one-to-one and interactive, so specific wants and needs can be catered for. This is examined in the light of the research results, in the Conclusions chapter. Furthermore, it is arguably easier for consumers in the online setting to ask questions and give feedback, as they can do it straightaway, without needing to wait for a salesperson or bookseller to appear. A clear advantage which e-marketing gives the seller, is swifter ‘responsiveness and flexibility’ (ibid) regarding what they are selling. It is much easier to adjust online sales displays swiftly and cheaply in response to any negative feedback, or errors. This is obviously in contrast to traditional approaches to marketing, like catalogues and posters in the book trade.
3.2.7 Approaches to marketing

The growing awareness of retail theory amongst strategists (as opposed to academia) is referred to by Wileman and Jary (in Gilbert, 2003) who point out that in most retailing companies a marketing function does not exist and the established approach to selling, based on experience, has prevailed. Gilbert however, goes on to explain his view of how the attitudes towards marketing and business practice have evolved over the last few years, with a shift to more sophisticated marketing techniques where the consumer is central. Miller says:

In recent times qualitative studies have increasingly acknowledged the possible autonomy of consumption from production. There is no longer much support for the idea that we are merely the passive recipients of whatever capitalism produces. There is too much evidence to suggest that most attempts to sell us goods fail (1998, p.138).

Miller’s quote suggests that it is impossible to market products that the public avoid. However, it is interesting to consider Miller’s point in the context of the book trade. A trade interview with one publisher resulted in the publisher complaining ‘it is nearly impossible to get to number one without the support of Tesco in particular’ (Kean, 2003b, p.23). One must therefore ask, are supermarkets simply pointing out the availability of titles to the public, more effectively than the book shops have ever done, or are the public simply buying what is available? The implication seems to be that the supermarket stocking of titles has more impact on sales than even the chain bookshops. This has important ramifications for the future role of supermarkets in the book trade. One must also bear in mind that consumers in all retail sectors are now much more sophisticated and aware of the kinds of marketing and advertising to which they are exposed, across current retail sectors (Christopher, Payne and Ballantyne, 2002, p.3).

Stallard’s research into the book trade (1999) found that ‘numerous reader respondents…recounted their perception of the “marketing tricks” employed by retailers to sell books to them and the tactics they employed to resist these’. So not only do marketers in bookshops have to deal with sophisticated consumers wise to many marketing techniques: sometimes these consumers are actively pulling against these ‘marketing tricks’ in an effort to resist them.
Data gathered by retailers in store with the help of epos (electronic point of sale) equipment collates potentially useful information such as the titles that are selling and whether they are selling more or less in any given period. Nevertheless, without detailed analysis of this information and considerable follow up research, this does not help to inform retailers about the effectiveness of any strategies which they have put in place (see section 3.3). As Underhill points out:

Information which stores collect is quite sophisticated. However, they are much more adept at collecting it than at designing systems or processes to use that data in a timely fashion (1999, p.28).

BML (2007) carried out recent research into the kinds of ‘purchase prompts’ to which consumers respond in bookshops. This is precisely the kind of research which can be usefully built upon in the current study. While the BML research found that the largest section of consumers responded to in-store promotion, or simply bought because they ‘saw in shop’, this suggests that a significant amount of unplanned, impulse buying takes place in traditional bookshops. Other purchase prompts included recommendation, or having read another book by the same author. These prompts to purchase are investigated further in the data collection which takes place in the current research, although the categorisation of these prompts is somewhat different (see appendix VI for the questionnaire survey probing consumers about these points). The other major marketing tool which booksellers can use quite easily, is to experiment with store layout (Gardiner, 2002) but again this is based on the ethos of experimentation rather than evidence based action.

Referring to the oft-cited Harry Potter phenomenon, Brown (2002) says: ‘The history of our field [marketing] reveals that it occupies a betwixt and between position, with production on one side and consumption on the other, with practice to the left and theory to the right’ (p.143). This delicate balancing act means that publishing ‘phenomena’ such as ‘Harry Potter’ or other fast-selling titles are notoriously difficult to cope with. Indeed, the Harry Potter situation demonstrates the power of word of mouth publicity, and also, unfortunately, the inability of the publisher to keep up with demand in the early stages of fast sales. It also demonstrates once again that the book trade is in many ways in a unique position: while one can argue that one can predict sales based on an author’s past sales records - his or her ‘brand’ (Royle and Stockdale, 1999; Royle, Cooper and Stockdale, 1999), or on a ‘type’ of book in vogue – such as celebrity tie-in titles on gardening, or diets, nevertheless, there is the unique book trade
problem of each new book and/or author being an entirely new product (Cooper, 1998)
whose potential sales are entirely unknown.

Historically, marketing strategies and approaches in the book trade have been led by
experience and gut feeling rather than any evidence based strategies. Indeed, this is
representative of how the broader field of retailers have historically worked, as well as
being symptomatic of the fact that there has been little research carried out in the area
of marketing effectiveness in the book trade, or how consumers might respond to any
given marketing strategy. Sanderson (2001a) in an article for the book trade, refers to
the various strategies adopted by marketing personnel in the book trade when dealing
with advertising new titles. Her interviews reveal a wide range of experiences and
different approaches to marketing, based on such disparate approaches as: trusting to
gut instinct; experience, and getting a good deal from the advertiser – there was no
evidence of any research or evidence-based marketing. As one marketing expert
commented to Sanderson:

Books are not tried and tested on the public in advance, so asking them to
spend £6.99 just like that is asking them to make a big leap of faith. What’s
more, you are also trying to reach a comparatively small public with an
astonishing number of new lines every year. Making your particular product
stand out among all the others is a huge challenge (p.28).

This quote emphasises the problems the book trade faces in marketing new titles to the
public as well as the uniqueness of each new book.

Klaus Saur (2003), MD of Saur Verlag commented that out of ten published titles the
usual breakdown of success in his own company is that five will fail, four will break
even and one will be a success and will hopefully cover the costs of the others. The
problem of course is that nobody knows which one, if any, is going to be successful, so
each one has to be supported and marketed equally vigorously, as they might be ‘the
one’. Although KG Saur Verlag is an academic publishing house, nevertheless, the
problems they face with regard to putting money behind new books, is broadly
representative of the problems faced by other publishers in the book trade and can also
be seen to represent to some degree the problems of marketing faced by the
bookselling trade. This disparate approach to marketing would seem to some extent to
be a necessity. However, it is also arguable that it leads to a blurring of marketing
strategy, perhaps even of brand, when bookshops as well as publishers have to support so many titles so vigorously.

In a trade article, Richard Knight, then MD of sales data agency Whitaker BookTrack, now Nielsen BookScan, commented that ‘many titles on sale in bookshops might be regarded less as stock than as fixtures and fittings’ (Lind, 1999, p.12), making the point that the unknown element with regard to what is going to sell and what is not, means much stock gets left sitting on shelves. Indeed, whereas the book trade might formerly have been seen as ‘combining a duty to the intellectual community with reasonable financial stability’ (ibid), this approach has been forced to change in order to survive in an increasingly competitive market with supermarkets, online booksellers, chain bookshops and independents all clamouring for a share of the book market. An increasingly commercial approach has become necessary and bookshops can no longer afford to have books on their shelves which do not sell quickly. However, expanding the market – which might arguably seem to be part of the obvious solution to increased competition - has resulted in a rush to discount books by most of the chains. This is evidenced by the plethora of discounted titles visible in most bookshop chains, as well as all of the other bookselling outlets listed above. Suggesting a more measured, long-term approach to bookselling, retail analyst Hugh Phillips suggests that an *evidence based approach* is required to sell books, in order to determine what actually sells. Phillips says,

> Price is the last resort of the unintelligent, uneducated or unimaginative – the easy no brainer option. In contrast, working out what the consumer really wants and supplying it requires time, ability and effort’ (2003, p.22).

Similarly marketing consultant Michelle Harrison speaking at the Booksellers’ Association Conference 2003 suggested that many discounted books would have been purchased anyway, and went on to recommend ‘a more sophisticated model of price elasticity to disentangle the strategic thinking behind discounting and marketing initiatives’ (Rickett, 2003a, p.12). Keen competition has enlightened bookshops both to the potential market to be tapped and to the fact that commercial survival could be difficult should they rely on existing customers for their trade. However, to expand the market is not a quick process; it is well documented that the easiest and quickest way to improve the bottom line is to sell more goods to the same customers, by increasing their spend (de Kare-Silver, 1998; Gilbert, 2003; Schiffman and Kanuk, 2004). This
would suggest that bookshops have to be careful about maintaining brand integrity and not alienating currently loyal customers in their desire to change their target markets.

The overall cultural shift which has taken place in bookshops over the past few years, has seen many chain bookshops moving toward a ‘lifestyle’ type of bookshop with sofas and coffee shops, following the examples of bookshops and book superstores in America (Pennington, 1997). Nevertheless, the effectiveness or otherwise of this cultural shift has not been examined or monitored in any detail. As Gardiner says,

Their [the bookshops’] community-building activities are broad brush to say the least, and it is hard to see how this could be refined or how chain bookshops...could find out who their customers are, what the purchase individually, as opposed to an aggregate, and how they could be encouraged to do more of it (2002, p.163).

Gardiner points out not only the failings of many bookshops to effectively analyse the information they have, but also the difficulty inherent in the trade when there exists such a wide range of products and a (relatively) wide range of consumers.

The ubiquitous presence of ‘3 for 2’ and various other discount based selling tools in bookshops is part of the approach to increasing sales which many chain bookshops currently take. However, it has attracted much in the way of negative press both within the trade-wide press as well as the wider broadsheet media (Publishing News Online, 2005; Wilkinson, 2005). The basic objection to these kinds of price-based promotions seems to be a perceived ‘dumbing down’ and lack of choice or narrowing of range. However, it is interesting to note comments from Scott Pack, Waterstone’s Buying Manager until early 2006. He notes that Waterstone’s has more titles on offer than it had five years ago and, crucially, while ‘3 for 2’ promotions are effective they ‘only account for a few hundred titles at any one time. The majority of sales come from thousands of books that are not on promotion’ (Hall, 2005). While it might be argued that ‘3 for 2’ promotions promote experimentation and risk taking by consumers, thus promoting sales of lesser known authors or titles – indeed this was a point made by one of the managers interviewed – nevertheless, feedback from consumers revealed the opinion that these offers consist largely of homogenous and unchallenging titles. These findings are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. Recent comments on the dangers of a further narrowing of range due to the takeover of Ottakar’s by HMV elicited a heated response from Alan Giles, chief executive of the HMV group. He
stated that 97% of books sold in Scottish branches of Waterstone’s in 2004 were chosen by local managers and booksellers rather than being head office prescribed and that no two stores stocked identical titles (Giles, 2005). Nevertheless, the crucial difference would seem to be the public perception of what is available and the titles that Waterstone’s is promoting. If, as Scott Pack says, the highly promoted books at the front of store account for a relatively small percentage of sales, then this would seem to beg the question; ‘Why is so much emphasis and marketing focus placed on these titles?’

It is notable that this kind of sameness of marketing techniques being used by chain bookshops in the UK can be seen as a smaller part of the wider homogenisation of our high streets. Miles (1998, p.63) comments on the increasing uniformity of British urban environments and on ‘a retailing system in which competitors perpetually tend to clone one another, with retail developments, in British cities especially, being characterized by a predictable and uniform tenant mix and a distinct lack of any creativity’.

3.2.8 Store surroundings
Gilbert (2003, p.129) describes atmospherics as: ‘The changes made to the design of buying environments that produce special emotional effects that subsequently enhance the likelihood that a purchase will take place’. Given the current emphasis on the bookshop as a destination environment, it would seem that the qualities inherent in a study of atmospherics may well be important in consumer assessment of their bookshop experiences.

The term ‘atmospherics’ was first used by Kotler in 1973 in an attempt to put a name to a problem which had been recognised in the field of marketing:

The tangible product – a pair of shoes, a refrigerator, a haircut, or a meal – is only a small part of the total consumption package. Buyers respond to the total product. One of the most significant features of the total product is the place where it is bought or consumed. In some cases, the place, or more specifically the atmosphere of the place, is more influential than the product itself in the purchase decision (p.48).
Therefore, it is clear that atmospherics are closely linked to brand perceptions of an organization, but are specifically linked to those intangible qualities present in store. Kotler goes on:

We shall use the term *atmospherics* to describe the conscious designing of space to create certain effects in buyers. More specifically *atmospherics* is the effort to design buying environments to produce specific emotional effects in the buyer that enhance his purchase probability.

Here Kotler attempts to define what had not yet been defined and name the qualities which make up an atmosphere. While it may be instinctive to think that the atmosphere of a given environment is by its nature indescribable, Kotler says that: ‘Atmosphere is always present as a quality of the surrounding space’ (p.50). Therefore, according to Kotler, any atmosphere is made up of describable qualities. Kotler ‘tentatively’ suggests various propositions with regard to the importance of atmospherics in different situations. These are:

Proposition 1. *Atmospherics is a relevant marketing tool mainly in situations (a) where the product is purchased or consumed; and (b) where the seller has design options.*

Therefore, as Kotler points out, the use of atmospherics is more directly relevant to retailing outlets or restaurants rather than manufacturers or wholesalers, since a retailer has direct contact with the consumer. This is clearly of relevance to chain booksellers; arguably less so for online booksellers.

Proposition 2. *Atmospherics becomes a more relevant marketing tool as the number of competitive outlets increase.*

This might seem to be obvious; if various stores are selling similar products then the appropriate use of atmospherics may give a particular outlet a competitive advantage over another.

Proposition 3. *Atmospherics is a more relevant marketing tool in industries where product and/or price differences are small.*

In this situation, where prices for comparative goods vary little, then atmospherics potentially play a more substantial role. Conversely, if an outlet offers the goods at a
much lower price, this would presumably outweigh the attraction of an outlet with the ‘atmospheric advantage’.

Proposition 4. Atmospherics is a more relevant marketing tool when product entries are aimed at distinct social classes or life style buyer groups.

Kotler suggests that if a retailer is aiming at a broader cross section of society then a focused approach to atmospherics aimed at attracting a particular social group, may be less appropriate. This may be relevant to chain booksellers, in so far as they are concerned with selling to particular groups or target markets, but less so, according to Kotler, if they are looking to attract a wider cross section of consumers. This raises the question of subtle differences of approach in bookselling, and if one takes heed of atmospherics, it is clear that booksellers need to be clear about target markets. Bitner (1992) also acknowledges differences amongst groups or sectors of people in the context of designing appropriate buying environments:

One of the challenges in designing environments to enhance individual approach behaviors and encourage the appropriate social interactions is that optimal design for one person or group may not be the optimal design for others (p.61).

This problem has been raised by experts in related fields, concerned with attracting particular groups of consumers, without repelling others groups (see CRM, section 3.3). Bitner (1992) continues,

In marketing there is a surprising lack of empirical research or theoretically based frameworks addressing the role of physical surroundings in consumption settings. Managers continually plan, build, and change an organization’s physical surroundings in an attempt to control its influence on patrons, without really knowing the impact of a specific design or atmospheric change on its users (p.57).

This would seem to be particularly relevant to chain bookshops and to their wholesale adoption of ‘lifestyle’ over recent years. Very little research has been carried out which determines whether or not consumers respond well to the many changes which have been made in chain bookshops. Machleit and Eroglu (2000) in their research measuring emotional responses to shopping experiences acknowledge Ittelson, (1973)
when they say that; ‘Researchers from different fields and vantage points agree that the first response level to any environment is affective, and that this emotional impact generally guides the subsequent relations within the environment’ (p.101). The complexity of consumer responses to environments is underlined, and the fact that this response is often tied up with emotion, rather than a more rational, reasoned response. This feeling response is one which is examined in the research.

3.2.9 Shop layout and design
Gardiner says that historically, publishers and booksellers have tried to identify wide ‘communities of interest’ and to cater for their needs (2002, p.162). The ‘communities’ have sometimes been identified with, for instance, the help of school curricula but can be seen to have settled into the departments within bookshops which we can expect to see in most high street chains today: cookery; fiction; children’s etc. While there is general overlap among bookshops as regards the sections in store, there have been more recent developments which have resulted in many chains now holding sections such as mind body and spirit and gay literature as well as the contraction of transport sections and the expansion of travel guides. Paco Underhill, founder of Envirosell which carries out research into behavioural patterns in retail environments says, ‘We always advise our bookstore clients to group sections by gender, acknowledging the tendency of men to cluster in sports, business, do-it-yourself and computers while women troll psychology, self-help, health, food, diet, home and garden’ (1999, p.146). Indeed, if one looks at most bookshops covering a choice of subject areas, one would be likely to find these sections clustered together. This natural departmentalising of bookshops seems to have evolved naturally and is perhaps a necessity given the evidence of gender differences in approach to shopping. ‘Women are generally more patient and inquisitive, completely at ease in a space that gradually reveals itself’. However, ‘If a male is made to wander and seek…he’s likely to give up in frustration and exit’ (Underhill, 1999, p.117). Whilst this may not present a problem in some stores, it would seem to need to be considered in the design of the bookshop, since one is catering for both men and women, and while there may be trends in what each gender will generally buy or browse, there are certainly no fixed rules, meaning that the department layout and shop design is very important.

3.2.10 Effects of a ‘discount image’
In their study looking specifically at the effects of retail atmospherics on consumers’ perceptions of salespeople and how readily those consumers could be persuaded by
salespeople, Sharma and Stafford found important evidence of the influence which a store with a ‘discount image’ could have on consumer behaviour.

Customers visiting stores that present environmental cues supporting discount image are less likely to be persuaded by salesperson persuasion attempts because of the perceptions of inferior merchandise quality. In contrast, when a customer is in a store that presents environmental cues supporting a prestige store ambience (and therefore better merchandise quality), better persuasive outcomes should result (2000, p.185).

It would therefore appear that a store with a discount image must take into account the effects which that image has on its consumers. It would seem consumer perception is affected by such an image, in particular perception of the persuasive effects of the salespeople, due to the consumer perception of inferior quality goods. This finding clearly has significant implications for any store which has adopted or is planning to adopt a discount oriented approach to selling. Given the widespread adoption of discounting by chain bookshops, this is a topic which certainly needs exploring in the current research. Sharma and Stafford continue;

In general, retail salespeople working in “prestige ambience” stores were perceived to have higher levels of credibility when compared with salespeople working in “discount ambience” stores (ibid, p.188).

Therefore, they find that a ‘prestige’ environment seems to enhance consumer perception of persuasive qualities of the salespeople in such an environment. As Sharma and Stafford found, more prestigious stores mean more credibility for the salespeople who work there. They go on to sound a note of caution however, particularly in relation to the perceived availability of salespeople. The persuasive effects of salespeople in prestige environments could be diminished if there were not perceived to be sufficient numbers of available salespeople to help the consumers. In effect, the costs associated with adopting a prestige sales environment might be impacted upon negatively if there were not seen to be enough salespeople around to help. However, ‘the recognizable presence of personable and ready sales help in discount stores is likely to be perceived by customers as distinctive and desirable, and our results support the contention that more readily available salespeople will have more persuasive impact in discount settings’ (p.189). Therefore, if there are plenty of salespeople around, this can help to offset the negative effects of a ‘discount’
environment, even impacting positively upon how persuasive the salespeople are found to be. There seem to be repercussions for any store adopting a discount image. While one could reasonably argue that chain bookshops in particular, while adopting a discount image at the front of the store, still present a prestige sales environment when one gets past this area. However, it is customer perception of the store which is vital, and if the store is perceived as being predominantly promoting discount goods, this needs to be taken into account. Consumer perception of bookshops both online and traditional is examined in the research.

3.2.11 Brands and branding

3.2.11.1 Introduction
In an academic context, the concept of the bookshop as a brand has been explored by Royle and Stockdale (1999) as well as Royle, Cooper and Stockdale (1999). They explored the concept of books, or series of books as brands, looking at the role of publishers’ imprints in this process. The author as brand has also been explored in a historical context by Herman (2003). However, given the growth of chain booksellers into powerful organisations who wield considerable power in the book trade, it would seem timely to examine the role of branding in bookshops, and their approaches to brand projection. With this in mind, a review of current literature in this area is relevant.

Various definitions of branding abound, and are arguably best considered together, in order to grasp a more rounded understanding of the term. Kotler says:

[Branding is]... a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors (1996, p.571).

While his definition of branding is a helpful one and is a neat summary of how we perhaps tend to think about branding when we first consider the term, McGoldrick espouses a rather fuller definition of the brand, saying that,

A major cornerstone of retail marketing has been the development of the retailer’s name as a brand, rather than simply a name over the shop (2002, p.336).
McGoldrick’s definition hints at the deeper associations which the term ‘brand’ holds for retailers. It seems to suggest that the concept of brand exists beyond that of a mere visual representation and can be something that has a deeper meaning for retailer and consumer. In his article entitled “Brand strategy needs turning back to front”, Van Mesdag (1997) does just that, asserting that there has been too much emphasis on product but not enough on the consumer perception of the product and, therefore, the consumer relationship with the brand. Here we have the crux of what a brand is widely understood to be – a perception of meaning held by the consumer, rather than that which is projected by the retailer. Hall (2000) also states that ‘values attached to a brand are defined by consumers, not marketers’ (p.22). These deeper associations are also made explicit by Kent (2003), who, acknowledging Pickton and Broderick, says that brand managers are now concerned with ‘the creation of brand personality, the expression of values and culture; identity, the communication of personality through cues; and image, the perceptions of the brand, felt or thought, by its audiences’ (p.132). These assessments of what a brand is, range from the visual to the deeply felt associations which the consumer has with particular products. Furthermore, this sophisticated construct of meaning associated with a brand is not something static, rather it is a dynamic phenomenon which can grow stronger or weaker depending on a whole host of factors, but particularly depending upon how it is perceived. As Knapp says:

Ultimately, brand managers must think in terms of a brand continuum - a clear, purposeful covenant that ensures the company does things right and does so all the time (1999, p.71).

It would therefore seem that a brand is something that can be maintained, developed, changed or, vitally, diminished. It is important nevertheless, to bear in mind that Kotler also defined brand as something which is ‘intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors’ (1996, p.571). The point about differentiation is an important one, particularly in the context of chain bookselling, and is explored further at later stages of the research.

Branding is not solely associated with products. The definition of branding is different when applied to a manufacturing or product-based industry, where the brand is more closely associated with a particular product, rather than the definition of branding in the context of a service based, retailing industry when the brand is associated not only with
the products being sold, but, perhaps even more closely, with the services and environment where the transaction is taking place. As Knee points out:

Brands used to be embedded in products, then products were embedded in brands, now brands are becoming independent of products (2002, p.520).

Palmer (1996) also emphasises the shifting qualities of brand definition, pointing out their increasing application to organisational image (as opposed to being applied solely to products). Palmer seems to suggest that elements of organisational image such as store environment, layout, reputation and staff are therefore all elements of that image which contribute to the overall brand.

3.2.11.2 Brand equity, maintenance and integrity

3.2.11.2.1 Brand equity

When discussing brands and how they change over time, it is important to consider the importance of brand equity. Brand equity can be understood to be the value intrinsic to a brand; its ‘hidden value’. Brand equity can be conceived of as a financial value, but also as a more complex value, linked to the kinds of associations and beliefs which a customer might have about a particular brand. For example, it could be said that brand equity is what makes some people pay more for a pair of trainers with a particular logo on them. Feldwick (in Wood, 2000, p.662) refers to the various classifications of brand equity as being:

- The total value of a brand as a separable asset – when it is sold, or included on a balance sheet.
- A measure of the strength of consumers’ attachment to a brand.
- A description of the associations and beliefs the consumer has about the brand.

The first definition is likely to be adopted by those carrying out a financial analysis of brand strength, but the second and third definitions of brand are allied more closely to this research and the study of branding in bookshops.

A well-managed brand is an asset to an organisation. Value of this asset is referred to as brand equity (Dibb, 319). Kotler describes it as ‘the positive differential effect that knowing the brand name has on customer response to the product or service’ (2006, p.249). The brand equity stems from four elements –
Firstly, *Brand Awareness* simply indicates that just being aware of a brand makes it more likely to be selected than an unfamiliar brand.

*Brand Loyalty* describes ‘a strongly motivated and long-standing decision to purchase a particular product or service’ (Dibb, p.318). The factor of brand loyalty also makes a brand stronger in the face of competitors. However, it is worth noting that brand loyalty is in decline, due to the increase in consumer choice in so many product lines, and also because of the increasing reliance upon discounting, thus pulling brand-loyal consumers away from other outlets towards the one offering the discounts. It is interesting to note the impact that discounting is having on the wider retailing sector, as well as bookselling. It seems to have the effect of diluting brand loyalty, by the simple provision of cheaper goods. If discounting can do this; take brand loyal customers away from their products, it is clear why many retailers follow this route, despite its disadvantages.

Looking at brand loyalty in more detail, Ferrell, (2008, p.198) describes it as a positive attitude towards a brand that causes customers to have a consistent preference for that brand over all competing brands. In scholarly literature, there is generally held to be three degrees of brand loyalty:

*Brand Recognition* describes a situation where a customer is aware of a brand and considers it as one of a set of alternatives. It is the lowest level of brand loyalty and could probably be more accurately described as brand awareness, rather than describing any kind of desire to purchase a particular brand. As Dibb says, the word loyalty here is being used very loosely (p.318). Brand preference as the name infers, describes a situation where there is a real preference in existence, where a customer will purchase a particular brand if it is available. However, if the said brand is unavailable, a substitute will usually suffice. *Brand insistence* – this describes the highest form of brand loyalty and occurs when customers will go out of their way to find a particular brand. Furthermore, they will accept no substitute. While this is indeed ‘a marketer’s dream’ (Dibb, p. 318), it is also, unfortunately, the least common type of loyalty. Given the plethora of brands and the array of choice which consumers are bombarded with, brand loyalty is becoming more and more dissipated. However, crucially for the book trade, one approach to marketing which works to dilute brand loyalty is consistent discounting. This tempts consumers to move to other brands, particularly when discounting is undertaken in the long term, rather than as a short
term, targeted strategy. Given the current concentration by chain bookshops upon discounting, this is certainly an issue which is relevant to the current research.

*Brand Quality* is a strong factor, contributing to brand equity, since it reduces the risk to the consumer, if they can be sure of the quality of the proposed purchase.

*Brand Associations* describes the associations which the marketer for a brand works at developing in order to enhance the original brand image. For example, one might associate reliability with a particular model of car. Similarly, one might associate a relaxed, informal atmosphere with a particular bookshop chain. It is clearly important that any brand associations are well thought out, since poor association may linger in the minds of the consumer. For example, there were negative repercussions for Waterstone’s a few years ago when they selected a low-brow chick-lit novel as their book of the month. Whereas such a choice might meet with less outcry now, at that point it marked a change in strategy for Waterstone’s, which would much more typically have selected literary fiction, or literary biography as a suitable book of the month for its branches (Allen, 2006).

**3.2.11.2.2 Brand personality, values and attributes**

Other strong qualities inherent to any brand which go to make up the qualities which we associate with them, are brand personality, value and attributes. Brand attributes are perhaps best described as those ‘bullet point specific benefits’ (Dibb, 2006, p.320) which you might see on advertisements. For example, a washing powder might offer a ‘whiter than white’ wash. Brand values are the ‘emotional benefits and less tangible identifiers attached to the brand, providing reassurance and credibility for targeted consumers’ (ibid). Brand values tend to be more emotional than brand attributes. For example, one might be attracted to a particular brand because of values such as knowledge, dependability and passion – values which one would certainly like to apply to the staff in traditional bookshops. Brand personality is rather more complex, in that it is to do with the ‘psychological cues and less tangible desirable facets of a well-presented brand’ (ibid). However, again one can see how brand personality can be projected powerfully by retail staff; if they can demonstrate excellent communication skills, be customer-focused and have good knowledge about their stock, it is easy to understand how this would have a powerfully positive effect upon the projected brand personality. It would seem that these aspects of the brand – personality, values and attributes are to do with consumers ‘ deep seated associations with brand identity, but
also it would seem that these qualities can arguably be projected by staff demonstrating their knowledge. However, it is important to realise that these qualities cannot be demonstrated on a whim; they need to be consistently demonstrated in everything that a business does, if the kind of qualities which businesses wish to project are going to be picked up on by consumers.

With regard to using advertising in particular, in order to enhance a brand, De Chernatony and McDonald (1998) say:

Advertising builds up a ‘stock’ of brand goodwill in consumers’ minds. This takes time, however. If advertising is subsequently stopped, there may be only a small reduction in sales for several months while the stock of goodwill is depleting, but then there will be a rapid fall in sales. Furthermore, a disproportionately large spend is needed to raise a fallen brand back to its original position (p.353).

It would therefore seem that brands are not immovable qualities which once established are static for ever - they need to be monitored and maintained, thus ensuring that the qualities which they encompass remain sound, or that their integrity is maintained.

De Chernatony and McDonald go on; ‘The problem with continually enhancing the brand is that a point may be reached at which the extra costs may not be recovered through increased sales’ (p.339). They therefore suggest that efforts to rebrand should be considered in the light of potential sales and benefits. While a change of brand identity might be deemed to be initially successful, if it does not ultimately bring financial dividends, then there is little point embarking on this work. Knapp (1999) highlights the damage this can cause, pointing out how mistakes by staff or directors or even bad buying decisions or poor service can all chip away at a brand and redefine it, not always improving it:

Many once-formidable brands have lost their clout and distinction through poor management. The brand name survives, but its value erodes. Profit margins, market share and loyalty decline. Ultimately, the power of the brand dissolves, presenting a huge corporate loss (p.72).
He goes on,

To be a strong brand, a company must instil a clear, unwavering consumer perception of the distinctive emotional or functional benefits of its products and services. At the end of the day, the brand is the sum total of the consumer’s impressions about the product and service. The less distinctive these impressions, the greater the risk that a competitor’s products or services may gain a stronger perception - and competitive advantage (p.73).

Here, Knapp explains the danger of businesses failing to understand their own brand power and the repercussions of failing to maintain the values associated with the brand. He underlines the definition of brand as being the consumers’ perceptions and also points out the ‘emotional and functional benefits’ associated with the brand which are experienced by the consumer. It would seem that the brand of a given company is therefore not something that can be changed on a whim, but is something that is built up, developed over time and can be changed not just by altering a window display or the colour of the fascia, but is subject to consumer perceptions of the wider aspects contributing to the brand, such as the quality of customer service that is experienced, and the emotional attachment that is made between consumer and, in this case, retailer.

Christopher et al (2002, p.219) point out the complexities inherent in any attempt to change brand identity, and how these must be considered as a whole:

Changing a company’s superficial identity may signal a change of direction, but it will have no significant or lasting cultural impact. To change its culture successfully a business needs to back up its intentions with actions. The company needs to confirm its strategic intent with a series of coherent actions such as doing things in new ways, communicating the effects and using some events symbolically to shed light on the meaning of these new ways.

We see that Christopher, too, emphasises the deep-rooted conception of the brand that seems to be held by consumers. The concept of the brand once again is defined as being a much deeper construct than that of projected image: more, it is an emotional attachment; a perception based on past experience(s) of a particular retail store.
Christopher’s assessment of the superficial changes often made to the identity of businesses, sheds new light on the frequent ‘rebranding’ undertaken by many chain bookshops (Rickett, 2003b; Fraser, 2005). It would seem that any updating or rebranding should be done with caution since rebranding done badly may do damage to a brand. In a similar vein, Simms (2002) warns against the use of advertising as a last ditch attempt to salvage a foundering brand. As Simms says, if it is used to shore up a brand that is already in trouble, the initiative has been undertaken at too late a stage. The above writers on branding emphasise the importance of brand monitoring and maintenance and are clear that the perception of brand image by consumers cannot be changed by altering colours, logos or fascia design.

Brands naturally evolve and grow but at some point it may become necessary for businesses to revisit their initial aims and objectives in order to make sure that brand integrity is maintained, or if it needs to change, that strategies are in place to allow this to happen (Miller, 1998). Ros Hines, then long-term Brand Development Manager at Waterstone’s, also believes that it is possible to ‘change the feel’ of a bookshop without changing the actual fixtures and fittings. This might be done by changing the layout or merchandising techniques or ‘by introducing leather seating, reading tables or even a vase of flowers. All can influence customer perceptions of a shop, even if money for a refit is not forthcoming’ (Sanderson, 2001b, p.27). It is interesting to reflect on this comment, however, in the light of what was noted by Christopher et al (2002, p.219) with regard to ‘changing a company’s superficial identity’. It is according to Christopher, merely a ‘signal’, but it will have no significant or lasting cultural impact unless it is consistently backed up by actions. It would seem, therefore, that flowers for example should be seen for what they are, rather than being symbolic of any deeper change or cultural shift.

3.2.11.2.3 Branding – advantages for the buyer
There are many important advantages which an effective branding process can offer both the buyer and seller. Ferrell points out that ‘branding makes the customer buying process much more efficient because customers can locate and purchase products more easily than without branding’ (2008, p.197). Dibb (2006) concurs that brands ‘help customers identify the products they want and influence their purchase choices’ (p.316). Kotler concurs that ‘brand names help consumers identify products that might benefit them (2006, p.243). Signs and symbols which we recognise as representing brands which we like, are shortcuts through the decision process model, discussed
elsewhere in the literature review, helping the consumer to shorten the ‘evaluation of alternatives’ section, and move quickly and efficiently to a purchase. It is therefore clear that effective branding holds clear advantages for the consumer. Effective branding is of course extremely beneficial to the seller also, as it cuts out the danger of any evaluation of alternatives – another step in the decision process model - where the consumer may be tempted to try an alternative to the branded product. A vital part of the whole branding process is that it is distinctive, and easily separable in the minds of consumers, from other comparable products. (Or, in the current research, that bookshops are distinguishable from each other). Crucially, Dibb notes that ‘without [a brand], companies could not differentiate their products and shoppers’ choices may, essentially, be arbitrary’ (ibid). Effective branding can help consumers quickly identify what they do and do not like, thus saving time in the overall purchasing process, another benefit of effective branding. Without effective branding, the purchase process becomes more randomised – there are no cues to distinguish between products.

Dibb reiterates (ibid) that ‘branding provides benefits for both buyers and sellers’. It can help buyers to quickly identify specific products that they do and do not like, thus facilitating purchase of products that satisfy their needs and reducing the time needed to buy that product. Without brands, product selection would be quite random, because buyers could have no assurance that they were purchasing what they preferred. Furthermore, the effective use of brands helps buyers evaluate the quality of a product, especially when they are unable to evaluate its characteristics. Therefore, a purchaser for whom a brand symbolises a certain quality level will transfer that perception of quality to the unknown item which bears a familiar brand. A brand thus can help to reduce a buyer’s perceived risk of purchase. For example, one might speculate that a consumer might feel more confident buying a book from Waterstone’s, if they are familiar with that brand, than from a supermarket, or perhaps an independent store with which they are not familiar. Similarly, one might speculate in a similar fashion about familiar publishers being perceived as a lesser risk (an assurance of quality) rather than unknown publishers. Even the ‘author as brand’ might be a more confident purchase requiring less thought for the consumer, than the unknown brand of a new author. In addition it may offer the psychological reward that comes from owning a brand that symbolises status (Dibb, p.317). This is exemplified in the current research by a focus group participant who values her purchases of books from Waterstone’s more highly than those from Asda. Taking a moment to further consider the relevance of this to the current research, we can see that the emphasis upon brand distinction has resonance in the current situation of UK high street bookselling. Given the
homogeneity which can be said to apply to the chain bookshops, it is possible that this lack of brand distinction has the concomitant effect of failing to pass on the advantages inherent to effective branding, as outlined above. While some discussion has been undertaken about branding in the context of books and authors, nevertheless, central to the current research is the brand identity of bookshops, and consumer responses to those.

3.2.11.2.4 Branding – advantages for the seller
Sellers also benefit from branding because each company’s brands identify its products, which makes repeat purchasing easier for consumers. As Kotler says, ‘the brand name becomes the basis on which a whole story can be built about a product’s special qualities’ (2006, p.244). In the context of the current research we can substitute ‘bookshop’ for ‘product’ and we can appreciate the importance of a strong, distinct brand identity. Branding helps a company introduce a new product that carries the name of one or more of its existing products because buyers are already familiar with the company’s existing brands (Dibb, p.318). In this context, again, one can see the relevance and importance of effective branding to the sellers. However, again, given that there is so much focus upon the homogeneity of identity across chain bookshops, one wonders if the advantages to the seller are as significant as they might be. Again, this is discussed in more detail in the Conclusions chapter.
Ferrell (2008, p.197) sets out in more detail, some advantages of branding for consumers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product Identification</th>
<th>Customers can easily identify the brands they like</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comparison Shopping</td>
<td>Assists customers in comparing and evaluating competing products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping Efficiency</td>
<td>Speeds up the buying process and makes repeat purchases easier by reducing search time and effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Reduction</td>
<td>Allows customers to buy a known quantity, thereby reducing the risk of purchase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product Acceptance</td>
<td>New products under a known brand name are accepted and adopted more easily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Self-Image</td>
<td>Brands convey status, image or prestige</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Product Loyalty</td>
<td>Branding increases psychosocial identification with the product</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reviewing these advantages in more detail, one can see the connection between the advantages to be had when effective branding is in place, and the decision process model. In particular, it is clear that the stages of ‘information search’ and ‘evaluation of alternatives’ will be swifter processes. ‘Postpurchase evaluation’, it seems safe to assume, would more frequently be positive, if customer-favoured brands are adhered to. Examining the above list of advantages to the consumer pointed out by Dibb, in the context of bookselling, one can see how the first five categories might be applied to either the author, or the publisher as brand. Familiarity with a particular author would help consumers with the purchasing process, encouraging them to buy swiftly and confidently. Furthermore, recognition of a particular publisher as a reliable brand (Lonely Planet for example) would have a similar effect. However, more specifically, in the current research we are interested in the bookshop as brand. Customers can certainly easily identify the brands they like, whether this is Waterstone’s, Borders, Amazon or an independent store. However, given the amount of product crossover between high street chains, and the crossover of those titles being discounted, the distinction is arguably irrelevant. It is at this point, that one can see the advantage of Amazon, enabling customers to quickly check price and availability of titles online, thus
‘reducing search time and effort’ much more effectively than any high street chain might do. One could certainly argue that high street chains still have elements of ‘status, image or prestige’ which might be conveyed during purchase. This would seem to be a key advantage which chain bookshop brands have over Amazon at least at the moment. While Amazon is an incredibly strong brand, the idea of prestige or status associated to Amazon purchases is not currently an issue.

In summary the key advantages of branding to the consumer seem to be to do with easing the purchase; making clear what the consumer wants through distinction of products. Brand distinction would therefore seem to be particularly important for chain bookshops given the overlap in product range which they stock. It is in this situation where distinctive brand identity and clear targeted marketing would seem to become important for chain bookshops. Consumer perception of brand distinction is set out in the Results chapter and further debated in the Conclusions chapter.

### 3.2.11.2.5 Brand Alliances

Relationships with other firms are among the most important competitive advantages that can be held by an organisation. Many of these relationships are based on joint branding strategies. Cobranding is the use of two or more brands on one product. It is successful because the complementary nature of the brands used on a single product increases perceived quality and customer familiarity. For example, Costa at Waterstone’s is becoming more entrenched as a brand association in consumers’ minds. However, it is another example of the very similar approaches to marketing that chain bookshops take, that there is a similarly strong association between Starbucks and Borders. One can understand how identities of chain bookshops become blurred in consumers’ minds.

### 3.2.11.3 The bookshop as a brand

The concept of the bookshop as a brand is referred to in work by Royle, Cooper and Stockdale (1999). In their article investigating branding of books by publishers, Royle et al conclude;

> The use of research to establish how the book buying public perceives the publishing industry is still relatively rare and many questions remain unanswered. We have not attempted to include book retailers in this study
and they obviously have an effect on how brands are perceived, standing as they do between the consumer and the publisher. Retailers also have their own distinctive brands and are becoming more brand conscious as competition in the high street increases (p.12).

Although the aforementioned researchers were primarily concerned with publishers and authors as brands, they crucially identify the lack of research into the impact of the book retailers’ brand image, and what the effect is on the perception of books by the bookshop visitor.

There is considerable literature in the trade press covering rebranding in chain bookshops (Rickett, 2003b; Fraser, 2005), as well as documentation of the considerable changes which have taken place in chain bookshops over the last few years. These have largely been the adoption of coffee shops, following the US model, and a move towards the ‘lifestyling’ of bookshops, evidenced not only by coffee shops, but also by the introduction of sofas and browsing areas (Kreitzman, 1999a; Sanderson, 1999, 2001b). This is obviously relevant to the research project, given that consumer responses to marketing strategies is at the core of the research.

It is possible to understand branding in bookshops as being contributed to by the individual brand identity of each book. Unlike many other kinds of retail store, every book - although perhaps conforming to type - is different, so ‘with each new publication, there is what might be thought of as a reinvention and each reinvention may reaffirm the brand or erode the brand and each of these may be different depending on which customer you ask’ (Cooper, 1998). Therefore, not only does the bookshop have to contend with the books impacting on brand, the impact depends on the perception of the customer. While consumer perception is vital in every retail outlet, nevertheless, bookshops are perhaps unique when considering the variety of books that are published and the potential impact upon store identity.

The dynamic nature of the book trade makes the maintenance of brand integrity - for publishers as well as for booksellers - a highly complex matter. It can be argued that the brand of the publisher, the author and the bookshop is redefined each time a new book is published and sold in a bookshop as noted by Cooper (ibid). Herman (2003, p.709) examines ‘the marketing of an author through the integration of their persona into their text to form a brand that can then be purchased by the consuming reader with confidence’, therefore suggesting the unique bond between author and text as a brand.
in itself. This particular understanding of the impact which author persona has on the brand of a book is not a new one, as Herman examines the work of Delarivier Manley writing from the mid-seventeenth to the mid eighteenth centuries and how this author herself was aware of this situation.

3.2.11.4 Bookshop events
While an increase in sales is an obvious immediate goal for any bookshop event such as an author visit or signing, bookshops also hope to recoup their financial outgoings for these events in the form of intangibles i.e. the strengthening of the brand (Killick, 1998). A successful bookshop event may not only raise the profile of the author, sell some books and perhaps bring people into the shop who are not usual visitors, but can also help differentiate the brand identity of one bookshop from another, underlining the notion of a successful brand. The widespread adoption of bookshop events and bookshops’ burgeoning events diaries also seem to provide evidence of an effort to provide a ‘lifestyle’ experience in bookshops – a broader attempt to develop the brand of many bookshops. Other commonly adopted initiatives in bookshops include in-store coffee shops. While this may seem a harmless effort to entice more people into bookshops, Corstjens and Corstjens (in Kent, 2003) comment that common ‘brand extensions’- such as coffee shops – ‘can obscure meaningful distinctions between products and store image’ (p.134). This underlines the importance of brand image and ensuring that any brand extensions adopted by a business does not impact upon the existing brand integrity. This is of particular relevance to chain bookshops who have adopted coffee shops almost without exception. The research investigates consumer responses to brand extensions and the impact they have on such buying behaviour.

3.2.11.5 The role of the bookseller
The concept of what brand really is, is taken further by Stallard in his PhD thesis “Consumption and Identity in the World of the Book” (1999). In his interviews with various Waterstone’s directors, the concept of brand is identified as being inextricably linked to the person who answers the phone; the level of customer service given on the shop floor and the range of books sold. It is conceptualised as an all-encompassing quality and as such it is imperative that the brand identity of the company is understood and supported by everyone in the business. As one Waterstone’s director participating in Stallard’s research said,

You (the bookseller) are the brand as much as we are the brand in a way that is not the case in a more centralised retailer. The booksellers are
integral to the brand in a way that the staff are probably not in another retailer.

This opinion is worth investigation, particularly with regard to online bookselling where there clearly is no ‘real’ bookseller. It raises the question of how the brand is perceived by online consumers, and if there is some kind of substitute relationship present, instead of a bookseller.

This particular director goes on to evaluate what a brand is, in the context of bookselling:

[It is]... the emotional response that people have... it’s to do with how you felt when you got it [a book] in your bag and came out.

Here, we see that the brand has very little to do with signage or colour of livery, but is defined as an ‘emotional response’ to a particular experience.

Writing in the book trade journal *The Bookseller*, Mary Spillane identifies the importance of inclusiveness with regard to staff, in any branding or rebranding projects. ‘If staff do not buy into the culture and what the company is trying to communicate to others, they are losing the company business’ (2000, p.24). She underlines the fact that branding is not merely new signage above the shop door, or new letterheads or a shop refit. If there is a lack of belief, for whatever reason, in brand integrity then the effectiveness has been greatly diminished. Travis (2001, p.15) supports this definition of brand saying: ‘You are your brand in everything you do, from the way you answer your phone to the way you answer your conscience’. Here, both Spillane and Travis make clear the importance that personnel play in the maintenance of brand identity. If we accept that consumer perception of brand is closely linked to the kinds of experiences they have with that brand, then clearly the link with the retailer through any personnel is a vital one, where customer service is of paramount importance.

The vital role played by employees in the brand of a company is further endorsed by Eileen Campbell, then a publisher with Thorsons, an offshoot of HarperCollins publishing. When they were spending £500,000 relaunching the Thorsons brand, the importance of brand belief from everyone in the company was underlined by Campbell. ‘I wouldn’t employ anyone, from secretarial level up, who wasn’t passionate about the field’ (Rickett, 1999, p.31). Furthermore, she acknowledges the time it takes to
establish brand values, as well as the importance of consistency in maintaining these values. In the broader context of retailing, Knee (2002, p.522) writes about the ‘unique value of people’ and the important role they play in supporting and maintaining the brand. It would therefore seem that consumer perception of brand or even relationship with brand can sometimes be represented by their relationship with the personnel representing that brand and the kind of experiences they encounter. Once again this raises interesting questions about the online context. If booksellers are vital, why is online bookselling so successful? Does the absence of a ‘real’ bookseller online remove the possibility of a negative interaction? Can booksellers therefore be seen as a liability? As one bookshop expert commented in an interview for the current research, ‘any bookshop is only as good as its worst bookseller’. These ideas are explored in the thesis.

3.2.11.6 Human associations with brands
Beyond the associations or qualities which a brand may represent to any particular consumer, it is crucial to realise that branding is now recognised as having a deeper significance. From the establishment of certain brands in the mid-nineteenth century where particular names stood for reliability, recognised packaging and a consistency of standards, brand managers are now concerned with brand personality, values and culture and the communication of personality (Kent, 2003). In order to appreciate the complexity and significance of brands and branding, we must understand that although purchasing branded goods satisfies rational needs, purchasing a particular brand can also satisfy ‘emotional ones, by facilitating and simplifying the consumer’s choice process through behavioural shortcuts, habit and perception’ (ibid, p.132). Familiar brands supply ‘shortcuts’, relieving the consumer from the need to make choices, but ‘perception’ of brand is also important in its selection, so once again we see how significant the relationship between consumer and brand can be.

In some instances, a customer’s primary identification is with a company and how they see themselves reflected in that company’s image. In other instances, the customer’s primary relationship is to a product or collection of products (Durfee & Chen, 2002, p.15).

Here, Durfee and Chen expand upon the importance of the consumer’s associations with brands and brand image, whether that image be represented by the brand associations which the consumer has with the products, or with the store itself. It would
seem possible then, according to Durfee and Chen, for the relationship which a consumer has with a brand, to be with an entire store. In this case, it would seem that the whole store can be seen to encompass the brand as it is conceptualised by them. Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998) delve deeper into individual human associations with brands, pointing out the feelings of nostalgia and comfort which may be elicited when particular brands are experienced;

Brands that we have lived experience with may acquire a depth of meaning during sensitive periods unattainable by brands at later stages in our lives. If we have frequent sensual experience, particularly olfactory experience, with brands during childhood, then at later stages of our lives we may use them in nostalgic activity, and/or to restore a sense of security (p.132).

Here, Elliott and Wattanasuwan seem to extend the idea of emotional links to brands, by underlining how experiences with brands at ‘sensitive’ periods' during our lives may cause us to form a firm attachment with them. The authors further extend the concept of consumer links to brands, by underlining the ‘sensual’ relationship which it is possible to have with them. Although they single out olfactory experiences, one might by extension, suggest tactile experiences with goods play a part in brand perception.

Palmer (1996) points out: ‘There is an extensive literature on the emotional relationship that consumers develop between a brand and their own perceived or sought personality’ (p.253). Consumers have been shown to purchase particular brands which represent emotional desires or satisfy what they perceive as peer pressure. Palmer contends that: ‘Some products are bought for their conspicuous consumption…For this reason some segments of markets…are likely to continue to seek an emotional relationship through a brand’ (p.255). Although in this instance, Palmer is referring to sectors where one would expect this sort of conspicuous consumption to take place, such as the clothing industry and the soft drink industry, nevertheless, one might extend this idea of emotional relationship with a brand to the context of the book trade. This aspirational element of shopping, and relationships with brands is explored further in section 3.4. It might also be argued that consumers may in fact purchase books, or particular books, because they represent a ‘perceived or sought personality’(ibid, p.253) and that the buying process and/or the reading process is part of the conspicuous consumption process.
3.2.11.7 Distinguishing between different consumers

Travis states ‘products may leave your factory by the thousands a day, but they are sold one at a time’ (2001, p.14). Here, Travis emphasises the importance of understanding the consumer, as well as the vital importance of understanding that consumers are not one homogenous mass, but a group, or several groups, made up of individuals. These individuals represent different demographic groups, desires, aims and aspirations and as such, it is helpful for the retailer to attempt to understand their needs. Identification of the target market or markets is of prime importance, according to Van Mesdag, and the product should be developed according to that identity:

The first and prevalent priority of the brand owner... is to determine the exact group of people for whom it caters and, thence, the establishment, maintenance, strengthening and growth of the brand. Products and services are the transitory tools through which the brand functions (1997, p.158).

Van Mesdag prescribes a consumer-oriented approach to branding, with the importance of identifying one’s customers, of paramount importance. It would seem that, for Van Mesdag, it is only with this knowledge in place, that any business can then go on to think about brand growth. Fifield (in Kent, 2003) also makes the point about knowing the group of consumers that you are catering for, saying that: ‘Brand selection is based on experience and expectation; it appeals to a discrete group of buyers, indeed to consistently succeed it must maintain an affinity with a defined group’ (p.132). This would seem to sound a note of caution with respect to book trade market expansion or growth, if one is to maintain strong links with an established market. Nevertheless, it is also important to remember that according to de Chernatony & McDonald (1998, p.78) ‘marketers should not regard each consumer in a target segment as being equally attractive and assume that the same brand marketing strategies are equally appropriate across all the target segment’. This segmentation of the market serves to identify similarities as well as differences across different groups of consumers (Johnson and Scholes, 2002, p.128; Zikmund, McLeod and Gilbert, 2003). Therefore, while retailers can think of themselves as appealing to particular economic or social groups, nevertheless, it is vital that they bear in mind that these groups are made up of sub-groups and that these sub-groups can be broken down until they are groups of individual consumers with very separate profiles, wants and needs.
Underhill (1999, p.29) extends this idea by referring to the fact that stores may have ‘more than one constituency. Sometimes they co-exist in perfect harmony, other times they want nothing to do with each other’. So not only does the marketer have to select the target segment, the strategies adopted might need to be appropriate for the whole of what might be a wide sociological segment, depending on the particular approach taken. With regard to attempting to expand one’s market, Van Mesdag says, ‘by seeking to extend one’s target group of customers to types of customers not hitherto catered for, one may estrange one’s original, faithful, long-standing customers’ (1997, p.159). He goes on to add that any rebranding may not necessarily attract enough new customers to make up for the loss of these old ones. This is a crucially important point for retailers to bear in mind, particularly given that ‘rebranding’ seems to be taking place constantly in many retailers, and is especially evident in chain bookshops. Retailers may have to bear in mind that these mixed groups of consumers may not necessarily want to shop, or even browse alongside each other, according to Underhill.

It is interesting to note that this gives online bookselling an advantage over traditional bookselling: one never has to stand next to someone when shopping online. A further distinction between customer groups must be made when considering existing, as opposed to new customers. Christopher et al (2002, p.47) say ‘companies need to apply different strategies to new and existing customers and allocate differing portions of the marketing budget to them’. Christopher therefore advocates being very clear about strategies with regard to the retention of existing customers, as opposed to the gaining of new ones. (This topic is further examined in section 3.3).

The maintenance of brand integrity and the brand message is a complex business, if one takes all of these aspects of branding on board. Of course this is not to suggest that a particular target market will remain loyal to a particular brand for life. That was perhaps once the case, but consumers now have a different attitude to brands and brand loyalty. Each buying decision is considered afresh (Underhill, 1999, p.32). It would seem that consumers are now more sophisticated than ever before when making buying decisions and this presents fresh challenges to brand strategists concerned with the establishment, maintenance and development of brands.
3.3 Consumer Relationship Management

3.3.1 Understanding CRM
In any retail business, the relationship between buyer and seller is recognised as being a vital part of business success. The management of that relationship is known as consumer relationship management or CRM. The relationship between consumer and seller is managed in order to ensure consumer satisfaction, and therefore, the loyalty of existing customers and to attract new customers, the ultimate aim being to increase revenue. McGoldrick points out the importance of managing this relationship, in order to have a ‘clear understanding of consumer needs, motives and patronage decision processes’ (2002, p.86). He goes on to say that without this understanding of the consumer, there is a ‘tendency for strategy formulation to dwell upon the range of existing solutions, rather than developing formats to satisfy specific sets of consumer requirements’ (ibid). Palmer (1996) points out that consumer relationship marketing may be approached very differently depending on the business concerned. For instance, one approach to CRM might be to develop a database of information about the purchaser, where the business concerned draws out information about that purchaser, built up over a period of time, from what they buy, how often they buy and other purchasing patterns. This then enables the retailer or manufacturer to target the purchaser when promoting particular products which may seem relevant, or to offer loyalty schemes in an effort to ensure the purchaser is more inclined to buy from that store alone.

However, another more complex assessment of relationship marketing is what Palmer describes as the philosophical level of relationship marketing, where the lifetime needs of the consumer are focused upon, rather than the products of the retailer or manufacturer. Most relationship marketing carried out by businesses falls somewhere between these two approaches, with a deeper philosophical approach balanced by a need for information about the consumer in order that their needs be catered for, and they be encouraged to be more loyal. It is therefore clear that the ‘relationship’ referred to here is more complex than merely a transactional relationship between buyer and seller, although that too is encompassed by CRM. As Palmer goes on to point out, the development of a relationship with the consumer is not appropriate for every retailer or manufacturer; products such as milk or bread do not lend themselves to developing loyalty or a relationship between buyer and seller.
3.3.2 The bookseller/consumer relationship

When one considers the role of the bookshop, it would certainly seem to lend itself to the development of this sort of relationship between retailer and book buyer. By their very nature, books can be purchased from a range of sites, both in the high street as well as online and in the supermarket. With this in mind, it would seem that relationship marketing has an important role to play in the strategic development of the bookshop. However, marketing consultant Damian Horner makes some salient points about the changing role of booksellers (Horner, 2005, p.24). He comments that customer service is currently driven by technology and that great book knowledge of booksellers is no longer essential. As he says:

- It is less impressive for a member of staff to know what's “a good read at the moment” when books are displayed in a Top 30 format.
- It is less special when a book is ordered for you, now that we can all do it on Amazon.
- It is less necessary to know what staff think about a book when the internet provides an endless source of reviews.
- Even the basics – knowing when a book is coming out – are less clever when we know that any fool can look it up on a computer.

Horner’s observations would seem to suggest that the role of the bookseller is far less important than it once was. However, the quality of personal contact with a bookseller is one element which online bookselling and technology cannot - yet- capture. The importance of this personal contact as well as the knowledge and service in several aspects of bookselling, is examined in this research.

Palmer points out, ‘Where services are complex and involve a high degree of buyer uncertainty, the likelihood of customers seeking a relationship is increased’ (Berry 1983, Lovelock 1983, in Palmer, 1996, p.252). This implies that a study of consumer relationship management would be relevant in the case of bookselling: the very nature of bookshops is such that advice is sometimes sought from the bookseller when the customer has perhaps only part of the information necessary to identify the book required, or to establish whether an item is in stock, or available to order. Recommendations may also be sought. While it is arguable that the relationship
between bookseller and customer in a bookshop may have changed in recent years, given the prevalence of mass market titles and diminution of specialist titles, especially in the chain bookshops, this will be further examined in the research to be carried out, and in the subsequent. Nevertheless, it is frequently the case that the particular nature of the information needed by book buyers is such that catalogues or internet access is not able to help – for example a television tie-in title where only the presenter’s name is remembered, or perhaps a book where only the striking cover design is recalled by the consumer (although some online sites now offer this facility).

These examples would seem to underline the importance of the relationship between bookseller and customer in the bookshop environment. Indeed the specific craft of ‘hand selling’ – giving the customer the benefit of one’s knowledge and experience and being able to recommend alternatives is cited as a source of increased sales in Borders bookshops (see Results chapter, section 4.1.9). Hand selling can be differentiated from customer service by being more focused on developing a relationship with the customer, tuning in to their particular likes and dislikes and – specifically – being able to recommend titles for that specific consumer. This is designed to overcome consumer uncertainty about titles or choices and to focus upon what is suitable for that individual. Research by Underhill also demonstrates a direct relationship between shopper-employee contact and size of sale: ‘The more shopper-employee contacts that take place, the greater the average sale. Talking with an employee has a way of drawing a customer in closer’ (1999, p.37). It would seem that if these relationships between consumer and bookseller have not already been developed by chain bookshops, there is great potential for increased sales if these kinds of relationships are nurtured. This is also a vital point to consider in the context of online bookselling. The personalisation of a relationship between bookseller and consumer can clearly not take place in any kind of traditional sense in an online bookshop. However, the personalisation of online bookselling with ‘personal’ recommendations when one signs in and ease of access to customer reviews may be viewed as a kind of bookseller substitute. They may even be more effective than a ‘real’ bookseller. These issues are examined in the research.

As mentioned earlier, it is perceptions which are important when looking at customer attitudes towards booksellers, a point which is frequently made by academics studying branding. Weitzel, Schwarzkopf and Peach (in Babin, Babin and Boles, 1999) found that customer perception of service was vital in determining store performance. Should the salesperson be the only contact with the particular retail outlet, then for that
consumer, the salesperson is the firm. Given that for most people visiting a bookshop, their only contact with the store will be with a bookseller, even if it is only at the point of purchase, consumer perception of the bookseller and the relationship – if any – that exists between them, is worthy of exploration.

Previous research reveals the myriad of expectations which consumers have of sales people, such as ‘being visible; disseminating information, identifying consumer needs, implementing social controls’, and even ‘providing emotional and rational support to the customer’ (Babin et al, 1999, p.92). The hypothesis of Babin et al is that while the product may meet expectations, should the sales person however, fall beneath expectations, then the product may not be purchased. Clearly there is a far greater immediate financial impact on the retailer when a consumer decides not to purchase a car, as in the research of Babin et al, rather than a book, but the hypothesis that salespeople can have a negative effect on consumer purchase intention if they do not satisfy consumer expectation, is one that can be considered in the book retailing environment and is of particular importance, given the current intensely competitive environment of bookselling. It is also arguable that the impact of the quality of customer service provision from a particular retailer over time, can be compound and significant, whether it is good or bad. While the findings of Babin’s study underline the fundamental and overriding importance of the consumer’s attitude towards the product, nevertheless:

The strong relationship between salesperson and retailer attitude makes it unlikely that a consumer would consider a dealership further once a bad interaction with a salesperson is experience. However, the relatively independent effect that attitude toward the product has on purchase intentions suggest that the consumer may still pursue the product at an alternative location (ibid, p.95).

If one applies this finding to the book trade, it would seem even more worrying for any traditional book retailer whose booksellers are not all offering excellent service. Given that Babin et al have found that a poor experience in store might simply mean that the consumer will purchase the same product elsewhere, this research would seem to be very relevant for the book trade. It is very easy for most people to buy a particular book at an alternative store, supermarket, or if access to a bookshop is not easy, then online. Attitudes towards booksellers and experiences with them are therefore to be examined in the research.

136
Christopher (2002) recommends further research in the field of customer service in order to identify critical service issues (p.172). He also makes the crucial point that customers tend to change their minds about what is important. Therefore, he proposes that not only must customer satisfaction be measured in any study of customer service, but tracing studies should be carried out, in order to illuminate both emerging and critical service issues (ibid, pp.170, 171). Finally, he points out that ‘companies often gain the most important insights from customers during dialogue at the qualitative research stage’ (ibid, p.173). This provides support for the qualitative data collection stages of this research, given that bookshop users are asked to discuss their bookshop experiences in some detail. Christopher’s recommendations clearly have implications for the book trade, and seem to encourage bookshops to engage with customers in order to gain a deeper insight into what customers actually want from their bookshops. Given the success of online stores, it is also important to consider the role of the bookseller in these environments and to examined how this has changed, if at all, since the advent of online bookselling.

Finally, Babin et al (1999) point out that while research on attitudes towards advertisements and their impact on purchasing intentions have been well researched, the impact of salespeople on purchase intentions and consumer attitudes towards stores is a relatively new field of research.

3.3.3 The interpretive role of the bookseller

Spiro and Weitz say (in Babin et al, 1999, p.92): ‘Research… indicates that successful sales people…adapt their presentation and style to the needs of each customer’. Solomon comments, albeit in a different context, that we are ‘different selves for different people’ (2002, p.134). It would therefore seem that the role of the salesperson in a retail environment is a crucial one and for maximum effectiveness the salesperson should continually adjust their style of customer service to suit the person they are serving. Although Babin et al (1999) are studying major purchases and salesperson influence in car showrooms, it is nevertheless interesting to consider how their findings might be applied in a wider retail setting. According to Babin et al, ‘A superior sales force can provide a retail firm with a competitive advantage by improving the image of the retailer in the mind of the consumer’ (ibid, p.95). With this in mind, the study by Babin et al therefore points out that if bad service is forthcoming at a particular site, it is the outlet that is disadvantaged rather than the product. This also serves to underline the importance of the brand identity which is projected to the consumer, and the vital
role played by the sales person in that identity, as discussed in the branding section (3.2.6).

In their research, Menon & Dube (2000) concentrate on the abilities of staff to attune to the emotional state of their customers and read interpersonal cues, in adapting their response. The fact that marketers and planners in charge of branding concentrate on store layout and design is pointed out, but the role of the staff in this regard is often dealt with in a much more cursory fashion. As Menon and Dube point out in their research, angry customers often experienced angry responses from the sales people – according to the customers’ own perceptions – whereas they expected pacifying responses i.e. apologies and sympathy. It is not clear whether an angry response from a salesperson necessarily alienates the customer to such a degree that they shop elsewhere, but it is clearly an element of salesperson training which it is imperative to cover. Indeed, the findings of Menon & Dube confirm that it is far more frequent to find that ‘salesperson responses were aligned to the normative expectations accompanying delight and joy’ (p.302). To paraphrase, if the customer is happy, the salesperson is more likely to respond in a positive way, which the customer expects. However, if the customer is unhappy, the expected response from the salesperson, whether it be sympathy, patience or apologies, is much less likely to occur. Menon & Dube found in many cases that when the customer was unhappy or angry, the salesperson response often mirrored the anger or they were impatient or rude. It is also interesting to note that the study undertaken by Menon & Dube was asking selected subjects to recall either positive (joy or delight) or negative emotions (anger or anxiety) experienced whilst in a retail environment. As the authors comment in their discussion: ‘Results show that customers have clear recollection of episodes of specific emotions’ (ibid, p.303).

If these recollections of specific emotions have the power to affect consumer perceptions of the brand, then these study results are relevant to the book trade and to booksellers. As Menon and Dube report, the fact that the respondents were able to recall not only positive but negative emotions experienced, in a considerable amount of detail, would seem to illustrate that consumers have very good memories of distinct experiences, whether those experiences be positive or negative. This clearly has implications for the role of the bookseller in traditional bookshops when interacting with consumers, and especially when dealing with difficult customers. Again, the authors point out the limitations of their research, having used a student sample and limited the experiences described to two specific types of retail store. They conclude by calling for
more research in the area of consumer response and emotion and resulting salesperson response strategies.

3.3.4 Differentiating consumer needs

In his paper on the integration of brand development and relationship marketing, Adrian Palmer (1996) points out the historically separate routes which research into these subjects have taken and how a more integrated approach would be beneficial to experts in each area. He also points out that brands have always been strongly linked with manufactured goods whereas relationships have been more strongly linked with services. One might argue that the bookshop is the retail environment which most strongly exemplifies the bond between these two historically separate streams. While the study of the many different interrelationships which are possible within a retail environment is not a new one, Palmer points out the relatively recent concentration on these relationships by organisations, due to the realisation that good product quality is not enough for a company to gain competitive advantage. Palmer emphasises the importance of other qualities implicit in the brand of a product as being vital to its success. In the context of bookselling, given that the same products can often be bought in many different situations, this would seem to suggest the importance of other qualities of the bookshops.

Large organisations can now elicit detailed information about customer purchasing habits with relative ease, due to the emergence of sophisticated electronic databases, thus aiding the monitoring of purchase patterns. However, as Palmer (1996) says, different customers imbue the transactional relationship with different degrees of importance. Zikmund et al point out (2003, p.6) ‘a fundamental principle of marketing is that customers are different. Different customers represent different levels of profit for the firm’. Some may wish only to complete the transaction and be on their way, whereas others may wish to spend a longer time in store, or with the salesperson. Given this kind of instance the relationship developed with the salesperson takes precedence, perhaps even superseding the importance of the products required. Sheth & Parvatiyar (in De Wulf & Oderkerken-Schroder, 2003, p.97) found that ‘implicit in the idea of relationship marketing is consumer focus and consumer selectivity – that is, all consumers do not need to be served in the same way’. Thus, customers differ in their service expectations. Some transactions may be carried out with the minimum of contact, sometimes without even a word spoken, whereas another customer may wish to have a conversation with the bookseller. The salesperson has to be adaptable and
pick up on cues from the customer, with regard to the kind of experience they are seeking. These differences in consumer expectations should be borne in mind in the ensuing research.

3.3.5 Retaining loyal customers
Gilbert (2003, p.191) says: ‘Relationship management requires effective acquisition and retention of customers for the building of a more efficient operation and, ultimately, a stronger competitive position’. Here, Gilbert emphasises the importance of not only acquiring new customers and expanding the customer base, but also the vital importance of customer retention, in order that the full economic value of the customer is realised by the business in question. In their study of clothing retailers, De Wulf and Oderkerken-Schroder (2003, p.104) conclude that ‘retailers can influence consumer trust by rewarding consumers for their patronage to the retailer’. The authors point out that one way of retaining customers is to reward them. Furthermore, if one considers, for the moment, consumer loyalty simply in terms of fiscal benefits for the retailer, it would seem to be imperative that loyalty is considered seriously in terms of benefit for the company as it is ‘5 to 10 times more expensive to recruit a new customer than to retain an existing one’ (Gilbert 2003, p.190). This statistic is based on the costs of prospecting for new customers, new advertising costs and other associated expenses. De Kare-Silver also points out the prime importance of customer retention. ‘Numerous studies show that retaining a customer pays back many times…studies also show that customers who keep coming back typically spend increasing amounts with the same supplier’ (1998, p.222).

Schiffman and Kanuk (2004) point out the other advantages to any business, served by retaining loyal customers:

- They tend to buy more products
- They are less price sensitive and pay less attention to competitors’ advertising
- Servicing existing customers is cheaper
- They tend to recommend the store in question to people they know (advocacy).

(From Schiffman and Kanuk, 2004, p.15)

This point about word of mouth of a business or ‘advocacy’ is also made by Christopher et al (2002) where they point out that customers’ referrals to their friends
and relatives are ‘much more powerful and effective than advertising’ (p.89). Therefore from a purely fiscal point of view – leaving behind any moral duty regarding customer loyalty - it will pay the supplier/retailer to keep customers loyal. De Kare-Silver (1998) also raises the interesting point that the customer spend will increase as customers keep coming back. It thus follows that the longer you can keep a customer the more financial dividends it will pay back. However, it is interesting to note what Christopher et al have to say on this point:

In mature markets and as competition intensifies, it becomes imperative for organisations to recognise that existing customers are easier to sell to and are frequently more profitable. But though managers may agree intellectually with this view, the practices within their organisations often tell a different story. They take existing customers for granted, while focusing their attention and resources on attracting new customers. Only when there is a breakdown in service quality and the customer leaves or is on the point of leaving does the company turn its attention to existing customers (2002, p.40).

The implication here is that a business can get so caught up in expanding their customer base, that they fail to maintain the service which valuable existing customers expect. It is important that this point is examined in the context of the bookselling research, given the competitive nature of the book trade and the ongoing search for new book buyers. Responses of long term consumers to the changes implemented in many bookshops are examined in the research.

3.3.6 The valuable customer
A quandary facing strategists in any retail industry where a key aim is to expand the customer base, is that if one succeeds, there is a good chance that some of the customers you net will simply not be profitable in the long term: if customers are spending only small amounts, but require a lot of time, attention and incur administrative costs, it raises the question of whether it is commercially viable to attract this new kind of customer into your store. Palmer (1996) points out that one has to bear in mind the differences in value of different customers and how CRM is not always appropriate for a fleeting customer, or one who will not be a frequent visitor to one’s store. It is interesting to note that this consideration is not one that online booksellers have, given the ‘self-service’ nature of online bookselling. Zikmund et al underline how
a more intelligent use of CRM by retailers means putting an emphasis on customer creation, but more especially, retention: ‘Firms strive to treat customers in a manner to repeat sales thus maximizing the lifetime value of customer relationships’ (2003, p.2). Ryals (2002, p.242) says:

Retail marketers can come to believe that profits come from products, not from customers. The focus then becomes selling more products and increasing market share. A new customer is treated as though he or she is equally as valuable as a long-term loyal customer.

It is noteworthy that Ryals makes the point that retailers need to recognise that consumers are the key to profits, rather than products. She continues;

Marketing strategies based on conventional profit-based thinking focus on increasing the returns from low value customers (2002, p.247).

However, by focusing on the existing, or long-standing customers, the value of the relationship between customer and vendor can be enhanced. Christopher et al (2002, p.5) write that ‘maximising the lifetime value of a customer is a fundamental goal of relationship marketing’. The implication being that work must be undertaken on the part of the business in order to ensure that any given consumer will remain valuable, i.e. loyal to that business and relatively high spending. The focus on value both for the retailer and for the consumer is key to long term profitability. These relationship benefits can sometimes ‘create greater value for a retailer than is obtained from the stream of customer profits’ (ibid). This kind of intangible value has arguably been overlooked by some traditional bookshops in their rush to draw in new consumers, regardless of their long term value. Retail academic Hugh Phillips asserts that: ‘Stores that have a clear segmentation and market positioning create sustainable loyalty’ (2003, p.24). Therefore, successful stores know their market, appreciate its value and work hard to retain that market.
3.4 Shopping

3.4.1 The role of the shopping experience
The importance of the shopping experience with regard to the forming of community bonds between people and its contribution to our emotional and social wellbeing is made plain by many researchers in this field (Miller, 1998; Satterthwaite, 2001; Underhill, 1999). It is widely accepted that shopping is not always solely a utilitarian experience, but is carried out in many cases to fulfil much more complex needs for the shopper. Research by Cartwright (2001) has already established that some book consumers ‘lose’ themselves while book shopping and Stallard (1999) also found that respondents in his research made suggestions to turn their local stores into ‘destinations’ with coffee shops. With this in mind, it is proposed that an examination of some of the literature examining theories of shopping is apposite for this research. It would appear that these theories have not yet been examined in this context and furthermore, given the adoption of a ‘lifestyle’ bookselling environment by many bookshops, the potential for bookshops in particular to contribute to our emotional and social wellbeing would seem to be worthy of examination.

It is interesting, and not a little ironic, to note that the very first shopping mall ever built - in the US, as one might expect - actually aimed to reproduce the classical ideal of citizenship and to evoke the spirit of the ancient Greek and Roman marketplace (Miles, 1998, p.60). The view of shopping malls and in the UK, shopping centres is now far removed from this classical ideal. There is widespread acknowledgement of globalisation and the fact that high streets in the UK are becoming less distinct from each other as the same companies move into prime retailing sites in towns and cities, as well as in the shopping centres and malls (ibid, p.63). This homogenisation of high streets and even of book retailers is frequently commented upon in the trade press (Taylor, 2005; Wilkinson, 2005; Smith and Sulaiman, 2005) and its effects on consumers have yet to be studied.

3.4.2 Reasons for shopping
Miller points out that ‘shopping is not about possessions per se, nor is it thought to be about identity per se. It is about obtaining goods, or imagining the possession and use of goods’ (1998, p.141). Miller seems to suggest that the obtaining, as well as the imagined possession and imagined use of goods is an important motivator for
purchase. These parts of the shopping experience might be applied to the process of buying books, particularly in the traditional sector (as opposed to online) given the adoption of lifestyle bookselling by many chain bookshops, as mentioned above. In their research into shopping in charity shops, Gregson, Crewe and Brooks (2002) found that the shoppers in charity shops construed the whole practice of shopping as a ‘treat’. Not just the actual purchase but the whole shopping experience. It was differentiated from other forms of shopping because of this and there was frequently no aspect of necessity attached to it – it was solely for pleasure. This kind of shopping is clearly defined from other kinds of shopping, such as grocery shopping, which has a utilitarian focus and could be seen as being a similar kind of shopping experience to that of book shopping. The idea of book shopping as ‘treat’ would therefore seem to be worthy of examination. Furthermore, given the distinctiveness of the online shopping experience, it would be interesting to see whether consumers also view online shopping in this way.

Chenet and Johansen (in McGoldrick 2002, p.87) refer to the ‘self-actualized consumer’. They go on, ‘We do not buy products and services anymore – more and more what we buy are concepts and experiences that build up our self-identity and uniqueness (what we eat, drink, wear, drive, where we live, what we do or want to do at work and in our free time, study, believe in, etc.).’ They seem to expand the idea of purchasing solely for using a product to a much wider concept, linked to the consumers’ wants and needs. This is closely linked to the concept of branding and how consumers perceive brands. Solomon (2002) has much to say about cultural values and how deeply they impact upon consumer behaviour. Here he comments upon the choice of product rather than the choice of shopping venue: ‘people often buy products not for what they do but for what they mean’ (p.319). There seems therefore to be a strong affective element at work in some kinds of shopping. Book shopping and reading in particular seems to offer scope for searching for meaning, and exploring one’s sense of self. Solomon continues, ‘In the same way that a consumer’s use of products influences others’ perceptions, the same products can help to determine his or her own self-concept and social identity’ (ibid). It would seem that Solomon is suggesting that the selection of products helps to build the consumers’ own sense of identity and self worth.

It is important to note that the literature examined above is referring to shopping in a wider context; often grocery shopping or in the case of Gregson et al (2002), charity shopping. Nevertheless, it is important to look at the concepts raised in the context of
book shopping, and to examine whether the idea of determination of self-worth; identity and uniqueness can be applied in this context to book shopping. Given that part of the research is concerned with experiences in bookshops, this would seem to be a relevant application of these ideas. Looking at shopping in a wider context, the move away from shopping in small shops and towards supermarket or online shopping is part of the sociological change which is affecting those of us living in urban areas. This can be seen to have important sociological effects if we are not partaking in the community and civic life as fully as we once were (Nozzi, 2004; Oldenburg, 1997). The decrease of these kinds of transactions in cities and towns means that we are not afforded the opportunity to build solid communities as we once did. As Satterthwaite says, ‘sociability in many of our day-to day activities, including shopping, is disappearing…with repeated face-to-face transactions [one can] build trust between people and establish a sense of place and time as well as a civic pride in towns and cities’ (2001, pp. 3,4). It is possible to view the bookshop in the 21st century as one of the few places where it is possible to go and browse or simply ‘be’ at leisure, where the pace of shopping is slower than in most other stores and where it is arguably possible to be a regular and build up a rapport with booksellers and even other customers, in a way which is simply not possible in most other retail environments. The research will examine whether any kind of relationship is, or can be, developed between book buyer and bookseller, as well as between bookshop customers, and whether the bookshop environment can facilitate any kind of relationship. Looking at this relationship building in the online environment, once again it would seem that this is going to be rather difficult, but this area is explored by the research.

Several retail theorists talk about the various social and personal motives which are the catalysts spurring us on to visit specific shops, or types of shops (see Satterthwaite, Underhill, Solomon etc., above). Tauber (in Gilbert, 2003, p.172) also suggests categories of social motivation for shopping. One category which he suggests is that of ‘social experience outside the home’. This part of the social motivation for shopping makes the whole concept of shopping sound at the very least like a hobby. Perhaps more accurately, shopping is more about social contact in an increasingly isolated world. The recently couched term ‘retail therapy’ suggests the soothing, enjoyable even rejuvenating qualities which may be found in this activity. ‘Peer group attraction’ is another category suggested by Tauber, and recalls the suggestions made by Solomon about aligning oneself with appropriate groups, perhaps even socially ‘aspirational’ groups. ‘Communication with others having a similar interest’ is another of Tauber’s suggested categories of social motivation and seems to fit with the idea of the
bookshop as a lifestyle destination and the efforts by bookshops to engender this kind of atmosphere, with coffee shops, sofas and browsing areas. All of these elements encourage the mixing of people with similar interests and merit examination in the ensuing research.

Maslow’s hierarchy model (1943) is a widely used theory of motivation and is applied to a broad range of contexts of study. It is in the form of a ranking of needs from the most basic to the most sophisticated, most usually represented visually as a triangle, as shown below.

![Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs](image)

**Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs**

Some psychologists have added a further layer for Beliefs and Spirituality

(Managing Change, 2001).

**Fig. 3.5 Maslow’s hierarchy**

Gilbert (2003, p.65) explains Maslow’s theory thus:
He [Maslow] argues that if some of the higher needs in the hierarchy were not satisfied, then the lower needs — the physiological ones — would dominate behaviour. If a lower need, or needs were satisfied, however, they would no longer motivate and the individual would be motivated by the next level in the hierarchy.

One can see represented in Maslow’s hierarchy some of the qualities or emotional states which might be satisfied by shopping, as outlined by Chenet and Johansen (in Solomon 2002) above. For example, fitting in with or impressing others; goods purchased in order to satisfy subconscious needs; the overall idea of the shopping experience as a treat. Indeed, it might be argued that book shopping supports the highest level of need — self-actualisation — in opening minds to new ideas and perspectives and in providing reinforcement for existing beliefs. The current research examines some of these ideas in the context of shopping for books, particularly regarding the kind of experience which consumers have in bookshops and their responses to bookshop surroundings.

3.4.3 Gender differences in shopping
The housewife, according to Miller, ‘sees her role as selecting goods which are intended to be educative, uplifting and in a rather vague sense morally superior’ (1998, p.18). Miller’s assessment of the ‘housewife’ is in the context of his research into grocery and household shopping. Miller is specifically referring to the female shopper in this instance and observes gender differences in the approach to shopping and the whole shopping experience. There is a notion of ‘care’ when women shop, ‘the embodiment of care in shopping [is] a largely female preserve’ (ibid, p.109) whereas men ‘find strategies of distancing themselves or at least of treating shopping as merely a pragmatic and utilitarian act’ (ibid). This deeper involvement in the act of shopping which has been found to apply to women means that in many cases, the process of shopping has the potential to represent very different experiences to the sexes. Underhill concurs with Miller’s differentiation between the sexes with regard to shopping:

In fact, it’s women, not men who plumb the metaphysics of shopping — they illuminate how we human beings go through life searching, examining, questioning, and then acquiring and assuming and absorbing the best of what we see. At that exalted level, shopping is a transforming experience, a
method of becoming a newer, perhaps even slightly improved person. The products you buy turn you into that other, idealized version of yourself (Underhill, 1999, p.116).

While this may not apply every time one visits the local corner shop, it can potentially be applied to some shopping excursions. This element of self-improvement or even transformation is worthy of further investigation in the context of book buying, and even in the context of one’s presence in a bookshop. Anecdotal evidence of the differences between the sexes in their approach to shopping has long been cited as a kind of joke, but it would seem that these differences do exist and are important to retail strategists. Gender differences in approaches to shopping will be examined in the bookselling research, therefore it is important to be aware of the theories pointed out by Miller and Underhill, above.

3.4.4 Impulse buying
In the retailing environment, and with regard to impulse buying in particular, Peter and Olson (in Coley and Burgess, 2003) found that: ‘Women have been found to be more aware and more concerned with their moods and in return more able and more motivated to change or maintain their feeling and moods compared with men’ (p.291). In the context of shopping, this would suggest that women are potentially more inclined to buy goods in order to maintain a desirable emotional state, or in order to reach a desirable emotional state, than are men. This would seem to be relevant for bookshop marketing, particularly when it comes to impulse buying, since,

it seems that women were likely to exhibit a greater tendency to shop under the influence of affective states than men. Previous research has shown that women tend to value emotional and symbolic possessions more than men for more emotional and relationship oriented reasons (ibid).

In conclusion, it was found that ‘positive buying emotion and mood management were the most significant components of the affective process’ (Coley and Burgess, 2003, p.292) and while women were found to be more susceptible to these atmospheric add-ons, it is thought that by emphasising product functionality, men could be made more inclined towards impulse buying. Given the constant efforts to increase sales by chain bookshops, and to tempt shoppers to indulge in impulse buying, an assessment of impulse buying behaviour would seem to be appropriate in the current research.
A further aspect of consumer behaviour about which it is necessary to be aware is that of situational effect. This effect acknowledges that ‘People tailor their purchases to specific occasions and the way we feel at a specific point in time affects what we feel like buying or doing’ (Solomon, 2002, p.288). Solomon goes on to discuss ‘situational self-image’ which means “Who am I right now?” Research into impulse buying (Coley & Burgess, 2003) referred to findings that purchases are sometimes made in an effort to prolong a mood or emotional state attained in particular environments. Therefore, not only does any given retailer have the difficult task of identifying its target market, or rather, the more complicated groups of subtly different market which it caters for, but it must bear in mind emotional changes in its consumers which may well play an important part in what and whether they buy. Furthermore, ‘individual shopper characteristics might not be as salient as situational variables’ (Prasad, 1975; Stern, 1962 in Coley & Burgess, 2003, p.285). Subtle changes of mood or emotional state may play a bigger part in purchasing than any more easily quantifiable consumer characteristics such as gender, or disposable income. It is worth noting once again that these ‘situational variables’ seem to apply more to women than men, as women seem to be more inclined to ‘shop under the influence of affective states than men’ (ibid).

It would seem that emotional state or mood has a part to play in shopping behaviour. Given the focus of many bookshops on engendering a relaxed mood in their stores, an examination of the effectiveness of the bookshop environment on mood and shopping behaviour is deemed appropriate.
3.5 The Role of the Chain Bookshop in the Community

3.5.1 Introduction
The role of bookshops in UK society has developed dynamically since the early 1980s. Since the inception of the eponymous Waterstone’s bookshops in 1982, the rise of the ‘new’ chains with knowledgeable staff and stylish interiors has influenced the development of bookshops into destination stores. These have taken inspiration from the US concept of lifestyle bookselling and all the facilities associated with that term (Kreitzman, 1999a, 1999b; Pennington, 1997). The public’s changing expectations of what a bookshop should be, as well as an economic need for the chains to attract new markets, has led to a reassessment of the marketing and branding strategies adopted by chain bookshops. The role of the third place in bookshops is investigated both in the literature and in this study, following the raising of this term by one of the managers interviewed at the commencement of the data collection. Once more, this played a central role in the themes investigated in the data collection, and linked very closely to the idea of the bookshop in the community.

Books have long played an educative and socialising role in history. Before literacy was common and even before printing was mechanised, public readings by the literate few were occasions to come together to learn and to be with your neighbours (Manguel, 1996, pp.109, 116; Ong, 1982, p.115). With the re-invention of many UK bookshops as destination stores (Kreitzman, 1999b; Cardew, 2004; Clements, 2005), it seems that they may have the potential to play a similarly educative socialising role for the people, even communities, who use them. The role of bookshops in the community however, has not been studied in any depth in the UK. This is not a new subject for study in the US where academics recognise the role in the community played by bookshops, particularly in rural settings where independent bookshops have inherited the community role formerly held by the village hall or library as meeting place and social mixing environment (Miller, 2006; 1999). In this setting, it seems that the bookshop can draw like-minded people together in a comfortable welcoming environment where they can share views and opinions on current affairs as well as current literature. Satterthwaite says:

The surprising popularity of bookstores and the increase in the number of stores and the sales of books are partly due to the communal nature of the stores. The bookstore can be a community gathering place, a safe and
friendly harbour in an increasingly impersonal world. Amidst automation, sound bites, isolated computer communication, and all the effects of stretched living, the image of a small bookstore with a library ambience, piles of books to explore, helpful clerks to discuss your potential purchases, fellow customers with shared interests, and cozy cafes produces a warm, collegial feeling (2001, p.234).

While this utopian vision might not always match what people experience when they enter their local bookshop, there are nevertheless familiar features. The role of the bookshop as a centre of and for the community is an image that is being projected by many chains at the moment (Kreitzman, 1999a, 1999b; Clements, 2005), perhaps more so those which originated in the US. Recent research has concluded that bookshops are indeed providing the same sort of services for the community that were once exclusively served by public libraries and while libraries are still providing those services to many people, bookshops seem to be appealing more to middle income earners and younger people (Cartwright, 2003).

3.5.2 The role of US bookshops in the community
In her article discussing the role of the bookstore in the US as a ‘vital community institution’, Miller (1999) expounds on these and many other theories related to the community role of the bookshop. She comments on the developing role of the bookshop as it changes from ‘retail establishment... [to] a vital community institution’ (p.386). As the global urban population are gradually being pulled further away from local communities because of lifestyle changes (longer working hours, more women at work, less lifelong relationships, more working at home) it would seem that we are more prone to belong to multiple communities based on job, interests and lifestyle rather than simply inhabiting a physical place. Miller contends that as we move in the 21st century from an urban to a global society, we naturally ‘belong to multiple communities on the basis of more salient characteristics than inhabiting a physical place’(ibid). It would seem therefore, according to Miller that with the advent of the internet we may viably feel a sense of belonging, or even community when we visit a particular website whereas, simply because we live in a particular location it does not mean we have any sense of belonging there. Therefore, as the village hall, church and community centre are falling into disuse, this would seem to free the way for bookshops to fill the role of the community centre, providing a safe place in which to meet others with similar interests. As Miller notes,
Theorists of urban and consumer culture have shown, shopping is increasingly seen as an activity which can provide individuals with entertainment, fulfilment and the opportunity for meaningful connections with others (1999, p.388).

She points out that ‘the current association of the bookshop with the idea of community needs to be understood as the confluence of several different social processes’ (p.387). Miller opines that as chain bookshops become more widespread, more popular and more successful, this has had the effect of making independent bookshops search for a competitive advantage. According to Miller, they began to stress their ‘superior selection and service, but gave these familiar retail slogans a particularly moral and political cast’ (ibid, p.387). They became more vocal about their belief that their choices of book stock underlined their commitment to communities, and rather than the concentration by chain bookshops (according to some independent bookshops) on the financial imperative, the independents claim that ‘the right kind of business, nourished by its vital connections to a local community, can rise above profit considerations to provide the community with a multitude of meaningful services’ (ibid). It would seem therefore that there is an effort by independent bookstores to set themselves apart from the chains, in so far as they promote themselves as having a cultural obligation to their readers and communities, rather than being concerned solely with profitability.

In the US, the independent bookshop as community centre has evolved into a setting with seminars, coffee shops, and a meeting place. ‘In part a marketing ploy, in part a deeply and sincerely felt sentiment, this emphasis on community service and community embeddedness has become integral to the independent bookseller’s identity’ (Miller, 1999, p.387). While there is acknowledgement that promotion of their stores as a centre for the community is ‘part marketing ploy’, there is also an inherent cultural aspect to this kind of promotion. In Miller’s most recent book (2006) she grapples with the historical issue which is an ongoing theme in the study of bookshops – namely the idea that commercial success and cultural concerns are poles apart. One only has to look at the recent outcry over Waterstone’s inclusion of books in nationwide promotions, only when substantial sums of money – up to £45,000 - have been received from publishers (Reynolds, 2007).

It seems that there is a contradiction at the core of bookselling: there is a desire that bookselling be concerned only with quality, but if bookselling is to continue, it must be
profitable. This is not necessarily to defend the position of Waterstone’s, but to raise the subject for debate. This topic is investigated in the research. Paco Underhill, retail researcher and consultant also comments upon the perception that a bookshop is not only a retail outlet, but also has some cultural obligation, commenting upon ‘the attitude among [book] sellers that they purvey not mere merchandise but ideas’ (1999, p.201). This idea that bookshops have a cultural as well as a commercial role to play was one which emerged in the literature and was investigated in the data collection, as it was felt that this theme was important with regard to how consumers feel about bookshops and how they respond to bookshops.

3.5.3 Community involvement and bookshops as a third place
In his doctoral thesis, “Consumption and Identity in the World of the Book”, Stallard (1999) found that respondents in his research into books and the book trade were keen to make suggestions for improvements to their local store. These included the provision of a coffee area; more tables for browsing and social evenings with authors. Indeed in Stallard’s research, the consumers themselves seem to want to make bookshops into community centres. It may sometimes seem as if bookshops can call themselves a ‘lifestyle’ destination simply by offering customers a cup of coffee and somewhere to sit down (McCabe, 1998) but even as far back as 1998, there was recognition from at least one Waterstone’s manager that to give oneself that title, a little more commitment was required. Carl Newbrook, then Manager of the Sauchiehall Street store in Glasgow, defined ‘lifestyle’ as ‘the way that a bookshop interacts with the customers who use it’ (McCabe, 1998, p.45). In more detail, it involves not just the sofas and the cafe, but author events; a large range of books and, in Newbrook’s opinion, the sheer scale of the shop is vital. This is interesting, as it would seem to suggest that smaller stores – and this would include many independent stores as well as some chain bookshops – cannot by definition qualify as ‘destination’ stores, or by extension, as third places, regardless of whether they offer coffee or of the ambience therein.

Waxman’s research (2006) found that coffee shops perform an important function for many people who use them, such as a ‘sense of belonging’ and opportunities for ‘support and networking, and sense of community’(p.35). Waxman studied coffee shops in a range of settings, but it is clear that these findings can be applied to coffee shops within bookshops. Kreitzman (1999b, p.36) refers to ‘the bookshop as a social club’, which customers can come to in the evening ‘as though it were an event, an entertainment, rather than just buying a book. They can meet, have a coffee – it is a
social thing’. The potential for bookshops which provide these facilities to play a role in the community as a club, a place to meet, or even a ‘third place’ (Oldenburg, 1997) has significant social implications for the future role of bookshops in society, in particular those chain bookshops which are eager to take on this role and have the floor space to house sofas, cafes and browsing areas and as such needed to be investigated in the research. The term ‘third place’ was investigated further when it arose in one of the initial interviews with shop managers. A ‘third place’ by definition is a place one might go after one’s home and one’s place of work. Nozzi (2004) refers to Oldenburg when describing the inherent qualities of a third place:

They are distinctive informal gathering places, they make the citizen feel at home, they nourish relationships and a diversity of human contact, they help create a sense of place and community, they invoke a sense of civic pride, they provide numerous opportunities for serendipity, they promote companionship, they allow people to relax and unwind after a long day at work, they are socially binding, they encourage sociability instead of isolation, they make life more colorful, and they enrich public life and democracy.

All of the qualities inherent in a third place as defined by Nozzi, seemed to be interlinked with booksellers’ efforts to create spaces for people to spend time in their bookshops. These aspects of bookselling were deemed worthy of investigation, particularly with regard to the sense of culture in bookshops. In the case of the US based chain Borders, now widely visible in the UK, ‘they have provided a sense of community in many suburban areas where community has been missing and where there were often no bookstores’ (Cartwright, 2001, p.237). One can see that bookstores in the US are serious about their links with the community when ‘community relations coordinators’ were at one time employed in every Borders store (Przybys, 2000), although this no longer seems to be a dedicated role. It is also notable that while the role of the bookshop in local communities in the US may traditionally have been held by independent stores (Miller, 1999) that mantle is now very overtly being adopted by chain bookstores, with efforts not only to provide seating and encourage long-term browsing, but also to engage with local communities. However, it is clear that the US are rather further ahead of the UK as far as serving the community is concerned is clear when the Manager of Borders in Nevada says his clientele includes teachers marking papers, students working on laptops and business people conducting meetings and interviews in the store café’ (Miller, 1999).
The ways in which consumers make use of bookshops is explored in this research. Evidence of proactive community projects from bookshops includes Borders’ UK involvement with community outreach programmes such as Reading is Fundamental UK (www.rif.org). This involves activities such as visiting schools and having school visits to stores where pupils are given vouchers to spend. They are not the only bookstore to provide community benefits however, given that WHSmith were putting £1.5 million into a scheme to ‘improve literacy, through donations of reading materials, student mentoring and work placements’ in secondary schools (Marketing, 2002b, p.4). This kind of activity can be regarded as a form of promotion, or an arm of corporate social responsibility. Miller (1999) also argues that it can be unclear which bookshops’ actions qualify as ‘authentic’ gestures aimed at community enhancement or mere marketing ploys, thus pointing out that the motivation for promoting one’s bookshop as a centre of the community may sometimes be an altruistic one, but may also, as one would expect, be motivated by a commercial imperative, i.e., to be seen to be caring about the local community, as well as to reap the rewards of attracting new clientele by providing ‘community’ facilities. This could obviously apply equally to independent as well as chain booksellers. Once again, we see Miller pointing out the perceived clash between altruistic community involvement as opposed to such measures inspired by financial gain (2006).

Kieron Smith (then internet site manager for Ottakar’s) wrote in The Bookseller about how the Chelmsford branch hosted political debates. ‘Society is far more individualised than it was 10 years ago, with the decline in membership of trade unions, churches, and the mass political parties. This, combined with the decline in social space, with multiples owning and controlling what were previously public areas, has weakened a sense of collectivity [sic]’ (Smith, 1999, p.31). In many ways, this echoes what Miller has said about changes in society (1999; 2006). Smith points out that one benefit of such events is the sense of ownership of the shop for the customers: it is a community space where there can be customer interaction. Even chain bookshops are at pains to point out the uniqueness of each store and how each one is shaped uniquely to cater for the individual community. This sense of ownership of local stores will be examined in the present study, as well as asking consumers whether bookshops can or should be a venue where this sense of community is experienced. It is interesting to note that online bookshops are by definition excluded from this part of the research. Indeed, the potential for traditional bookshops to be a third place; a physical venue, gives them a unique competitive advantage over online bookshops: they have a physical space...
which can be explored for maximum potential. However, the relationship and perception which consumers have with online bookshops is investigated in the research as is any sense of online community.

3.5.4 The cultural role of chain bookshops

It has been argued that independent bookshops have the freedom to become more closely attuned to their local community than a chain bookshop which is obviously one of many and has to fit with brand and marketing strategies from head office. Andy Ross, owner of Cody’s independent bookstore in Berkeley California:

The chain stores are mass merchants. They are very good at promoting highly commercial titles with huge printings and giant promotional budgets (2002, p.78).

While this clearly makes very good financial sense, Ross goes on to point out that it leaves the smaller more eclectic titles with less chance of being stocked, let alone promoted. Ross also notes that a further effect of this concentration on the ‘bigger’ more ‘promotable’ titles is the reduction in the life expectancy, or shelf-life of a book: if a book does not perform at a certain standard of turnover, it is returned to the publisher. There is less scope for a book to be a ‘grower’ (as opposed to an instant hit) in the current climate of the book trade. However Willie Anderson, deputy chairman of John Smith’s Bookshops says; ‘The accusation that the chains have in some way reduced the quality of books is a misconstruction. They could perhaps be accused of confusing quantity with quality, on the ground that they have made far too many books accessible, causing confusion in the readers’ choices’ (Anderson, 2002, p.147). Indeed retail analyst Hugh Phillips (2003, p.23) refers to how an intelligent reduction in stock can actually increase sales, since ‘the simplified range enabled customers to identify more easily what they wanted and sort it out from the range’. Cartwright’s research (2001) also uncovered the occasionally overwhelming effect which too much choice can have, although this effect was noted only in a few research participants. Others are critical of cultural restriction as a result. ‘The distribution of ideas in our culture is far too important to be left in the hands of a few corporate executives’ (Ross, 2002, p.79). Here, Ross, like Miller, discusses the idea of the bookshop as a promoter and distributor of culture, rather than solely a retailer, whose only aim is to turn a profit. Not according to the experiences of one Waterstone’s manager. ‘We stock 150,000 titles, and yet we take hundreds upon hundreds of individual customer orders every week’
(McCabe, 1998, p.45). The manager cited here sees the 'lifestyle' store as raising the expectations of customers who then want more from their bookshop. Nevertheless, with the growth of national and multi-national chain bookshops, strong arguments rage about the narrowing of book range. The buyout of Ottakar’s by HMV media (owners of Waterstone’s) has caused further furor among booksellers and publishers, who fear it will lead to further homogenisation of the book trade (Guardian, 2006a; Tagholm, 2006; Jardine, 2006).

Ross (2002) comments that in the context of local communities one must understand that independent bookshops as well as high street bookshops have a more direct relationship with the communities where they are situated. Out of town superstores are necessarily of service to consumers with cars and have a more distant relationship with the town they are near to, rather than a high street store in the heart of the community. However, most commentators recognize the decline of the high street. According to Ross, booksellers in a high street store are more likely to boost the economy of the local town if they can use local facilities such as sandwich bars, banks and other local shops, whereas the out of town superstore is more isolated leaving booksellers unable to make use of local amenities. By raising these issues, Ross is pointing out the inter-relationship between local communities and their bookshops and by definition, implies that bookshops have an obligation to their local community. Ross goes on to argue about the inconsequentiality of out of town book superstores to local communities;

The store might have a broad selection of books (as do all the chain superstores). It might even have a nifty café. But ultimately its presence or absence in its community is a matter of small consequence, both to the chain and to the community (Ross, 2002, p.82).

Of course, this is also applicable to exclusively online bookshops. One thinks of Amazon.co.uk which, with the exception of some storage depots, has no links with any local community. Whether or not bookshops have an obligation to the local community or indeed whether any sort of local qualities inherent to the bookshop are perceived by bookshop users, is an issue investigated in the present research.

3.5.5 Broadening the readership
The strategic thinking behind the introduction of 'lifestyle' bookstores is ultimately to grow the book buying market from the traditional buyers of books (largely those in
higher socioeconomic groups) to include those who have been less frequent users of bookshops in the past. This has resulted in efforts to make bookshops more welcoming, less intimidating settings and have included plans to welcome more people from a wider range of backgrounds into bookshops. For example, the introduction of in-store cafes might have the effect of attracting a wider range of people who might then be tempted to buy a book (McCabe, 1998). The need to broaden the book buying market is driven by increased competition across the whole of bookselling (including online and supermarket selling). This has highlighted the past focus upon the higher socioeconomic groups and their relatively heavy book buying habits and has put into sharp focus the fact that potential book buyers from other socioeconomic groups can be seen as an untapped resource for bookshops. It is arguable that people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may have been made to feel less welcome in bookshops than those in group ABC1. This point was made by Alan Giles, then chairman of Waterstone’s (Lottman, 1999) and is an issue which is explored in the current research.

Examining this issue from a historical perspective, a book written just 35 years ago illustrates a very different attitude towards readers of fiction:

Research in this field [light fiction] is not easy, but it is important not to sweep aside this category of books and readers simply because they do not come up to the necessary social and intellectual standards required for entry into the most exclusive world of ‘culture’ as exemplified by the books and readers catered for by the review columns’ (Mann, 1971, p.8).

Mann here demonstrates an unashamedly biased attitude towards readers of fiction (as opposed to readers of worthier topics). Attitudes towards readers of fiction – particularly literary fiction – have changed radically since Mann was writing, but it is arguable that this attitude of superiority has simply moved to readers of other book genres, such as romance or true crime. Writing about bookshops on the Charing Cross road in the late 1960s, Mann goes on; ‘Few concessions appear to be made to the stranger who might not know where to find what he wanted. There were a few exceptions, but some shops were more like private collections than public shops’ (ibid, p.27). This sense of catering for the select few has been filtered out over the intervening years, as bookshops have accepted the commercial need to widen the market. Historically, books and bookshops have encapsulated an intellectually superior role. Available initially only to the upper classes, they have gradually filtered out to a wider audience, in order to become available to everyone, but regardless of whether one thinks this good or bad, it is
arguable that many bookshops still retain an air of intellectualism about them. It is interesting to note Mann’s comments, again in 1971, that he had witnessed ‘a heartening sign to some extent of the breakdown of the ‘bookshop barrier’ which is believed to deter working-class people from frequenting bookshops’ (ibid, p.105). It is not a little ironic that bookshop chains are still grappling with the problem of expanding the readership today (Book Marketing Ltd., 2005b).

Orion group sales director Dallas Manderson said in a trade interview in 2003, ‘Generally, supermarkets have expanded the market by making it easier for people to buy books’ (Kean, 2003b, p.23). The success of the supermarket foray into bookselling (Mintel, 2005), has caused some alarm amongst the traditional trade outlets, particularly with regard to the growth in supermarket share of the market, as well as their tendency to ‘cherry pick’ only guaranteed good sellers and their aggressive approach to price cutting. Supermarkets are also acknowledged to have a huge impact on sales of titles and getting titles into the bestseller lists. One publisher said ‘it is nearly impossible to get to number one without the support of Tesco in particular’ (Kean, 2003b, p.23). Whilst it is clear that supermarket prices are often extremely competitive, it is interesting to consider their accessibility as a key factor in their success, rather than simply the financial undercutting. It is arguable that for some sectors of the wider community, buying books in supermarkets may be socially easier too, especially if there are not experienced bookshop users or knowledgeable sales assistants around.

Miller (1999) points out how mall bookstores have had a similar effect in the US. ‘The mall chain gained such success in part because it was able to attract a class of readers who had been intimidated by and resented the elitist atmosphere of many independent bookshops’ (p.393). While supermarkets may be less environmentally appealing for many people, for others, the very lack of bookishness of the supermarket atmosphere, may be less forbidding than bookshops. Furthermore, while many large bookshops have extended opening hours, they cannot as yet compete with the 24 hour access which we have to many supermarkets. Ottakar’s M.D. James Heneage concurs with the view that supermarkets have expanded the book market. ‘Supermarkets have the facility to introduce new people to books that we don’t’ (Bookseller, 2003c, p.11).
3.5.6 The human experience of the bookshop

With regard to the sorts of experiences people have in bookshops, and the sorts of qualities they associate with bookshops, one of Cartwright’s (2001) respondents in her research into the impact of book superstores upon libraries, spoke of the chance to ‘lose’ oneself in a bookshop, with another respondent suggesting it as a venue to go to in the evening – an alternative to the pub (pp.68, 76). These kinds of experience would seem to suggest that the bookshop, or certainly the book superstore, can play a role in some people’s lives as a venue for entertainment, or a sanctuary for peace and quiet. This supports the argument that bookshops can be a third place in people’s lives. The issue of the role which the bookshop, or even the book superstore, can play in people’s lives is also explored in greater detail in the current research.

There may well be issues about serving the whole of the community and community needs which independents are arguably designed to fulfil but there is also the question of accessibility which the large stores and especially the superstores in the US so effectively provide.

The superstore phenomenon in the US is credited with having popularised book buying in the last 10 years and helping books regain their place as a central part of culture. Beforehand, people told me, small bookstores were perceived as intimidating and for the exclusive use of informed bookbuyers (Stewart, 1998, p.23).

Although Stewart cites only anecdotal evidence, it does highlight the fact that the new breeds of bookshops - specifically the very large book superstores as well as the supermarkets - seem to be very good at not being intimidating. Furthermore, although Cartwright’s research, as cited above, focused on the impact of the book superstore upon public libraries, one other interesting point raised was that of further suggestions from bookshop and library users as to what they actually wanted from their bookshops. Bookshop users tended to focus on environmental enhancements whereas library patrons focused upon features which would aid the location of books. Stallard (1999) also found that participants in his research were keen to suggest environmental enhancements to their local bookshop, such as cafes and special events. The issue of what people actually want from their bookshops and the kind of facilities they would welcome is central to this research.
3.6 Online Bookselling

3.6.1 Introduction
Online bookselling has developed very quickly in the last ten years, now providing serious competition for traditional booksellers in the UK. Amazon dominates the online bookselling market by some considerable margin, typically accounting for over 80% of online book sales in the UK (Clements, 2006) and third only to Waterstone’s and W H Smith overall (Bury, 2006). While other online sites are still generating business, any examination of online bookselling in the UK must consider Amazon. Borders operate their online sites via Amazon, as did Waterstone’s from 2001 until 2006, although Waterstone’s once again operate their own online bookshop. While there were plans to make the Ottakar’s site commercial, rather than just a site for searching book titles (PR Newswire, 2006), these plans have obviously not materialised given that Ottakar’s have now been subsumed into Waterstone’s. Blackwell’s operates an online bookselling site and while general interest books are available from them, they are largely known as an academic bookseller and the profiling of their site reflects this, with considerable emphasis given to academic and professional (law, accountancy) titles. While Amazon is not the only online book site in the UK, the chains have very little visibility online at the moment. Bury and Kean (2005, p.26), writing in the trade, comment: ‘The premier league of high street booksellers has failed to compete online, leaving the field open’.

With regard to the field of online retailing, the following comments have been made:

With few exceptions….relatively little empirical research has been conducted on retailing in a multiple-channel environment, and even less conceptual research has been reported in the literature (Peterson & Balasubramanian, 2002, p.15).

With regard to consumer responses and behaviour in electronic settings, Fenech and O’Cass (2003, p.374) call for research on ‘how… consumers feel when they are operating in the traditional mall environment versus the virtual mall environment for retail activity’. Satterthwaite (2001, p.2) also decries the fact that little research has been done on the wider social impact that online shopping may have and goes on to comment on how many businesses have moved from small localised shops to larger and larger stores, then e-commerce, saying: ‘These changes have produced crucial yet
generally overlooked and understudied social and economic impacts on communities and regions – and on the people who live in them’ (ibid, p.13). It would seem that studies of online selling and the social impact it may have is generally agreed to be an area requiring further academic research. With regard to this research in particular, the area of bookselling is one that has attracted very little research and online bookselling even less.

Referring to internet selling and communication, Banerik (in de Kare-Silver, 1998, p.224) notes that ‘only things that are measured actually get done or improved upon’. Here, Banerik points out the importance of empirical research in order to further our knowledge of this broad field. Jonathan Reynolds (2000, p.417) argues ‘Rarely has the academic world, the conventional provider of rigorous analysis, lagged so significantly behind the world of practice’. It would seem to be an inherent problem with research into electronic media, that the dynamism of this industry requires a particularly fast response from the research community. While this is gradually changing with the exponential growth of research in this area in the last few years, nevertheless, the dynamism of the area and the constant technological developments present a challenge to academia, namely, that quality research is an ongoing requirement that needs to be addressed. Furthermore, even though research into the wider field of online selling has grown greatly in recent years, research specifically into online bookselling is very scarce. Much of the research that has been carried out in the online setting, is more concerned with examining the online setting as a conduit for sales, rather than investigating consumer responses to the online setting, or their relationship to the online setting (Loebbecke, Powell and Gallagher, 1999; Latcovich and Smith, 2001).

Berry (in de Kare-Silver, 1998, p.135) commented that in his experience of online businesses, ‘many companies... just don’t do enough to assess and understand what their customers really think, their customer research is relatively superficial, they struggle to build loyalty and just don’t develop the insight and appreciation that would help them retain and build their customer base’. This emphasises the apparent failure of online companies to invest in research in order to build effective strategy based on knowledge of the customer. According to this particular business guru, the key to online success appears to be knowledge of the customer, leading to building and adjusting the business to suit. In the context of bookselling in particular, HarperCollins Chief Executive Victoria Barnsley recently pinpointed the importance of communicating with consumers online. Talking at the 2006 Book Marketing Limited conference about
the competition posed by online booksellers she referred to the need of consumers to
be part of a community, and urged publishers to take on this role, rather than leaving it
to online competitors, most notably Amazon (Fraser, 2006).

3.6.2 The social implications of online shopping
The established contribution of the activity of shopping to building communities,
ievitably leads one to question how online shopping affects communities and
community. It is viewed with concern by some, as having the potential to ‘undermine
traditional civil and civic life in real communities dependent on face-to-face encounters’
(Satterthwaite, 2001, p.2). The benefits that terrestrial stores bring to communities such
as employment and an environment in which to browse, even chat or have coffee is
obviously not possible in online buying. Nevertheless, there are efforts, especially from
Amazon to make online book buying a social process, should the customer wish, in
recognition of this aspect of the terrestrial bookstore. For instance, they can inform the
potential buyer of other items in which they might be interested, as well as providing
customer reviews of the items in question. In the broader online environment there are
many examples of online chat rooms and discussion groups which cover an incredible
breadth of subjects, including books. This extends the social quality of being online
beyond that which is available in terrestrial stores. In many ways, the online
environment can be seen as facilitating this kind of interaction between people.
However, no online bookshop has yet provided their customers with the facility to chat
directly with one another.

It is interesting to note the benefits of online shopping which give it an advantage over
traditional terrestrial stores. As Satterthwaite puts it: ‘Online shopping offers significant
social and cultural benefits for the individual and society, of which the most important is
the powerful democratisation involved in many aspects of this new interactive
technology’ (2001, p.209). This democratisation occurs essentially because there will
be no other person able to view the buyer and therefore make any sort of judgement
about them, be it sociological, intellectual or gender-based. The very lack of personal
interaction with other people which is a cause for concern when considering the social
implications of online shopping, is the same source of democratisation and social
equality for many online buyers. The anonymity of online buying is a source of
empowerment for the buyer, since the only details to be given out are name and card
details, if you are purchasing. Satterthwaite goes on to say ‘the social discrimination of
shopping in real stores, whether real or perceived, is eliminated in the virtual world’
(p.209). Of course this democratisation is extended to those people previously excluded to a large extent from real stores such as the geographically isolated and the disabled as well as those people who simply dislike traditional shopping.

In many ways, the advent of online shopping is - ironically - harking back to the kind of personalised, or customised, service one would have expected years ago from local shops (Underhill, 1999, p.213). One important difference of course is the lack of relationship with the online seller which one might have expected to build with local shops delivering direct to one’s door. The research project investigates the element of interaction that takes place in online transactions, and the effect which the lack of direct contact with other buyers or with the seller has on consumer behaviour in this environment. Marshall McLuhan said, ‘Societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication’ (2001, p.8). This is a stimulating starting point from which to examine the advent of online retailing and the aspect of communication therein. McLuhan seems to suggest that it is the quality of the information conduit rather than the information per se which has the most influence on society and by extension, consumers. It might therefore seem that it is the attraction of being online and purchasing electronically which might be a major factor in the adoption of online book buying by consumers, rather than the actual facilities which online retailing offers.

Fenech and O’Cass suggest that in an online context - just as in any other retail environment - there are complex factors influencing any consumer’s choice of products, ranging from basic utility to those factors encompassed by ‘personality, values and lifestyle’ (2001, p.374). There appear to be strong parallels therefore between motivations for shopping online, compared to shopping on the high street. An analysis of how consumers select which book outlet they will use would therefore seem to be appropriate in the current research, in order to expand our knowledge of consumer behaviour. It is worth noting that previous research carried out in the field of online retailing has found that the most significant predictors of becoming an online consumer, include simply enjoying being online and generally enjoying a ‘wired’ lifestyle (Bellman, Lohse and Johnson, 1999). To clarify, someone with a ‘wired’ lifestyle would be a frequent user of electronic technology and an experienced user of the internet; someone familiar with and at ease with current technology. However, this is changing with technological developments such as broadband, allowing even technophobes easy and swift access to the internet. Bellman, et al (1999) note that retailing through the internet, is similar to in-store retailing, reactive in so far as
consumers must make the effort to “visit” the site prior to purchase. It is also worth noting one might walk down a high street and be tempted to browse and perhaps buy in a shop because you have been attracted by their window, or fascia. While there is no direct online comparison, there is the possibility of being drawn in, indirectly, to particular online bookselling sites by their use of sponsored links and advertising on Google and other popular sites.

3.6.3 The qualities of online retailing

3.6.3.1 The Long Tail
The theory of the long tail describes the increasing frequency with which consumers buy obscure items. This is a recently identified phenomenon (Anderson, 2004) and is a theory now applied to the growing availability of unusual items, largely due to the phenomenal success of online shopping. Whereas terrestrial stores are limited in what they stock by shelf space, and associated costs (staffing, rent, lighting, stock depreciation) online stores naturally overcome this because of their virtual approach to stock management and therefore are able to supply details on a much wider scope of goods without the need to necessarily have those goods ‘in stock’. This results in a buying pattern where popular ‘bestsellers’ appear, but the ‘long tail’ of other purchases carries on for a very long time (see fig. 3.6 for an illustration of the long tail). Described by Chris Anderson in his book on the subject he says, ‘increasingly the mass market is turning into a mass of niches’ (2006, p.5). The simultaneous growth in the personalisation of culture with the popularity of Ipods, downloadable tracks, blogging, is mirrored online by a move away from a relatively small number of ‘top ten’ hits focusing upon mainstream products and markets towards a growing number of niche markets, towards the ultimate in niche marketing – the focus on the individual customer as a target. Anderson notes however, that ‘simply offering more variety…does not shift demand by itself. Consumers must be given ways to find niches that suit their particular needs and interests’ (p.53). He goes on, ‘long tail businesses treat consumers as individuals offering mass customisation as an alternative to mass market fare’ (p.218). One can immediately identify the relevance of the long tail to online bookselling, given that online bookselling enables customers to buy even the most obscure titles, formerly requiring weeks, perhaps even months of searching in traditional bookshops. The element of personalisation is also clear, with recommendations and customer reviews accessible online.
One of the most revolutionary aspects of the long tail, and one which is particularly relevant to the current research, is that it naturally adopts a different approach to traditional retailing. Whereas traditional approaches to marketing have tended to focus upon selling in quantity – a natural approach since in traditional retailing costs such as rent, staffing, lighting and other overheads make it impractical to stock single items, the online approach has emerged as one which sells anything, regardless of the quantity in which it sells. The traditional approach demands that stock turnover be at a certain level, otherwise an item is taking up valuable shelf space if it is not selling. Therefore, a traditional approach examining segmentation, targeting and positioning usually focuses upon what is going to sell in quantity (or sometimes upon fewer sales of large value items). However, stocking an item which sells just every few months is perfectly viable for online retailers. With far fewer staffing costs, and no need to actually stock an item – it can simply be represented online, then bought in from the manufacturer/publisher when required – this is an economically sensible way of doing business.
Another facet of the long tail relevant to the current research, is the choices which bookshops make about the goods they stock. It has already been noted that there is a move towards top tens and an arguable similarity of goods stocked. ‘Quality’ titles are not stocked as a matter of course – they need to earn their place on the shelves by turning over at a certain rate. However, as Anderson notes, in a traditional shop environment, the ratio of good to bad is important, since there is a limit to the available shelf space, so one bad product inevitably means less space for a good product. However in the case of unlimited shelf space (online) the amount of poor quality material available is irrelevant as this has no impact on the amount of space for the good material. Online therefore, there will certainly be much that is of poor quality, but there will also be space for material which is of very high quality, which cannot find its way onto a typical bookshop, naturally concerned with turnover and potential sales.

The growth of online retailing has naturally supported the growth of niche markets and the resulting long tail. Anderson observes that since the online approach to retailing means that they naturally support niches, an observed result is that the aggregate of all those niches can make up a significant market (p.10). Using Borders as an example, Anderson says that the average Borders stocks around 100,000 titles, but around one quarter of Amazon’s sales come from outside its top 100,000 titles. This example shows how online retailers can tap into those unsatisfied niche markets which traditional terrestrial retailers have not explored.

According to Anderson, the costs of reaching potential niche markets and tapping into individuals’ interests must be reduced in order for the long tail to come into play. Along with the democratisation of production and distribution (access to computers and the ability to create and distribute one’s own material) Anderson also suggests that supply and demand must be connected. The awareness and exposure to new material must be increased, so that niche markets (customers with specialist needs and wants) are exposed to material they would like. (p.57). Again, one can see how this theory fits with online bookselling, in that it exposes people to material they have searched for, but also leads them onto other things. i.e people who read this, also read this. Recommendations from people with similar likes – no matter how obscure – are uniquely available via online shopping. It also has the unique advantage of linking together niche buyers, since traditional geographical barriers do not exist (p.24)

A pertinent question to ask about the long tail is, does it tend to shift demand away from the ‘head’ of bestsellers? (p.135) According to Anderson, there are three qualities
of the long tail which do indeed have the effect of shifting demand towards the tail. The availability of greater variety simply means there is greater choice, so the spread of what people buy will be greater. Secondly, the lower search costs of finding what you want (including time spent searching, and the effectiveness of recommendations) mean it is often economically a more effective way of finding what you want. Thirdly, the availability of sampling which inevitably lowers the risk of any potential purchase. This is perhaps less relevant to books, since we can ‘sample’ books in traditional stores too, scanning a few pages. However, the availability of a larger quantity of obscure items online means that sampling is much more important since we are exposed to books we might never see in a traditional bookshop. This also has the effect of encouraging customers to explore ‘riskier’ material that they might not have ventured into before.

It is interesting to note that Anderson makes the point that, ‘although there may be near infinite selection of all media, there is still a scarcity of human attention and hours in the day’ (p.146). This is a relevant point to note, since the exposure to such a wealth of material still does not mean that we all have time to explore everything, a point supported by Zaid (2004).

Comparing online and traditional bookshops in this context, a key advantage of the online setting is that there is no need to know which section to look in (p.160), so there is no need to ask if you can’t find something. It is also fair to say that given a starting point, there is a vast choice of categories and lists available online in order to aid purchase.

3.6.3.2 Choice
Regarding the concept of wide range of choice, and what existing book trade experts have said about this, it is worth noting what other experts have said on this topic. Iyengar noted (in Anderson, 2006, p.172) that when choice is wide, it is imperative that customers get help with choosing.

Despite the detriments associated with choice overload, consumers want choice and they want a lot of it. The benefits that stem from choice however, come not from the options themselves, but rather from the process of choosing. By allowing choosers to perceive themselves as volitional agents having successfully constructed their preference and
ultimate selection outcomes during the choosing task, the importance of choice is reinstated (p.172).

Of course, traditional bookshops would say that they do help with choosing, with their branded store fronts focusing customers upon the front of store, promotional tables and special offers. Nevertheless, there are certainly very different filters at work when comparing traditional and online bookshops. In a traditional store, we are guided by blurb, cover price, perhaps where the book is stocked in the shop, whether it is reduced, even if it has a 'Richard and Judy' choice sticker upon it. Online, it is possible to search by genre, author and title, but also to filter by reviews, recommendations, ratings and look at linked titles. The fact that online, consumers can select their own filtering mechanism may be important. In traditional bookshops, the filters in place may not be relevant for all consumers. So, choice, but also the mechanism for choosing appear to be important for consumers, according to Anderson.

Anderson notes that the phenomenon of the long tail does not signal the end of the hit, just the end of the monopoly of the hit (p. 230). The impact of this kind of retailing upon the traditional approach to bookselling is just beginning to be felt. Given that the approach to traditional book retailing in recent years has tended to concentrate upon bestsellers, the ability of online selling to supply choice and range of such breadth has given consumers a much broader choice of books than they have in traditional settings. It is noteworthy however, that even the most recent strategic moves by Waterstone’s (Mintel, 2007a) show that they are concentrating upon a more populist approach in their traditional stores, and leaving their online site to provide choice for consumers. The success or failure of this strategy remains to be seen.

3.6.3.3 Advantages
Gilbert (2003, p.426) when considering the future of retailing describes the advantages of internet retailing over traditional retailing and points out that from a marketing perspective one of the main benefits is the greater degree of interactivity, allowing a dialogue to be established directly with individual customers. Charlie O’ Shields, creative director of a US based interactive advertising agency, says that:

(T)he web gives the user the opportunity to actually interact with brands on a personal level. The ability of websites to create a community enables brands to not only reach their target markets, but also to bring them
together and enable individuals to interact with each other (Drew, 2002, p.7).

Royle & Stockdale (2000) found that electronic commerce facilitated relationships, insofar as it helped publishers interact directly with consumers and was helpful for building relationships across the industry. In the context of online book retailing, this ability to tailor promotions to individual consumers’ likes and needs (based on purchase records) has facilitated the development of online book recommendations and links to what other similarly profiled purchasers have bought. While it is useful to bear in mind that any skilled bookseller in a traditional store will recognise regular customers and be able to advise them about new titles which they might like, even the most observant of booksellers would be unable to track every customer’s purchase. Without high street booksellers undertaking this sophisticated approach to consumer relationship marketing, it is an advantage which online booksellers, or certainly the more sophisticated ones, will be bound to maintain. This individualisation of promotion, enabled solely via electronic commerce and tracking of consumer preferences provides an advantage for online retailing over traditional retailing. Consumer reactions to this kind of online tailoring of promotion however, have yet to be studied and consumer responses to online marketing techniques will be examined in this research project.

The whole potential for interactivity between customers also opens up the potential for underpinning the brand, since it is:

creating a bond not only between the consumer and the brand, but also between consumers themselves. With the community approach companies will be able to increase brand loyalty, as the consumer will become more aware of other users who share their brand interest (Drew, 2002, p.150).

Whether online booksellers have managed to create any kind of online book buying community is as yet unknown. Most online bookshops do not support the technology which allows consumers to communicate with each other, so this would seem to be unlikely. Nevertheless, online bookshops frequently have facilities which guide consumers to what other readers have bought (if they have similar purchasing profiles) and many also have access to customer reviews and recommended reading lists, so there is more material available online which gives access to the purchasing habits and opinions of others. With regard to the social aspect of online bookselling, Solomon points out that sometimes the complete absence of others can be seen as an
advantage, as observed in exclusive boutiques, where privacy is maintained while exclusive shoppers browse and purchase.

The type of consumers who patronize a store or service or who use a product can influence evaluations. We often infer something about a store by examining its customers (Solomon, 2002, p.4).

This particular point clearly has implications for online retailing also, if we can say that use of a particular website has implications beyond those of the utility of the product purchased. If the lack of direct interaction with others in an online bookshop acts as a product attribute then this could potentially be a significant factor attracting – or repelling - people from online bookshops. Whether these facilities have been enough to engender any kind of online book buying community will be examined in the research.

3.6.3.4 The limitations of online shopping
Phau & Poon, (in Fenech & O'Cass, 2001) point out the lack of sensuousness in online shopping, and the fact that it can only provide a shopper with fulfilment of two of the senses (sight and sound) whereas terrestrial shopping according to Underhill (1999, p.217) can provide all of the following, ‘Touch, trial or any other sensory stimuli…immediate gratification…social interaction’. Indeed, these are salient points to make about the limitations of online shopping. The range of sensuous experience is extremely limited when compared to high street shopping, where consumers can ‘take pleasure in the items that they are viewing, touching, smelling and otherwise experiencing’ (Rowley, 2001, p.369). Given the predilection of bookshop customers to browse, pick up and leaf through potential purchases this might potentially be an important aspect of online book shopping which consumers are missing.

In addition to Underhill’s mention of delayed gratification quoted above, Satterthwaite (2001, p.206) says of online shopping:

Placing the order may be the swiftest and most gratifying part of the online shopping transaction. The ultimate gratification of physically possess the purchase is postponed in online retailing. For many avid shoppers, the disappointment of “delayed fulfilment”, what happens between clicking on your intended purchase and receiving it, prevents them from shopping online.
This is obviously a consideration for online purchasers of books. The success of many online booksellers, especially Amazon would seem to suggest that this is a quality which consumers can live without. Given that there is usually an indication of delivery time when the order is expected to be fulfilled, this might be satisfactory for online book shoppers. Furthermore, one must bear in mind that many books need to be ordered in traditional bookshops, so there is frequently an element of delayed gratification in that setting also. However, further research into consumer responses to this ‘delayed gratification’ is important, since it might potentially be stopping many more potential online book buyers from purchasing online.

3.6.4 Personalising the online buying experience

With regard to the limitations of the online buying experience when contrasted to buying in a traditional shop, online businesses have been swift to use new technology in order to utilise customer purchasing histories to develop personalisation of recommendations and suggested further reading. ‘Perhaps more worriedly for established retailers, new entrants have also been seeking to create the possibilities of new kinds of relationships with customers, which are dependent upon technology for mediation’ (Reynolds, 2000, p.421). Therefore, what might traditionally have been seen as the limitations of online shopping, are being turned around by online retailers and used to their advantage. When an online customer purchases a book over the internet, by the very nature of the technology used, their name and address at the very least can be tracked against their purchases, thus enabling the ‘personalisation’ of greeting when they next visit the site, relevant recommendations for further reading, and the direction towards relevant customer reviews. This ‘personalising’ of the online experience is evident in the way that Amazon apparently approached its online strategy:

In its early days, it did not even pretend to be aiming for profitability as it concentrated on winning customers, enhancing its site, and ensuring that its service was impeccable. Now, the company is talking more openly about a drive to profitability, with no apparent lowering of standards (Guardian, 2006a).

Amazon did not make a net profit until the last quarter of 2001 (BBC, 2002) but has performed well since that point. Childers, Carr, Peck and Carson (2001) hypothesise that ‘while some consumers may be shopping primarily for instrumental purposes, others may be primarily enjoying these interactive media, and thus both factors can
ultimately affect their attitude toward using interactive forms of shopping’ (p.514). Nevertheless, the ‘interactive media’ which can be manipulated in the online shopping environment clearly provides online retailers with an advantage over traditional retailers, given that the technology, ironically, enables this personalisation of experience, if one is a regular visitor to a particular site.

Research into e-satisfaction by Szymanski & Hise, (2000) found that convenience, site design, and financial security are the dominant factors for consumer satisfaction online. In their examination of ‘Hedonic and utilitarian motivations for online shopping behaviour’, Childers et al (2001) found that ‘a technology oriented perspective that attempts to treat shopping media as cold information systems, rather than immersive, hedonic environments, is likely to be fundamentally misguided, especially for products with strong hedonic attributes’ (p.527). In this instance, ‘hedonic' seems to mean pleasurable; the kind of environment where one could lose oneself in the experience. Given that one could make a strong case that books have hedonic - or affective - attributes it would seem to be imperative that the design of the web pages have the appeal that the customers are looking for, rather than just ‘cold information’. Reynolds (2000) substantiates this finding by noting how ‘Amazon.com has successfully positioned itself as a service provider rather than a book retailer through its reviews, book suggestion service, rankings information and such innovations as its consumer small-ads site’ (p.420). It would therefore seem that while high street bookshops are stretching the traditional concept of what a bookshop should be, by providing coffee shops and lifestyle or destination environments, this extension of service provision is also happening online as internet bookshops – especially Amazon - is extending its provision beyond simply that of products to give a more rounded service to its customers. Whether consumers actually perceive this ‘rounded’ approach to service provision by online booksellers or are simply more attuned to the convenience of the online experience is yet to be established.

3.6.5 Comparing browsing in online and offline settings
Much has been written about shopping theory and the various social motives present when one goes on a shopping trip. For instance: ‘While some shopping trips are entered into in order to find a specific item, many are performed just to socialise and catch up with friends, or to have time with oneself’ (Rowley, 2002, p.370). In the study of online retailing, the aspect of socialising or catching up with friends is obviously absent, but nevertheless, whether this quality is one which the consumer is aware of
when shopping online, has yet to be studied. Browsing is a key aspect of the shopping experience, but as yet, there is little information available on browsing behaviour in the online setting (ibid). Rowley discusses opportunities for online browsing, saying that the very nature of the online experience is such that the opportunity for browsing and happening upon wished-for items by chance are limited. Rowley also notes that it is important to realise that browsing is not just a ‘choosing mechanism’ or a means to an end, but a valid activity in itself which affords the browser pleasure: ‘Accordingly, if a purchase is not made, the quality of the experience is not lessened in any way’ (Campbell, in Rowley, 2002, p.370). Furthermore, according to Rowley, someone shopping online may not intend browsing but may be drawn into it; what started as a directed search online can, somewhere along the way turn into browsing, especially as technological advances that support browsing have become more common and more effective. However, she goes on, ‘it is difficult to replicate the richness of this real-world shopping experience in an on-line shop’ (ibid, p.371).

Comparing the activity of browsing in traditional stores with ‘browsing’ online, one almost requires a new word to describe this online activity, as it is so different to that carried out in a traditional store. An examination of Rowley’s findings in the context of online book buying seems appropriate, as does an assessment of consumer approaches to browsing online, if indeed, browsing is possible. At the moment, technology does not allow the online book buyer to choose a department and browse the spines of the books, but again this quality of serendipity - the happy accident of finding a book which attracts the browser - was one which Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon, tried to emulate in the online setting with ‘personalised’ recommendations, associated with books the customer has already purchased, as well as reviews leading customers to titles which they might otherwise not have been aware of. Indeed every retrieved book lists other similar titles and subject searches gather a broad range of books. However, this is patently not the same as scanning a row of shelves, or having a book catch one's eye. It is also important to remember that just because a book has been purchased, it need not necessarily have been enjoyed, or even read (Gardiner, 2002), but these recommendations make that assumption.

Amazon introduced a facility called ‘search inside’ in October 2003, allowing browsers to search for specific phrases or words which can be located in the actual text of a book rather than just in the title page. While this facility is limited (at launch it was available to 120,000 titles) it is a step closer to real browsing for the online book buyer (Wilkinson, 2005). Google also introduced Google Book Search (formerly Google Print)
in December 2003, another facility for users which allows book content to be searched (Ojala, 2006). This facility is currently being investigated by many publishers, in order not to be left behind in the advent of this technology (Chillingworth, 2006). Google, of course, is not a bookseller, at the moment. While this facility may be seen as a kind of substitute for browsing, allowing as it does, access to the content of some books (those whose publishers/authors participate in the scheme) it is nevertheless a different experience. Whether or not it will in time be as effective a sales tool as browsing in a real bookshop, has yet to be determined. Furthermore, it offers a different quality of experience, given that the tactile and social elements of browsing are absent. Consumer reaction to this kind of experience has yet to be assessed.

While online bookshops can try to replicate the social elements of a trip to the bookshop, there appears to be no current material that examines ‘how relevant the various approaches of internet retailers are to their customers’ (Horvath, 1998, p.18). As Horvath goes on to summarise; ‘For the straightforward shopper, Amazon is as good as a good bookstore’ (p.19). Unfortunately, no one knows how many shoppers are ‘straightforward’, even if we are agreed what ‘straightforward’ actually means in this context. If it is a customer who knows more or less what they want and is not concerned with being around others or having a ‘real’ browsing experience, then the online experience may be ideal.

3.6.6 Branding online

The choice of a favourite web site is very much a lifestyle statement: It says a lot about what a person is interested in, as well as something about the type of person she would like to be (Solomon, 2002, p.4).

One’s brand and product choice online can be seen to reflect aspiration and idealism, just as it does with terrestrial brand. De Kare Silver emphasises the importance of brand strength in an online environment:

Those companies who have invested in their brands over time have put themselves in an excellent position to take advantage of future changes in shopping habits. As consumers do become more familiar with buying online and as the number of store visits reduce, so there will be a premium on established reputations (de Kare-Silver, 1998, p.78).
De Kare Silver also found that trust in a brand was the most significant factor regarding future buying by customers and whether they would recommend a particular site to friends. As Brynjolfsson and Smith found from their research,

One of the ironies suggested by our data is that, far from being a great equaliser of retailers and eliminating the need for branding as is so often claimed, the internet may heighten the importance of differences among retailers in dimensions such as trust and branding (2000, p.579).

This seems to suggest that setting up a business on the internet might be easier for an established brand i.e. a ‘clicks and mortar’ business rather than one starting from scratch. However the bookselling business would seem to contradict these findings. Amazon is by far the most successful online bookselling business in the UK and has no terrestrial representation. Furthermore, no other chain book retailer of note has as yet been able to compete with Amazon with regard to their commercial online site. Nevertheless, now that Amazon is a phenomenally well established brand in the field of online bookselling, this notable brand strength would seem to work very strongly in its favour with regards to trust and brand familiarity. One might surmise that while Waterstone’s was a very successful specialist bookseller in terrestrial stores, it perhaps did not have the expertise to set up and maintain its own online bookselling site when it did. The approach taken by Jeff Bezos of Amazon, would also suggest that knowledge of online technology is far more important than book knowledge when it comes to operating and maintaining a successful online bookselling operation (Spector, 2000).

Reynolds’ critical review of writings on e-commerce (2000) also suggests that brand familiarity and trust are much more important qualities for the online buyer than the more basic attraction of low prices. Furthermore, research by Jarvenpaa & Todd (1997) found that new users of the internet are inclined to explore the sites of familiar brands first. Latcovich and Smith also found that consumers are prepared to pay a premium to use a familiar branded seller (2001). Indeed in the research by Latcovich and Smith, low prices online did not necessarily translate into the most sales. This is also commented upon by Fenech & O’Cass (2001). Once again the importance of the brand and brand recognition is demonstrated to be crucial in the online setting. Jevons and Gabbott (2000, p.630) note that:

Branding on the Internet is of interest because the dynamics of a brand in a computer-mediated environment may well turn out to be different to the
dynamics of a brand in the physical world and, whilst there is intuitive support for such a proposition, there is yet to be any evidence that Internet branding follows currently accepted branding principles.

Therefore, while results gathered from research to date would suggest that branding is just as important to online consumers as it is to those buying in the high street, nevertheless, more research needs to be gathered to substantiate these findings, as well as investigating the impact of price.

In their research entitled: ‘Effect of store design on consumer purchases: an empirical study of on-line bookstores’, Liang and Lai (2002) point out that despite the fact that e-commerce is no longer a novel way of doing business, nevertheless, ‘there are neither guidelines nor theories to show how electronic store features affect consumer purchases’ (p.431). The myriad of businesses that have set up and are currently setting up online selling sites are seemingly basing their online store designs on no firm understanding of how the online environment affects consumer behaviour. Liang and Lai go on: ‘Empirical findings indicate that design quality is as important as product price, and more important than store reputation for on-line book shopping’ (ibid, p.442). McGoldrick comments that ‘convenience outranks price as a factor for many consumers in stimulating on-line behaviour’ (2002, p.602). Whether these findings are supported by the current research will be established in due course.

Brand strategists have conflicting views about whether or not to replicate brand identity when a terrestrial brand moves online. ‘Completely replicating an offline brochure online completely ignores the Internet’s unique applications’ according to Charlie O’Shields (Drew, 2002, p.8). Brand strategist Tomas Ancona emphasises online importance at ‘every touch point – be it tone of content, navigational structure or the visual language that runs all the way through the site. Your customer experience is your brand’ (ibid, p.145). This comment emphasises the similarly key role that the brand plays for customers, whether they be offline or online. The emphasis from branding and marketing gurus on how important the experience of brand is for customers, suggests that this is a vital part of the online shopping experience for consumers.
3.6.7 Online consumers
Like any approach to branding, be it online or offline, the importance of identifying your key audience is crucial, as it enables that audience to be targeted via the website (Drew, 2002, p.146; Van Mesdag, 1997). Van Mesdag goes so far as to say that depending on the profile of the audience, who the audience is, branding may even play a stronger or weaker role than the content. It would seem then that in some cases the brand perception is more important than even the actual content of the site. Kes Neilsen, senior vendor relations manager with Amazon, has noteworthy comments to make on identifying Amazon’s core market, and how that market has changed:

A few years ago, you may have been able to identify a typical Amazon customer. Increasingly, we’re doing well in categories that are streets apart. We wouldn’t pin ourselves to a demographic such as ‘market towns’ or ‘upmarket’. We offer every type of book for every type of customer (Bury and Kean, 2005, p.26).

Clearly Amazon feels it is reaching a very broad demographic. The present research compares this with the approach taken by the chain bookshops to their markets.

Looking in more detail at the available information regarding who uses online sites, Mintel (2005) found that for online bookshops in particular, there was little in the way of a gender split, and that shoppers’ ages ranged broadly from 20 - 55. However, the popularity of internet shopping falls away with the over 55s. This is attributed to lack of trust, or unfamiliarity with the necessary technology. Mintel also found that online book shopping was very popular with families, with 31% of all families and 46% of ABC1 families having bought a book from Amazon in the 12 months preceding their research. This would suggest that online bookselling, like traditional bookselling is also dominated by ABC1 consumers. The current research will examine whether there are significant differences in demographics across traditional and online bookshop users.

3.6.8 The success of online bookselling
The advent of internet bookselling and its subsequent development was initially a cause of great concern for traditional high street bookshops. The fear that every customer would be lured away by the attraction of being able to order books efficiently and conveniently and find what they wanted without having to scan bookshelves was a source of worry for traditional booksellers (Clee, 2000). While online bookselling has
provided traditional booksellers with serious competition, nevertheless, terrestrial bookselling still has a solid market, albeit one that is very competitive. Sales in 2003 (Mintel, 2005) showed that while Waterstone’s achieved sales of £428.9 millions, Amazon achieved £417.0 millions. These figures illustrate the strength of both of these booksellers, which provide very different book buying experiences. More recently, Amazon.co.uk was found to have almost a 69% share of traffic to online book sites. The magnitude of this percentage share is made clear when one sees that W H Smith has just over 1%, and Waterstone’s 0.7% (Teather, 2007, p.28). Clearly, online bookselling provides considerable competition to the traditional bookselling trade and Amazon in particular has developed into an extremely successful business. The continued success of online sites as well as the continuation of traditional bookshops, despite their difficulties, suggests that consumers appreciate the unique qualities in both of these bookselling settings. This research will examine these qualities and asks whether consumers in online bookshops are aware of and concerned about the absence of such qualities and facilities such as booksellers, coffee shops and even other customers.

Books are the most successful product to be sold online. In 2005, sales of books accounted for 34% of the market, followed by sales of DVDs and videos, with 22% of the online market (Booksellers Association, 2007). Books are ideally suited to the online environment; books are easily posted, and one usually has a very clear idea of what is going to arrive. De Kare Silver has said that: ‘Bookselling over the Internet is one of the more sophisticated industry sectors to have developed in this way’ (1998, p.38). It is relevant to note that when Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon, set out on his business venture, it was in response to the exponential growth of the internet and a desire to have a successful online business. The fact that it was an online bookshop that emerged perhaps says more about the suitability of the book to online transactions than about Bezos’ love of books (Spector, 2000, p.7). Part of the strategy behind the development of Amazon.com was a realisation by Bezos that bookselling as an industry was essentially inefficient. It has historically evolved in a way which one would never choose by design. Publishers, suppliers and retailers, rather than working together, have essentially conflicting intentions. As Bezos says, it is ‘not a rational business. The publisher takes all the return risk and the retailer makes the demand predictions’ (Spector, 2000, p.36).

While one can contest the detail of Bezos’ argument, there would seem to be an element of truth in what he says and the online forum purely from an economic point of
view is certainly more efficient, cutting out the costs of stockholding and staff. Gardiner (2002) concurs with the suggestion that books are the ideal online item of merchandise, suggesting that online bookselling appears to ‘offer solutions to the most generic problems of trade bookshops…trying to sell very specific products to customers whose needs and wants are, on the whole, unknown’ (p.164). Some salient points to bear in mind when looking at online retailing seem to be of particular relevance to the book trade. Brynjolfsson and Smith point out that ‘Amazon.com is the undisputed leader in online book sales, and yet is far from the leader in having lower prices’ (2000, p.577). This obviously raises the topic of familiarity with the brand being an effective lure to buying online, as pointed out above. Nevertheless, while Bryjolfsson and Smith have found that Amazon do not (or did not at that time) offer the lowest prices online, there has been considerable media coverage of the heavy discounting which Amazon has undertaken of a wide range of books. For example, offering 30% discount off 100,000 titles priced at £10 or over and 50% discount on more than 100 titles over the Christmas season (Bookseller, 2004a, 2005a).

Degeratu, Alexandru, Rangaswamy and Wu (in Brynjolfsson and Smith, 2000, p.564) also found that customer sensitivity to pricing can sometimes be lower online than in the high street and that those retailers with the lowest prices online do not necessarily generate the most sales. All this evidence serves to underline the importance of the brand. However, it also suggests that further research into price sensitivity in online bookshops would be appropriate. The research being undertaken addresses this point and asks consumers about the importance of price when buying books online, as well as investigating the importance of brand.

3.6.9 Emulating the traditional bookshop
There are significant efforts made by many online bookshops to mimic the social qualities of the terrestrial bookshop experience. This is done by having pop up recommendations, easy access to other customers’ reviews and the opportunity to review and rate books you have read, in an effort to replicate the social aspect of shopping in a traditional bookshop. This is an acknowledgement by the online stores that book purchasing is not solely about the purchase, but is about the buying experience. The online retailer may not be able to alter the fact that an online purchase is essentially a lone experience, but there are many opportunities to personalise the online book buying experience. There is certainly no bookseller available for advice or recommendations, but with the wealth of information available online about books –
certainly much more than is visible in traditional bookshops – this begs the question, are booksellers necessary online? The success of Amazon would suggest they are not, but this research will examine this question and ask online customers what they think. As previously pointed out, online retailing cannot as yet compete with traditional stores in terms of tactile experience. Indeed this may be seen as one of the main distinctions between online and traditional book shopping. Despite the wealth of information about prospective purchases and even the chance to ‘search inside’, one still cannot leaf through a book online for font size, paper quality, or even to read the final sentence, to check how a work of fiction ends.

Jeff Bezos acknowledges,

> We’re not going to replace the bookstore...One of the things that’s interesting about books as a product is that people go to bookstores in part because they want books, and in part because they want a nice place to go. It’s a challenge for all interactive bookstores to make their site as engaging as possible (Spector, 2000, p.80)

It appears that even at the advent of Amazon, Bezos was sufficiently aware of the social aspect of the bookstore to try to replicate that quality in the Amazon website. As well as referring to the online site as a ‘store’, thus endeavouring to suggest that the online experience was not dissimilar to the terrestrial bookshop experience (Horvath, 1998), Amazon also,

> promoted the idea of creating a *community* of customers. The company fostered this clubby feeling by encouraging readers to write and submit book reviews’ (Spector, 2000, p.87)

This was done in the hope that a sense of community would be engendered between users of Amazon. Bezos appears to have been acutely aware of the commercial advantages that online bookselling could ultimately have as well as being aware of the social disadvantages with which he would have to grapple. Nevertheless he offered up the whole Amazon.com experience as ‘engaging and fun’ (ibid, p.139) and while acknowledging that customers of Amazon would never ‘hear the bindings creak and smell the books and have tasty lattes’ (ibid) this knowledge of the differences between online and terrestrial, enabled Bezos to gain some competitive advantage and market Amazon.com in a more effective fashion. It is interesting to ponder the aspirational
aspect of book shopping in the context of online shopping. While one cannot be seen browsing in particular sections, and in that specific context, online shopping can be seen as limiting the potential to see and be seen by others, nevertheless, the ease with which reviews and opinions can be posted allows online shoppers more freedom to express opinion and let others know what and how much they have read.

It is interesting to note the furore caused when it was revealed that publishers paid to have their books featured on Amazon’s review pages ‘Destined for Greatness’ and ‘What we’re Reading’ (Hennessey, 2000), rather than being promoted on the grounds of merit alone. This kind of paid promotion is also undertaken by high street bookshops, and similar objections were raised when this practice became common knowledge (Thorpe, 2004; Bookseller, 2005a, Reynolds, 2007). The power of this kind of online advertising is considerable, simply because it is highly visible to every person who visits the site. It is important to remember however that the brand integrity of Amazon was arguably dented when these revelations came to light (Spector, 2000, p.234). It was felt that these kinds of promotions implied that the books were selected on merit alone and to have any kind of financial imperative behind the promotions was arguably misleading. Comparing promotions in the book trade to those in other retail industries it would perhaps seem a little naïve to expect goods to be promoted on the basis of quality alone. This mirrors what Laura Miller (2006) has written with regards to the promotion of books and the difficulties faced by those who sell books; that there is a central juxtaposition between what many people see as the cultural obligation which booksellers have to their public, which does not sit easily with the fact that they are just like any other business organisation, in that they need to be profitable in order to survive.

Online booksellers, just like traditional booksellers, have changed markedly in recent years, with advances in technology and a more personalised approach to selling books. Given that book sales dominate the online retail market, research into this area of retailing would provide invaluable information regarding consumer behaviour and responses to online marketing approaches, not only for the growing area of online research, but also for the book trade as well as the wider field of online retailing.
3.7 Literature Review – a Critical Reflection

3.7.1 Reflecting on the context
The literature review for the thesis helps to provide context for the study, as well as supporting – or sometimes contradicting – the research findings. Approaching the literature review for the current research, one must provide a rationale for the literature included as well as an explanation for the rejection of literature which may initially seem relevant but is ultimately discarded. Certainly with regard to the current study, it was clear that scholarly material on bookselling and publishing was limited, and moving beyond those parameters to the broader scope of available literature, brought its own challenges. There is a great deal of material available in related fields, and one of the requirements of this research was to focus upon relevant areas. As outlined in the Methodology chapter, one of the challenges of the current research was the fact that the area is relatively new to academic research, and given the emergent research design, and the fact that an evolutionary, developmental approach was taken (in response to the ongoing data collection and findings) a parallel approach has had to be adopted with respect to the literature also, reviewing the relevance of various sources as the thesis has developed. This section explains the selection process used for the literature, as well as subsequent revision of this selection process due to the evolution of the research.

Viewing the research holistically, it was necessary to examine closely the rationale for approaching the literature that was reviewed in the first place, and to justify its inclusion or rejection in terms of the research questions and research objectives. Taking into account the evolutionary, developmental approach of the study, as well as accepting that every piece of research will develop, change and perhaps shift focus along the way, there may emerge instances in any research where literature initially regarded as relevant, even central, may be rejected. Furthermore, the initial deselection of some literature may need to be reconsidered as the research development may demand its inclusion. Indeed in the case of this research, some literature which had not initially been considered as central to the thesis, gradually became significant, particularly as the research focus shifted along the way. This development of research focus is further explained in the Critical Reflection of the Methodology, section 2.5.
The preliminary approach to the literature and the reasons for looking at what was actually reviewed is set out in Appendix XI. Examining this in more detail it is useful to reflect upon the research questions, and the subsequent research objectives, as these provided the initial focus for the approach to the literature review. The first research questions which emerged are as follows:

*What are the influencing factors for consumer behaviour in bookshops?*

*How do bookshops market themselves (and the brand) and their goods?*

*Is there a sense of community among bookshop users, or a ‘culture’ of bookshops?*

*How do consumers respond to these marketing and branding techniques?*

*Are the marketing strategies adopted by bookshops successful in attracting people who don’t normally visit?*

*How do consumers respond to online facilities?*

*Why might some customers prefer to shop online and others in traditional bookshops?*

As set out in the Methodology chapter, these research questions were developed in due course into the following objectives.

**Objective 1** – To evaluate the interpretation and application of marketing techniques used by bookshops and bookshop managers and to analyse the methods by which they establish and maintain their brand identities.

**Objective 2** – To analyse critically the impact of these branding and marketing strategies on customer perception of the bookshop identity, perception of bookshop marketing procedures and the resulting impact on customer behaviour in the bookshop setting.

**Objective 3** – To evaluate the factors contributing to any sense of the ‘culture’ or ‘community’ of the bookshop experienced by bookshop users, again examining any resulting impact on customer behaviour.
Objective 4 – To evaluate whether or not the marketing and branding strategies adopted by bookshops are effective at attracting new customers.

Objective 5 – To evaluate the degree to which the application of marketing techniques and approaches to branding by traditional bookshops have been extended to online settings with a view to assessing any differentiation which bookshops make between traditional and online customers.

Objective 6 – To critically analyse customer perception of the marketing and branding strategies of online bookshops, including any sense of online community experienced or perceived by online bookshop customers; the resulting impact on behaviour in online bookshops, and to evaluate the degree to which those who do not regularly use traditional bookshops are attracted to online bookshop facilities.

Reflecting upon the objectives and upon the research questions above, it is clear that literature on marketing would be relevant to any study looking at consumer responses to marketing in bookshops. A strategy focusing initially upon trade approaches to book marketing was taken in order to contextualise the study and to focus upon the current areas of concern to the trade. This examination of trade literature identified as particular areas of concern, discounting, lifestyle concepts and the similarity of marketing approach across bookshops. Again, much of this is explained in Appendix XI. Scholarly literature on marketing was then reviewed, looking at key texts such as Kotler (2006) and others examining retailing such as Gilbert (2003) and McGoldrick (2002) in order to ensure that the topic of marketing was understood within the retail setting. Marketing represents a wide field of research activity and within its ‘umbrella’ is the subject of branding. A study of branding was considered vital to the research, given that the research proposed to look at consumer responses to bookshop identity (see objective 2, above). The key marketing texts noted above were also used for the review of branding literature, as well as other writers on the topic such as Wood (2000), De Chernatony and McDonald (1998) along with a range of trade literature which focused upon the ‘rebranding’ of bookshops. One section of the literature review focused solely upon newer approaches to marketing which are particularly consumer focused, such as CRM (Consumer Relationship Marketing) since looking at the objectives, consumer responses to marketing was to be central to the study.

The final main section of the literature review needed to deal with more complex proposed areas of study such as community and culture within bookshops. Again,
some literature was gleaned from trade sources for this part of the review, given trade writers’ focus upon the growth of coffee shops, the development of bookshops as retail destinations and the changing role of the bookshop into more than just a place to purchase books. This necessitated a deeper examination of motives for shopping, a topic covered in the shopping section within the literature review. This examines our motives and experiences of shopping, and it was felt that this would go some way to explaining some of the eventual results looking at consumers’ shopping habits in bookshops (Miller, D. 1998). Closely linked to the shopping experience was the section dealing with the consumer experience in bookshops, and looking at the bookshop role in the community. This section was included in an attempt to maintain relevance to those objectives looking at the possibility of the existence of some sort of culture or community in bookshops, and again linked back to trade literature examining the bookshop as a third place and the importance of the bookshop as a retail destination with a coffee shop for spending time in. This section again drew upon relevant trade literature, as well as cultural writing on the role of the bookshop (Miller, 1999, 2006; Ross, 2002) and writing on the third place (Oldenburg, 1997; Nozzi, 2004). As far as academic writing on this specific topic is concerned, it was essentially ‘self-selecting’ as there is not a great deal of material available in this area. Indeed this is a particular area where it was envisaged that the thesis could make a contribution towards original knowledge.

This final section of the literature review looked at many of the above topics, but in the context of online bookselling. Therefore, texts examining online marketing, online branding and consumer behaviour online were examined. Some elements of consumer behaviour online helped to address one of the final research questions – why some consumers prefer to shop in traditional stores, why others prefer the online approach. Many of the key writers in these established areas in traditional settings (Kotler, 2006 and Jobber, 2007 for example) also addressed newer concerns with e-marketing for example. Coverage of this literature area was clearly of prime importance given that the final objective looked at online behaviour and response in online settings.

3.7.2 Reviewing the focus of literature
Reflecting upon the questions and objectives above, the main subject areas of marketing, branding, consumer behaviour, shopping, culture of bookshops and community were then felt to have been covered in the literature selected for review.
However, and of vital importance to the thesis, at a later stage in the research, as discussed in the introduction to the Methodology chapter, due reflection upon the direction of the research and in particular the developing focus upon consumer responses to marketing seemed to necessitate a refocusing of the literature. In particular, in order to contextualise those results emerging from the research, it became clear that an examination of more fundamental marketing literature would be necessary, as well as helpful. As well as providing solid underpinning for the research, many of the marketing models and theories potentially provided context for the consumer behaviour also, e.g. the purchase decision model examining motives for purchasing, and the STP process. While the process of STP is one which concentrates upon marketing, nevertheless, all the while it is referring back to predicted consumer response. This re-examination of literature was also necessary in order to strengthen and underpin the conclusions, as well as helping to clarify and strengthen the original contribution to knowledge by giving examples of models and theories to which the research findings could be compared and contrasted, thus underlining the original contribution which this significant piece of empirical research has made to this new area of investigation. Below, is a figure showing how the literature initially developed into different sections of relevance. Some of these diminished in importance (for instance, shop layout) and some took on increased relevance, such as marketing and consumer behaviour, as explained below.

Fig. 3.7 Chapter development
Reflecting holistically upon the progress of the PhD, it became clear that, in a thesis which essentially concentrates upon consumer responses to marketing and branding approaches, it would be imperative to set out the fundamental tenets of marketing and branding in the review of the literature. While these fundamental models and theories may be of varying degrees of relevance, only a review of them could establish their contribution to the context of the thesis. Some of the marketing theories and concepts subsequently covered in the literature review include STP, the marketing mix, the purchase decision model, and the Long Tail. Of these, the purchase decision model and the Long Tail were found to be particularly relevant to this research, helping to illuminate the results, as well as supporting the conclusions and clarifying the original contribution to knowledge. Another model which was found to be relevant to bookselling was the Fishbein and Ajzen theory of reasoned action (Jobber, 2007, p.124), a model which helps to illustrate how a purchase of high-involvement can be explained. This develops the basic purchase decision model into a more complex system, and is particularly appropriate to book purchasing, both traditional and online.

3.7.3 Delimiting of the Literature Review
As explained above, a review of the context of the thesis revealed that more literature should be reviewed and integrated into the thesis in order to inform the conclusions as well as clarifying the contribution to knowledge. However, it is equally important to set out the inevitable delimiting of the literature review; to justify what was rejected as well as explain what is included, in order to support the aim, objectives and overall direction of the research. While a wealth of literature was reviewed, largely due to the breadth of initial focus of the thesis, nevertheless, over the course of the research journey, much was rejected. Rejection of literature was undertaken for many reasons. Much of the initial rejection of literature was straightforward, and little difficulty was met in so doing, since lack of relevance was obvious. However, focusing relevant literature at a more advanced stage of the study became much more challenging, and continual reference to the aim and objectives was necessary to focus the delimiting of the literature. Crucially, it was necessary to keep in mind that the thesis had developed and changed along the way (as explained in the Critical Reflection upon the Methodology), so what had originally been considered important with regard to informing the research, then had to be rejected as it was irrelevant to the research as it had evolved over the process of the research journey. To clarify, it may be helpful to give examples of this focusing process which the literature review went through.
Literature looking in depth at human associations with brands and with deep associations therein was examined as part of the literature review. For instance, Palmer (1996) was reviewed, as he wrote about consumers’ emotional relationships with brands and their own ‘perceived or sought personality’ (p.253). At the time of reviewing it had been anticipated that this might be directly relevant to material emerging from the more qualitative parts of the research, as participants talked about their feelings and associations with certain bookshops. Similarly, writing by Goffman (1963, 1975) was also reviewed, since his works ‘Behaviour in Public Places’ and ‘The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life’ were thought to be potentially useful in a similar context – that of explaining complex social behaviour in bookshops. However, it became clear that as the data collection continued, what emerged even from the most qualitative interaction with participants was much more focused upon responses to tangible qualities and facilities in bookshops, both traditional and online. Vitally for the research, and its shifting focus, it became clear that participants in the more qualitative parts of the research certainly expanded upon their behaviour in bookshops, but the depth with which they expounded on their thoughts and feelings on a more abstract level about bookshops, was more limited. Therefore, Goffman was seen to be of peripheral relevance, and the importance of Palmer was much reduced. Whereas at the point of the original review this had been anticipated as being central to the anticipated results, it turns out that it is more on the fringes of what is useful.

Consumers tended to talk about their responses to the concrete, such as booksellers, coffee shops, book quality and range, rather than the more affective, emotional aspects of book shopping which had been anticipated. While the more affective aspect certainly emerged to a small extent within the research – there was a lot of focus on the importance of environment and atmosphere for example – it was not as central as had been anticipated. A further example of rejected literature is work by Machleit and Eroglu who have researched extensively into affective elements of shopping, particularly the effects of smells when shopping. While these papers were interesting, it was felt that this work moved the research away from its central areas of interest, which as it developed, were more concerned with consumer responses to the concrete aspects of marketing and brands. Connected to this was the investigation of some literature on emotional state and moods when shopping. While this is certainly of interest, and was indeed referred to in the results by the research participants, related literature (Coley and Burgess, 2003 for example) had to be consigned to the realms of future research, since the thesis did not concentrate upon this per se. Indeed connected to this are the results showing the kinds of relaxation effects which bookshops have upon people. However, as mentioned above, this needs to be studied.
in more depth in the future and the related literature consigned to that period. Some literature examining gender differences in shopping was reviewed (for example, Dittmar, Beattie and Friese, 1995), but purely on a practical level, it became clear that unless the thesis was focusing upon gender differences in approaches to book shopping, a detailed examination of gender differences within the current research was not a sensible approach to take. While large numbers of participants were dealt with during the questionnaire stages, nevertheless, it was felt that an in-depth study of gender-based responses would have diluted the strength of the emphasis of the thesis as well as following a direction which was never planned.

It therefore became clear that a review of literature and theory focusing upon established approaches to marketing and to consumer responses therein, would provide useful contextualisation of the study. It had originally been anticipated that the literature focus would have been much more upon bookselling culture and consumer responses, on an affective level, yet the evolution and development of the research dictated otherwise. This summarises the kind of delimiting of literature which went on throughout the process of the literature review.
Chapter 4 - Results

This chapter describes the results from each of the six stages of data collection, as set out in the Methodology chapter. These stages are: interviews with bookshop experts; in-store questionnaires with bookshop customers; focus groups with bookshop customers; online surveys; interviews with online managers and online surveys with users of online bookshops.

4.1 Interviews with bookshop experts

4.1.1 Introduction
Detailed interviews were carried out with two store Managers, one store Marketing Manager and one Marketing Director, all of whom were affiliated with the bookshops where further data collection was to take place. The interviews were carried out with a view to identifying the current high street marketing and branding strategies within a range of high street chain bookshops. The structure of the interviews broadly followed a series of themes within which there were specific questions. (The semi-structured question schedule is Appendix II). Due to the discursive nature of the procedure, there were frequent areas of overlap with certain issues being raised several times. Some interviewee responses were also felt to need further exploration, with the result that each interview was not a carbon copy of questions and answers.

Overall, the degree of corporate loyalty to the respective chain, displayed by the interviewees was quite varied, with the exception of the Marketing Director, who, as one would expect, demonstrated a high degree of company loyalty and strong support of company procedure. Otherwise, there were some frustrations about marketing strategies mentioned by all interviewees: whether about campaigns which were felt to be ineffective; the constraints of being part of a large chain or the feeling that marketing departments of many chain bookshops were essentially generating the same promotions. However, the overall impression gained was one of loyalty and a general faith in what respective companies were doing with regard to branding and marketing.

The resulting coding scheme identifying emerging themes, is Appendix III. The managers interviewed are referred to as Managers A, B, C and D.
4.1.2 The role of branding

4.1.2.1 The Managers' conception of branding
The first area of questions emanated from the general topic of ‘what is branding?’ and sought to investigate what the interviewees understood by the term ‘brand’ and how that related to the brand identities of their respective stores. A broad range of responses was gathered, ranging from a conception of brand as the company logo, or insignia to a more sophisticated understanding of the term; seeing brand identity as what the consumer believes it to be regardless of the company’s projected image. Manager B gave a full and wide-ranging description:

How would I describe a brand? A brand operates at several different levels…: the emotional; the psychological; the commercial. It's... the name the livery and by that I mean the colours chosen, uniform, the mission statement… but most importantly what that brand makes people feel. Whether people like that brand, like to be associated with that brand and are loyal to that brand.

Both Managers A and C referred to the brand, crucially, as being defined by how it is perceived by consumers, rather than how it is projected by those who design and promote the brand. Manager A also added that, ‘companies spend lots of money trying to establish brand and... manipulate your brands, but it’s actually quite hard to change brand perception’.

It is worth noting that Manager C referred to the ‘negative feelings’ which are attached to the term ‘brand’, referring to what he perceived to be a widely held mistrust of anything to do with marketing, advertising or branding.

4.1.2.2 Projected qualities
When exploring the brand identity of the stores concerned, there was considerable overlap across the stores, regarding the qualities which each manager hoped they were conveying to their consumers. The most strongly emerging themes were to provide a wide range of books for customers, and, perhaps more surprisingly, the promotion of community spirit, or being part of the local community. The interviewees were quick to comment on how they hoped their bookshops were appealing to the whole of their respective local communities. This theme of inclusiveness was to surface frequently from all the managers. Closely allied to community involvement was the idea
of local relevance mentioned by some interviewees; making sure that the books that were stocked represented the needs of the local community, and tailoring stock and promotions to satisfy those needs. ‘Community outreach’ and ‘community spirit’ were terms mentioned as being integral to the brand identity of stores A and C, along with the aspects of the store which one might more readily expect to be mentioned, such as ‘knowledgeable staff’ and a ‘relaxed atmosphere’. Indeed, just the previous day, Manager A had attended a meeting of ‘lifestyle’ stores in her chain, so we see that one chain at least is actually referring to some of its own branches this way and acknowledging the importance of the concept of lifestyle as portrayed in its bookstores.

Extending the idea of a lifestyle store, Manager C introduced the term ‘third place’ in relation to his store, and said that this kind of image is what his own chain were trying to convey to their customers. The term ‘third place’ describes somewhere in the local community where people can find companionship; conversation if desired, and perhaps eat or drink (Oldenburg, 1997; Nozzi, 2004). The bookshop as a ‘destination’ or lifestyle choice is a topic which has been referred to widely in the trade press (Kreitzman, 1999a; Sanderson, 1999; Cardew, 2004; Clements, 2005) and is becoming more widespread with the current expansion of large chain bookshops which have cafes, sofas and enough room for a consumer to spend a considerable amount of time there. Manager C referred to the ‘multi-layered’ branding of his store, given that some people might pop in just to purchase books, but that others see it as somewhere to read or study or just relax and have coffee.

On a more practical note, Manager D underlined the importance of value for money, referring to it as a hygiene factor in bookselling (an expectation of customers, rather than a luxury).

The diagram below shows the various qualities which the managers wished their bookshops to project. Each quadrant represents a different set of qualities. It is clear to see how strongly the theme of community came through from the interviews, as well as the importance of the booksellers in imparting good customer service; being able to make recommendations and to be able to speak with authority and expertise when talking about books.
4.1.2.3 Character of the store

Linked to the brand identity of the store, the interviewees were asked if it was possible to personify their store, and to imagine what it would be like were it to come to life. Examples of the terms emerging here include ‘eclectic’, ‘feisty’, ‘opinionated’ and ‘informed’. Manager C referred to the ‘cachet’ of the bookshop or the ‘highbrow’ element which is still attached to it, even though he acknowledged that ‘most of your profit comes from Tom Clancy’ (a mainstream thriller writer). Manager B was unwilling to state named characteristics of his store and said instead that ‘I wouldn’t limit it, by defining it, to one individual and…I think that’s a mistake to make. I think to compartmentalise it is automatically closing yourself off’. Fig. 4.1.2 illustrates the
various characteristics of the stores which the managers felt were present. It is notable that many of these qualities would need to be demonstrated by the booksellers, or arguably, by a broad range of stock. For example, authority, credibility and intellectualism could certainly be demonstrated by a knowledgeable bookseller, or by stocking a broad range of titles which might convey these sorts of qualities to the customers. It is possible to group these qualities as follows, so that they fall roughly into ‘reliability’, ‘individuality and spirit’ and ‘intelligence and intellectualism’.

**Reliability**
- Authority
- Integrity
- Informed

**Intelligence and intellectualism**
- Wit
- Interesting
- Cachet
- Intellectual
- Polymath

**Individuality and spirit**
- Eclectic
- Feisty
- Opinionated
- Independent
- Unorthodox

Fig. 4.1.2 Projected store characteristics

4.1.2.4 Brand impact on sales
The responses to this area of enquiry seemed to focus more on marketing rather than brand identity. Manager A felt that in her store they were successful at promoting a range of titles in an interesting way, to the widest range of customers. Manager C also
focused upon marketing and the power it has to predict sales of promoted titles, but he went on to describe how the marketing strategies in his store – concentration on ground floor promotions as ‘the brand’ – had the most impact on sales and how that relatively small area of the store generated the largest percentage of sales. None of the managers felt that the brand identity of their store was ever compromised by selling ‘unsuitable’ books, since they all felt that there was no title or genre of writing that they wouldn’t sell. As Manager C said, ‘I think our idea is that we should be stocking everything’.

4.1.2.5 Consumer impressions of the stores
Manager A referred to her experiences when interviewing for new staff, as this presented the opportunity to ask about their impressions of the store. She noted that commonly mentioned were physical aspects of the store such as,

(L)ightness… colour; signage; ambiance things like that. So the things that immediately they pick up on is about the physical properties. And of course I’m always desperately disappointed because I think our stock range is so much better, but… they either don’t think about that at all and can’t articulate that, or that’s way down the list. The things that they pick up on is kind of… lightness.

Manager C, when referring to the comments which were made by customers about the store also commented on the qualities mentioned such as atmosphere, and pleasant environment. Manager C went on to say,

There’s definitely a lot of positive feedback on a day to day basis about the store and about the atmosphere and about… how people feel when they come here and therefore why they come here.

The issue of the effect of the bookshop environment on feelings and emotions of consumers is explored in greater detail when examining the results from the subsequent stages of data collection.
4.1.2.6 Site and geography
An issue which arose across the course of the interviews was how geographical peculiarities impact upon the brand identity of stores. Brand identity was understood by all managers to be affected by topics such as the site of the store; socioeconomic status of an area; local competition and even size of store. One example given was that if a bookstore were to be in an extremely busy high street it would necessarily make the recognition of regular customers and the building of customer/staff relationships more difficult. It was felt that size of store would impact on the identity also, given that a staff of 40 would be less familiar with their customers than a staff of four.

‘Scottishness’ of the store was mentioned in one interview as being a key factor in store identity - a topic which would obviously be applicable only to the stores in Scotland, although branding linked to regional differentiation could obviously apply across a national chain. These peculiarities of identity came up time and again and serve to underline that brand cohesiveness is ransom to these foibles of individual stores’ regional differences. This individuality arose again when Manager A referred to the fact that several customers of her shop would say that they shopped there because, perversely, they didn’t want to give money to a chain. This kind of brand misapprehension is obviously working in the favour of Manager A and her store (a well known UK wide chain), and she went on to refer to the fact that several customers think her chain is in fact an independent. This misapprehension is the kind that seemed to pay dividends as it was the kind of identity which she was happy to promote: she was happy to be seen as an ‘independent in a chain’ and to reap the competitive advantage which resulted. Indeed, this image of a ‘chain of independents’ was to form part of a brand campaign for her bookshop chain, to take place at a future date. The importance of acknowledging a local relevance for bookshops even within a chain was emphasised by each of the interviewees. Manager A said,

I think we have 122 quite separate stores that say different things. And probably inevitably, the strategy has to be, “who’s saying the best thing, and how do we make sure we roll that out to everybody?” But I hope it’s “who’s saying the best thing and how do we, how do we take the best and push it forward” rather than “how do we make these 122 stores say one thing?”.
4.1.3 The development of the brand

4.1.3.1 Marketing and brand guidelines

When examining how the brand identity and marketing strategies have evolved in the stores concerned, it is clear to any bookshop customer that display styles whether in windows or on tables in store, have become much more stylised in recent years amongst the chains. While it is still possible to find handwritten signs and homemade displays in independent bookshops this seems to be anathema to the chains. Referring to display tables at the front of his store, Manager B said;

(T)here is... an increasingly strict set of expectations and guidelines as to how they should be physically laid out, the pyramid, and which position as well as content, the titles on the table and the position of the sticker, so there’s fairly rigid expectations, in terms of standards.

However, he continued: ‘When you get off the front of store, off a bestseller bay, it’s more about keeping the shelves neat and tidy: books spine out; facing out your bestsellers; just making them look, easy to shop’. Manager C referred to the marketing plan which was rolled out to stores nationwide, in order to have a ‘uniform marketing strategy’. He went on,

You walk in to this store and then leave and walk into Oxford Street; it’s going to look the same, pretty much. You’re going to find the same things in the same places and so on. It’s giving out the same image or the same brand... but in terms of how we lay that out ourselves... there’s obviously flexibility, especially just considering the local market.

Manager A thought that ‘the brand for us is personified in how we merchandise the shop’. She went on to explain that the style of display seemed to be more representative of the brand identity of the chain, rather than the books that were stocked and was thought to involve more ‘prescriptive input’ from head office than the choice of titles for sale. Therefore, while the respective head offices of the chain bookshops studied could be said to be rather prescriptive, the branches seem to be given varying amounts of freedom to respond to local needs.
4.1.3.2 Recent branding developments

Focusing upon any recent changes or newer initiatives on the part of the bookshops, in an effort to enhance brand identity, or as part of ongoing marketing initiatives, the common theme emerging was how much more focused, professional - even aggressive - the marketing was now, compared to even five years ago. As Manager A put it,

I think that the company had come from this very small very “we’re all a big family” - it was a bit of a kind of love-in almost and I think it had to become, more robust, more professional... more competitive, less naive.

Manager C said,

We market ourselves much more aggressively now than we ever have done in the past... as the chain has grown the brand has grown and therefore... there is increased control, or increased advice over how your store should look and how... you should be pushing the brand.

4.1.3.3 Highly branded ‘front of store’

A high level of importance was accorded to the ground floor area in each of the stores concerned, since that was where all the promotions were and where the promotion of brand identity was focused. Therefore, there tended to be a concentration of ‘3 for 2’ offers, discounts, top ten shelves and staff recommendation in each of the stores concerned, near the front of the store, or in a multi-level store, on the ground floor. Manager C referred to the occasional difficulty he felt in getting people in to the other parts of the store, beyond that intensely promoted area to what he referred to as the more distant ‘destination sections’. Manager B referred to the strictest sets of head office display guidelines applying to the front of store. In all of the stores studied, it is arguable that projection of store identity is defined more accurately by the presentation of the store, than by the range of stock. Manager C confirmed that in his store, there was a high concentration of sales which took place in the heavily branded front of shop area:

What sums up the brand is when you walk in the front door of the ground floor of the store. That’s where our marketing is centred and that’s what everything directs towards. Our ground floor as you walk in the door is
where you’re pushing the brand and it’s where you’re pushing your offers and you’re pushing your deals.

4.1.4 Promotional impact
Manager C commented on the impact that promoting a title or series can have on its sales performance. This demonstrates the change in performance which strategic placing of a title or series can have:

Marketing plan definitely directs what you’re going to sell. I could take next month’s marketing plan of what we’re going to be adding to our promotion and I can guarantee you that next month that’ll be some of our bestselling titles over the course of the month.

He saw this as concentrating the customers on key titles and helping them to make choices;

It filters their choice down and centres it on specific things, just even by the layout of the store... the majority of folk are in just to buy what’s new... and people are happy to be directed by promotions.

4.1.4.1 Nationwide promotions
Discussing the topic of discounting raised many interesting issues. In many ways, like the ‘3 for 2’ campaigns, it was felt to be something that bookshops needed to be seen to be doing, even something that customers expected in bookshops, but reservations were raised by all of the managers about the wisdom of such an approach (with the notable exception of the Marketing Director). The constant changing of windows, updating of posters and in store display makes administering co-ordinated promotions a labour intensive task, but when managers are probed about the benefits, some interesting responses were forthcoming. When asked in what way promotions such as BTU (Back to University) and ‘3 for 2’ reinforce the brand, the considered opinion of Manager A was, ‘I’m not sure they do reinforce the brand’. Manager B expressed serious doubts about this kind of promotion, and Manager C supported it – with reservations – because it was supposed to attract new customers. Manager D was also clear that it was part of the ‘value for money’ ethos and expansion of the market which her store was going for. Manager A went on to point out the cyclical nature of bookselling and the marketing initiatives which were undertaken, commenting that it
was now rare to see any in-store marketing which she hadn’t seen before, in some incarnation over the years.

The widespread adoption of the ‘3 for 2’ promotions was generally acknowledged to be one way of widening the book buying market. Manager B, while supporting the ‘3 for 2’ promotions in store, had reservations about the margin (net profit) which was given away on such promotions, and referred to his desire to sell items at full price. A reduction in this kind of promotion might have the effect of reducing turnover, but the effect on net profit is less predictable. As Manager B said,

In the time that I’ve been here, one of the things I have done is tried to decrease the visibility of the price promotions and increase the space…given to back list, to range, to non-promoted titles. Now that’s driven by several things. One is that I…take more than 80% of my sales from non-promoted titles. And I make more profit from non-promoted titles, so that the ‘3 for 2’ message…is actually not the most significant part of our business and is costing me profit.

It seems that while the highly branded area results in a high concentration of sales per square foot, there are nevertheless issues of profit margin to be considered. Manager B continued,

(W)hen I look at a…title that’s sold ‘3 for 2’ and if I could have sold it ‘3 for 3’ I think “why did I give the money away?” But that’s just an instinctive money making commercial entrepreneurial feeling that I have, I don’t have any input to the…strategic direction or decisions made.

Nevertheless, Manager B still felt that the ‘3 for 2’ promotions sent out a strong message to people who were perhaps unsure about what they wanted, or were purchasing books directed by price. Manager D pointed out that there is much more focus now on price and value for money than was formerly the case. She opined that this was due to a more sophisticated customer who expected value for money in bookshops. As for how a promotion like ‘3 for 2’ supported the brand, Manager B commented on the fact that every high street bookshop now does ‘3 for 2’ promotions and suggested it was an ideal opportunity for identity to be stamped on a bookshop by not doing these multi-buy promotions. Manager A also referred to the fact that these kinds of promotions certainly didn’t distinguish the brand, as every high street
bookshop was doing them. Manager C – like Manager B - was also aware that his store was sacrificing a large chunk of margin on the myriad of price promotions in which it was partaking, but also said the purpose was to get new people in the store. He also noted that the figure for sales of promoted titles were monitored to see what amount of add-ons had sold, as this was the purpose of some of them. Manager D pointed out that ‘3 for 2’ promotions helped promote new authors, since consumers were more inclined to ‘take a risk’ on unknown authors in ‘3 for 2’, as there was less financial outlay involved. The effectiveness or otherwise of the ‘3 for 2’ promotion raised some interesting issues. Manager A felt there was now an expectation by the public that bookshops should be doing ‘3 for 2’, so perhaps this particular promotion has been a victim of its own success. The issue of loss of margin was raised, and it was doubted by at least one manager that the amount of add on sales initiated by drawing customers into the shop for these ‘3 for 2’ purchases covered these losses. At the time of the interviews, there seemed to be no real analysis of the effect of ‘3 for 2’ promotions in any of the stores studied, beyond knowing the quantities sold, and, in some stores, the other goods purchased at the same time. There appeared to be no in-depth analysis of the impact of the widespread adoption of discounted titles.

4.1.5 Organisational differences
All of the interviewees (with the exception of the Marketing Director) expressed the belief that bookshop staff working in the stores had a different concept of the brand compared to that of their bosses, to varying degrees. As Manager A expressed it, ‘any chain marketing department thinks their brand is stronger than the store does’. Indeed it is perhaps important to bear in mind that this could well apply to any industry, not just the book trade. Manager C opined that even if his booksellers were not wholeheartedly ‘on message’ as regards the brand, the important point was that they were good booksellers. The main gripe about brand message which the shop floor booksellers seemed to have, tended to emanate from geographical differences and the fact that these differences sometimes meant that staff felt they could not wholeheartedly support some marketing initiatives. For example, Manager B expressed his belief that marketing initiatives in his chain were very much oriented around London and both he and Manager A suspected that every store would have similar niggles about geographical uniqueness and issues of identity. As Manager B said;
I think when you have a head office that’s in London...they sometimes forget the peculiarities and variances...that impact business anywhere other than London.

This is perhaps an issue that will always arise in any chain and is maybe more indicative of feelings of identity rather than a reflection on the effectiveness of particular marketing campaigns. Manager C however, felt that head office marketing campaigns were always suitable for all stores, even if they did sometimes need ‘tailoring’ to suit particular branches.

There did seem to be pride in the individual bookshop brands, especially with regards to brand reputation and, often, heritage. The managers were aware of the positive qualities which their bookshop brands represented to many of their customers, but this seemed often to be overshadowed by frustration with respective head offices and a feeling of being thwarted; not having the freedom of autonomy which they desired. The managers all seemed to want increased levels of freedom regarding the marketing for their individual stores. With regard to the brand adding value, it seems that the managers were aware of the brand value, but did not often see that brand truly represented or done justice to, in the kinds of (head office initiated) promotions and marketing which was being carried out.

4.1.6 The newer marketing initiatives

4.1.6.1 Coffee shops, sofas and brand identity
The topic of the ‘lifestyle’ store was never far from the centre of conversation and Manager A referred to the fact that there seems nowadays almost to be an expectation of a coffee shop, from customers. All of the interviewees felt that having a coffee shop in store contributed in some way to the store identity. Overall, this seemed to be one of the biggest contributors to the overall brand image of the stores concerned and to contribute significantly to the atmosphere, ambiance and the feeling that bookshops can be a ‘third place’. As Manager C said,

I think having a coffee shop definitely contributes to the identity. It adds to the idea that it’s a third place. Definitely, I mean hugely. People come in not just to purchase books or ...whatever. They come in because it is a lifestyle choice. It relates to coming in, having a coffee and being able to walk about freely... what other shops encourage people to do that? We put comfy
chairs round the store, we put tables with chairs around the store, people can sit down and do some studying and stuff... the point is that people can come in and just enjoy themselves and there’s no obligation to, in some way pay for that experience. And the coffee shop is an integral part of that. People take stock to the coffee shop and read it... and don’t feel an obligation to have to purchase it, therefore we’re... giving an image that we’re not just there to take your money from you; we’re there as part of the community.

Indeed, in his store which out of the three examined possibly conformed most closely to that ideal of ‘third place’, being a very large store with a separate, spacious coffee shop, bookshop visitors were encouraged to walk around the store with coffee, sit at tables, do work or read and he insisted that there would be no pressure put on them to purchase anything.

It was interesting however to note that although all of the managers felt that having a coffee shop in store contributed to the brand, there was a general inability to say definitively whether the addition of a coffee shop made any meaningful contribution to sales of books i.e. whether the people who came in to use the coffee shops actually bought any books. There seemed to be no real knowledge of the financial impact – if any – that the inclusion of coffee shops has in bookshops, simply because there had been no detailed analysis of any links between coffee shop and purchasing patterns. Furthermore, while there appeared to be no concrete evidence of whether the coffee shop customers are a separate clientele to those who buy books or what kind of overlap there is, nevertheless, Manager A was clear that there was a separate coffee shop clientele, which were easy to pick out; ‘you know... you can tell’, thus implying a group easily identifiable in the context of a bookshop. Manager C was also clear that while there could be overlap between bookshop and coffee customers, the coffee shop had definitely attracted a new clientele, who might not necessarily be particularly interested in books:

Absolutely. I mean there are people who come in just to have cups of coffee and who are, I doubt would ever be buying book... stock from us or even be hugely interested in it.

Therefore, the evidence that coffee shops attract a new clientele is anecdotal; based on the managers’ experiences of seeing a new demographic coming into their stores
and focusing on the coffee shop. Manager D made the point that book shopping is experiential and that the inclusion of coffee and sofas has enhanced this experience. Even in the stores which are too small to have coffee shops installed, Manager A referred to the trolleys from which staff can serve coffees to customers. This seems to be further evidence of the element of ‘lifestyle’ which is seeping in to almost all chain bookshops and serves to satisfy what she perceived as customers’ expectations of coffee within bookshops.

I think there’s an expectation, I know when I was the manager of [a branch in a small English town]... people would say, “Oh, if only you had a coffee shop”, you’re thinking “My God!” You know, how can you have a coffee shop in 2000 square feet which we’re trying to... fill to capacity with books?

This theme, of customers wanting to shop in a bookshop within which there is a coffee shop, was continued by Manager A, when commenting on in-store seating. Making the point that customers like to know there are seats around, but that they may not sit in them, she commented that customers also want impressive authors to be at their local store, even though they may not attend the event.

I do think that customers want to know they’re there [chairs], but don’t actually want to use them which is the same with events. They want to know we’ve got big authors coming, but they don’t want to come to the events and queue up.

There therefore seems to be an element of expectation from consumers in bookshops, whether it be special offers, author events or comfortable sofas, representing the qualities or facilities which they think a bookshop should offer.

4.1.7 Bookshops in the local community

We’re not just there to take your money from you; ... we’re there as part of the community (Manager C).

This assertion of serving the community was strengthened by the community outreach activities which Manager C and his colleagues undertake. These include support of
charity reading campaigns for the underprivileged and outreach work with schools which involve visits from staff. Manager C commented:

We would say the people going out to do it would be going out in lots of ways because they love working here and they love books or whatever but obviously it has the benefit - and is designed to have the benefit - that we’re taking the brand out in the community.

As Manager C himself said, many of the people coming to the store for school visits and talks have perhaps never been in a bookshop before. To then be given a voucher to spend on goods of their choice certainly sends out a powerful message about books and that book chain. There was a significant amount of focus by the managers upon the relevance of their respective bookshops to the local community and how stock would be tailored accordingly. However, only one store – as mentioned above – could be described as being proactive and actively went out into the local community visiting schools. For the other bookshops the concept of local relevance seemed to be represented more by the notion of tailoring stock and of making sure that each particular branch of a chain was catering for that community’s wants and needs with regards to books. This did not refer necessarily to local books, but might be reflected in a particularly broad crime section, or a section devoted to regional cookery. The concept of local relevance seemed to revolve around local customer requests.

4.1.8 Bookshop customers

4.1.8.1 ‘Typical’ customers
The range of customers catered for was a wide one, although two of the managers suggested an age range of around 40, not many older, and with disposable income. All of the managers stressed that their chains were trying to appeal to a wide range of customers and although specific groups were targeted with promotions from time to time, that wide range was a consistent theme emerging from all of the interviews. As Manager C said, ‘we’re looking to have a broad range of appeal’. Each of the interviewees emphasised their wish to be welcoming to any potential customers. Asked to describe a typical customer, Manager D’s response was typical: ‘Anyone who wants to buy a book’. However, she had made the point earlier that her chain needed to become more actively accessible while still maintaining their core audience.
4.1.8.2 Developments in bookshop clientele
Manager A felt there had been a change in the book buying market which had taken place over the past few years. Her former book trade experience had been of a more exclusive customer clientele. As she put it, ‘book fiends rather than just quietly book lovers’. She now felt that there was currently a ‘less challenging book readership’. Manager A went on to point out a change in strategy with regard to the books which her chain stocked. Whereas what might be described as highbrow literature may at one point have been stocked, simply because it was felt that a good bookshop ‘should’ stock it, currently any title without an acceptable rate of turnover would not be stocked. Decisions on stock now tended to be made on a commercial footing rather than a cultural one:

Sometimes customers ask for things and you know I’m really pleased ‘cos I can go “Oh, yes that’s by so and so, yes we’ll have that” and I go to the section and I think “Of course we’re not going to have that!” you know, there’s one person a year wants that book and all right I’ve read it or I know about it and it’s wonderful, blah blah blah, but you know, no we don’t have that. …(W)e were criticised the other day…because we didn’t have every novel by Joseph Roth. I would love to work in a bookshop where we had every novel by Joseph Roth. I think he’s wonderful. But, my commercial business head says “that is just going to sit there” and we can’t afford to have that.

The strategy of trying to appeal to a wider market, i.e. a less specialised clientele, is arguably one which the book trade has had to pursue in order to survive. Nevertheless, it was interesting to hear the opinions of Managers A and C on this topic. While they supported wholeheartedly this strategy and Manager C was at pains to stress the importance of getting people reading, no matter what they were reading, they both felt they should be doing more to promote the smaller publishing houses and more specialised book availability. Manager A felt there was room for promotions by the smaller publishers or foreign literature in translation, in order to capture, or recapture ‘the old Waterstone’s customer’, thus expressing a belief that the current bookshop marketing strategies are not necessarily appealing to the more literary end of the consumer market:

I want to see us doing European Literature and promotions and stuff like that ‘cos I still think there are people out there that would really respond
well to that but I think that those days of doing those kind of things have largely gone.

Manager D again emphasised the need for accessibility and being welcoming to all potential bookshop customers, since bookshops have in the past been accused of not catering for people who might be intimidated by the traditional bookshop environment.

4.1.9 Role of the staff

4.1.9.1 Impact on bookshop brand
The impact of the staff on brand image and perhaps more tellingly marketing, has come to the fore recently with bookshop focus on personal recommendations. Most if not all of the chains now have sections dedicated to ‘staff recommends’ where staff members write a short précis about a book they have read and enjoyed, in the hope it will encourage the public to select that title. Manager A said that this had an immense impact on volume of sales and was a more effective marketing tool than the top ten. She emphasised the impact of locally generated promotions, saying, ‘I think the things that work are not things that are company generated’. She also was of the opinion that customers are sometimes looking for something that is a little bit out of the ordinary and that staff recommendations sometimes satisfied that need – ‘some of them do tend to be a bit more, obscure, a bit different, people are prepared to... pick them up’.

Another point linked to this was the range of titles chosen by staff. Certainly in her store, she insisted that she was not at all censorious about the titles chosen to be recommended. So if for instance a member of staff wished to recommend ‘chick-lit’ or left wing fiction, then that choice would be supported. This personal touch was also emphasised by Manager C when he referred to ‘hand selling’. This term refers to the approach which a bookseller can take to a sale, giving a customer the benefit of their knowledge and experience and being able to recommend titles they have enjoyed as well as suggesting alternatives if specific titles are unavailable. While hand selling encompasses good customer service, it can be perceived as going further than providing a good basic level of customer service, since it assumes a level of engagement with the customer, and finding out about their literary likes and dislikes, in order to be able to recommend intelligently. Again, Manager C underlined the effectiveness of this sales technique. Hand selling according to Manager C is about ‘recommendations and about using the knowledge you have and using the enthusiasm you have... to generate and drive the sales’.
When prompted to think about staff impact upon store identity, Manager A was clear that staff personalities have a huge impact upon the particular sections which they manage and therefore upon store identity as a whole. This impact meant it was important to have balanced teams in the shop and to minimise any detrimental effect which might be caused by particularly opinionated members of staff. Manager D concurred with the view that staff were vital, saying ‘they are the brand’. Manager B felt that it was a case of the customer having either a good experience or a bad experience in store, dependent upon bookseller courtesy and appearance. Manager C felt overall they possibly gave off an air of individuality and possibly youth. Overall the impact of individual staff personalities on the identity of the store seemed not to be an issue for Managers B and C.

Exploring the area of staff impact on the bookshops a little further, the contribution of staff to promotions and events was investigated. There were significant differences in how this area was managed by the respective chains. In Store A, individual staff were encouraged to ‘champion’ their own areas of interest and to manage mini promotions for those subjects or authors. If they could justify a commercial reason for promoting a particular subject or author then they were allocated window space or display space and that promotion’s progress was left to them. ‘Everyone’s encouraged to do events because they’re appraised on running events... people are encouraged to pitch for things, particularly if they are really going to champion something and really run with [it]’. In a way, this can be seen to be part of the ‘chain of independents’ image which store A seems to encourage. Certainly, this gives room for a significant amount of individuality to be encouraged in this chain. Manager A was also clear about the impact which individual personalities can have on a store saying; ‘Some personalities really shape departments’. Manager C felt that if staff came up with promotional ideas, they would be passed on to head office, but he pointed out local promotions which were taking place anyway. However there seemed to be no room in his chain for the sort of individual impact upon promotions which were taking place in store A.

4.1.9.2 Staff coteries

This led on to the subject of staff ‘coteries’ of customer: groups of regular customers with whom members of staff had established a relationship and with whom conversations and advice would be exchanged upon every visit. Manager A commented that:
We both have our own kind of sets of customers and all, a lot of the staff do. And they might have customers who, there are certainly customers who I know of and I know their names, but I’ve never spoken to them ‘cos they’re not my customers and you do kind of back off. You know that’s…Arthur’s old lady and gentleman and he always speaks to them and I wouldn't dream of kind of stepping in.

These kinds of relationship might be viewed as an extension of ‘hand selling’ – a particularly individualised approach where regular bookshop visits allow a relationship to be developed between bookseller and customer.

4.1.10 Atmosphere and ambiance
The less tangible qualities of bookshops such as atmosphere and ambience, were themes which came up readily in conversation and were overtly discussed in terms of the bookshops concerned. Manager C had already referred to the readiness of customers to mention the atmosphere and pleasant surroundings in which to ‘hang out’ as well as the whole ‘lifestyle’ aspect of the store and the fact that it was a destination store as well as a ‘third place’ with all the community implications of that term. This topic was investigated further with the interviewees. All of the respondents agreed that they had regular customers, although Manager B felt it was difficult to establish the reasons for regular visiting due to the very busy nature of his store. However he did feel that some lunchtime regulars visited his store as part of their ‘lunchtime ritual’. Manager A also mentioned regular lunchtime visitors and felt in some cases it was to escape an oppressive work environment.

Discussing those people who spent long periods of time in store, all of the respondents mentioned the homeless in this context. However Manager A also believed that some dedicated bookshop visitors tended to be high spenders, sometimes book collectors and also tended to be the customers with whom staff built up relationships: advising on suitable new titles when they visited or apologising if they didn’t feel there was anything new which was suitable for ‘their’ customers.

Manager C felt it was the overall atmosphere of the store which led to customers spending long periods of time there. He specifically mentioned the freedom which customers were given to browse, have coffee and roam around.
With regard to customers developing any sort of relationships with each other, Manager C referred to frequent mentions of his store in the ‘I saw you’ section of the List magazine. This is a classified section of a local events magazine which is subscribed to by a largely youthful population. The ‘I saw you’ section works like any other classified section dealing with relationships but also concentrates on where the interested party saw their potential partner. This clearly extends the social element of the bookshop to another level. Manager A felt that the customers in her store tended to be rather reticent, and that that would deter them from developing relationships. This was felt to be once again a geographical trait. She also felt that people tended to be suspicious of others’ motives and perhaps didn’t feel safe to develop conversations in that setting. It is also notable that Manager A’s store was considerably smaller than that of Manager C and there were far fewer chairs and sofas, so perhaps the opportunity for this sort of relationship development between customers simply presented itself less frequently.

4.1.11 Store identity

4.1.11.1 Brand distinction
When asked how their stores were different from others with whom they’re competing, Manager A was very clear that the distinct advantage her store had over local competition was customer service. This was aided by the fact that she had sufficient staff which aided the quality of that service, by enabling the staff to have the time to give good service and to spend time with customers. Another major point was the autonomy which she felt her store had. Although part of a chain, she felt that each store had its own identity and strengths and was good at sometimes very different things, so that autonomy encouraged and enabled her store to be community responsive. This again links conceptually with her idea of a ‘chain of independents’, allowing individual store identity to come through. Manager C, although he mentioned the importance of customer service and staff knowledge, suggested that customers themselves would refer to the atmosphere and ambiance of the store as defining its identity. They seemed to be the qualities which he felt kept customers coming back to his store. ‘Lightness’ and ‘airiness’ were also physical attributes which were mentioned by Manager A, which were often referred to by customers as qualities of the store which they noticed, and liked. Manager C felt the comprehensiveness of his stockholding was a key factor in defining the store identity, as was the high level of customer service offered by his staff. Customer service and stockholding seem therefore to be key in defining the identity of bookshops, but also those indefinable
factors like atmosphere and visual ‘lightness’ play a part. It is important to realise that this ‘lightness’ does not refer to bright artificial lighting; rather, openness and access to natural light. Indeed consumers were very clear about their dislike of bright lighting in bookshops at a later stage of the research. Local knowledge and ‘community responsiveness’ are felt by the managers to be important too. However, as well as sufficient levels of staff, Manager A also mentioned the importance of a good pitch in town, so these unchangeable factors decided upon by head office also contribute to store identity. Manager B also focused upon the physical attributes of a store such as lighting, size and number of floors as being key in defining the identity of the store.

4.1.12 The impact of online bookselling
The topic of the internet and online bookselling was covered with the interviewees, with regard to whether or not they felt it had had any impact on the brand image of bookshops, or on their approach to marketing. When internet bookselling was first introduced, it aroused many concerns in the trade, and while these worries may still be very real for academic booksellers, the impact of the internet has been very different for the high street stores. Manager A commented on how it has served to change the role of the high street bookseller. No longer are they the key resource for information about books, but now the customer with internet access will come in being very informed and knowing exactly what they want as well as its availability and price. This concurs with earlier research carried out in the book trade, which found that the advent of online bookselling had resulted in wider knowledge of books and their availability (Royle & Stockdale, 2000). Manager A also thought customers used internet bookselling sites as a research tool, and as the booksellers in her store also had internet access at till points, this had effected a raising of standards in customer service by giving the bookseller more information, more quickly. She commented:

I think the impact it’s having on the business, which is actually a very positive one, is that customers can come in... being very informed about what they want. The days when people come in and... really you were their only source of research to find something that they vaguely knew they wanted, have long gone because so many people now come in and they don’t say “have you got a book on...” they come in and say “I want this. Can you order it for me, and can you beat this price?” So I think people will just use it as a research tool and that’s fantastic ‘cos that’s much better for us.
Even if books were unavailable, booksellers in her store were now able to direct customers to out of print sites online. However, to assume that customers will use it *just* as a research tool is rather optimistic. It is probable that while some consumers use online book information this way, many others will go on to purchase online. Nevertheless, this improvement in customer service was echoed by Manager C who said that in his store they had initiated a very quick lead order time for customers and this was competitive even with the speed of some online bookshop delivery services. Online bookselling therefore seems to have had the unintentional effect of improving the service and knowledge within bricks and mortar bookshops. In this context, online and bricks and mortar bookshops seem to have developed a kind of symbiosis with one feeding off the other, and vice versa. Apart from this effect on service, Manager A felt the impact on any approaches to branding and marketing on her own chain had been negligible. Manager C said ‘I think there’s been a negligible impact upon our business here on this site from internet bookselling’ and regarded online bookselling sites as simply another form of competition, comparable to that from other chain bookshops. Manager D concurred with this view, saying there had been no massive impact upon ‘traditional’ bookselling; simply that online bookselling provided a different experience for customers, if that was what they wanted. There was no concerted effort to differentiate themselves (the traditional bookshops) from online bookshops, although they were all very aware that they are in any case very different, given the physicality of the traditional bookshop experience as opposed to that online.

Manager C went on to refer to the advantage that terrestrial bookshops have over internet sites, in so far as personal recommendation was concerned, suggesting that customers were less likely to trust a recommendation from an online pop-up than they were to trust a recommendation from a member of staff in his own store. Manager B also referred to the social advantages that the high street bookshop has over the internet, saying,

(A) big part of the buying decision for books is looking at them and browsing them, comparing them. Maybe going for a coffee or popping in or being brought in so the, the human enjoyment of physically going shopping and seeing other people and being seen. You’ll never compete with that.

This sort of comparison of online and terrestrial bookshops, i.e. one of atmosphere and the social aspect of shopping in a high street, was almost completely overlooked when
online bookselling sites were first introduced. It is only recently that these aspects of
the whole shopping experience have been understood to be important by traditional
booksellers, thus endowing bricks and mortar bookshops with a key advantage in an
area where online bookshops are currently unable to compete.

4.1.13 Publisher influence
Publisher influence on the choice of books for promotion was acknowledged to be
significant and was felt to have developed considerably over the past few years. As
Manager C put it, ‘these days publishers…are much more savvy about getting books
on promotion and that’s become a major focus for them, much more than it has in the
past.’ He continued; ‘They will see that their book is not going to be a major success
unless they have it on promotions in large chain booksellers, and that’s just the way
the…industry is’. The power of the promotion to make or break the success of a title
was acknowledged to be absolutely vital by Manager C, unless it is a ‘phenomenon’ – a
runaway title whose success is by word of mouth.

Each of the managers – with the notable exception of the marketing director -
acknowledged the fact that financial incentives were frequently behind the choice of
books for promotion as ‘Book of the Month’ or for special promotions. The managing
director insisted that quality was the prime driver behind book promotion. The same
interviewees all accepted that this was how the industry currently financed promotions,
so in many ways promotions - or at least the major ones – were initiated by publishers
rather than booksellers. It was interesting to note that none of the managers who had
acknowledged the impact of financial incentives upon book choice for promotions felt
that this sort of financially motivated book choice ever compromised the bookshop
brand identity, perhaps because the range of ‘suitable’ books for promotion is now felt
to be so wide. Rather than having a ‘style’ or type of book which is deemed to be
suitable for any particular store or encapsulates the brand identity of a particular chain,
it would seem that the commercial potential for a title defines its suitability for
promotion. This was felt to be a change of strategy on the part of the chains by
Manager A, who believed that in the past certain titles might not have been promoted,
but if the potential sales were there, then it would be stocked in the current bookshop
climate. She also pointed out that certain titles currently on the bookstands might not
even have been published perhaps ten years ago, given the current media frenzy
surrounding celebrity lifestyles. Overall there was acknowledgement by the managers
that publisher influence on choice of promoted titles was much more powerful than ever
before, and also that, in general, publishers seemed much more tuned in and aware of the power that book promotions have to escalate sales figures. Manager B went so far as to say ‘I think they [publishers] have more influence than we necessarily do in the branches’.

4.1.14 Future plans
In summary of the whole interview process, the managers were asked what they would change in their store or chain of stores regarding marketing and branding. Manager A replied that her wish was to install a high quality desktop publishing package to give individual stores the power to run with and support titles which they felt could do well, thus picking up on titles which were not going to be promoted as part of bigger chain wide campaigns. The desktop publishing package would obviously enable them to create their own promotional labels and posters and therefore to promote these kinds of titles in a more professional fashion. This seems to go hand in hand with her vision of her store as an ‘independent within a chain’.
Manager B returned to the dominance of pricing and said ‘I’m trying to imagine if I was at the top what I’d be doing... I would have less focus on price... more on... range’.

It is interesting to note that both Managers A and C mentioned with regret the demise of independent bookshop and their contribution to bookselling as a whole. Manager A thought the ‘old Waterstone’s customer’ i.e. the dedicated book buyer interested in the more literary and high brow end of the market - was perhaps potentially waiting to be lured back, and that that was an area that the chains could concentrate on growing. She felt that this would do no harm to the ‘3 for 2’ end of the market and that it would in fact expand the whole market should they pick up on literature in translation for instance, and do a small scale promotion with that. Manager C also mentioned the demise of independent bookshops with regret and felt that the growth of the chains had limited choice for the consumer. The irony that he is the manager of a branch of a large chain was not lost on him. He said:

The whole nature of large organisations dominating the whole market is, it limits choice: it limits... the success of books that should be more successful but aren’t; it limits the time and effort that can go into making those choices about what’s going to be successful and what’s not, what you’re going to push and what’s not, because your time is constricted with dealing with all this other information, sifting and making sure that you’re ‘to
plan’...and therefore ‘to brand’... rather than maybe deciding upon “okay I’m a big fan of Dickens... maybe we could spend a few hours getting a nice display and then ordering in some other stuff for it and then seeing if we have like a local theatre company who are doing a Dickens thing who want to come in and do something”. All these things that are nice about bookselling and about [being] a bookseller.

He felt that rather than the growth of the brand and corporate identity, the real key in an ideal book selling world should be an ‘excellent community bookshop’. However, he acknowledged that ‘the market for these types of places is constricted and it’s constricted by me!’ He felt that there was probably not room in his store, or possibly any chain for this sort of initiative, since so much time is currently given to following chain strategy and plan, leaving little time for promoting the smaller, possibly less commercially viable initiatives. However, Manager A – continuing the ‘independent’ theme - felt the smaller less commercial promotion was something which could possibly be followed up in her own branch.

The issues emerging from this set of results are investigated in the context of consumer opinion in the following section. They are also discussed in greater detail in the full discussion section, where all the sets of results are triangulated and considered in conjunction with each other.
4.2 In-store questionnaires with bookshop customers

4.2.1 Introduction
Face to face questionnaires were carried out with bookshop users in the three participating bookshops. The data gathered from the questionnaires was input to SPSS and the following results were gathered. It is useful to note that one hundred questionnaires were administered therefore percentages and response numbers are the same, except where a question is not applicable to some respondents, in which case this is made clear. Weighted cases have been applied in some instances in order to collate and make more sense of responses to a particular topic. Some of these weighted cases have been further analysed in terms of gender selection, in order to find out whether this has any significant impact on the kinds of responses gathered.

The questionnaire concentrated on four different aspects of bookshops. Firstly, basic information such as frequency of visiting was dealt with, before moving on to the kind of marketing which is carried out in chain bookshops, and consumer responses to it. The concept of marketing was then developed, and the adoption of ‘lifestyle’ initiatives, such as coffee shops and sofas dealt with. Finally, the kind of interaction that bookshop customers have with others in the bookshop environment was examined.

4.2.2 Consumer demographics
Demographic data was collected from respondents.

Fig. 4.2.1 Age of questionnaire respondents
As illustrated in fig. 4.2.1, respondents were predominantly young, to young middle-age, with 35% aged 21 – 30 years and 28% aged 31 – 40 years of age. It should be borne in mind that respondents were selected by the researcher and therefore are subject to selection bias, although every effort was made to select from a range of ages and across gender, subject to the availability of people within the bookshops. 14% were aged 20 or less, while 13% were aged between 41 and 50. Those aged 51 or older accounted for 10% of respondents. While this cross section of ages is not representative of the general public, it does seem to broadly correspond with book buying habits, which tend to show that the young and the old tend to be less likely to purchase books, as opposed to those in the middle age groups (Mintel, 2005). One would therefore expect to see fewer older people in bookshops.

The gender split of respondents is shown in the chart below.

![Gender of questionnaire respondents](image)

**Fig. 4.2.2 Gender of questionnaire respondents**

The (approximate) 60:40 split female to male is a typical snapshot of bookshop users, according to existing data on the subject (Mintel, 2005).

**4.2.3 Consumer behaviour in bookshops**

This section commenced with establishing how frequently people visited the bookshop where the questionnaire was being carried out.
Fig. 4.2.3 Frequency of bookshop visiting

We can see that there is a fairly equal split of people visiting weekly (25%), monthly (28%), or ‘less frequently’ than this (25%). Bookshop visitors going at least twice a week accounted for just 8% of respondents. With regard to the amount of time spent on visits to this particular bookshop, participants responded as follows:

Fig. 4.2.4 Time spent on each bookshop visit
The vast majority of visitors (67%) spent around half an hour in the bookshop with 20% spending around ten minutes and 11% spending an hour or more in store. It seems that book shopping is therefore a reasonably time-consuming experience, with most people prepared to give up around half an hour for it.

![Fig. 4.2.5 Frequency of visits to other bookshops](image)

Regarding frequency of visits to other bookshops, as fig. 4.2.5 illustrates, the majority (39%) visit other bookshops less frequently than monthly, with 32% visiting monthly and 19% weekly. 10% visit more than twice a week. This would seem to suggest that the actual bookshop where the participants were questioned tended to be visited most frequently, but that many bookshop visitors are not exclusively loyal to one bookshop.
4.2.4 Consumer impressions

Fig. 4.2.6 Favourite bookshop

Of the 59% who said they had a favourite bookshop, fig. 4.2.6 illustrates which bookshops were chosen as favourites. 31% chose Waterstone's; 27% chose Borders and 22% chose Ottakar's. It is important to remember however, that the questionnaires were carried out in particular stores and the choices above may be skewed by this. Giving more detailed reasons for selecting these favourites, 26 respondents (44%) said that the ‘good range’ of books was what they liked about it. Other responses given included ‘layout’, ‘relaxed – can browse at leisure’, ‘convenience’ and ‘habit’, but were given considerably less frequently.

With regard to the reputation of the particular store which they were in, 84% felt it had a good reputation, 15% didn’t know and there was one no-response (fig. 4.2.7). It is notable that nobody thought any of the bookshops had a bad reputation.
Fig. 4.2.7 Bookshop reputation

The vast majority – 79% - of respondents were well aware that they were in a chain bookshop, although 2% thought they were in an independent bookshop and a surprisingly large percentage - 19% - did not know and, one might surmise, did not care. Fig. 4.2.8 shows the split of responses.

Fig. 4.2.8 Chain or independent
4.2.5 Other bookselling outlets

4.2.5.1 Visiting online bookshops
Looking at alternative sources of books, 53% said they did visit online bookshops while 47% did not. This data was analysed again, examining whether visiting online bookshops could be differentiated by gender. However, this was not found to be the case. Participants then named the online bookshops which they visited most often. Of the overall 53% who did visit online bookshops, perhaps unsurprisingly 39 (73% of all online visitors) said they visited Amazon, 10 (almost 19%) visited Amazon and other online bookshops, and three respondents said they visited a different online bookshop. All of the online visitors who were male cited Amazon as a site which they visited. Of the 53 respondents who visited online bookshops, 81% said they actually purchased books online, whereas almost 19% did not. The research found that many users of traditional bookshops (53%) also visit online bookshops, so we can see that there is significant movement between the traditional and online bookselling environments. Section 4.6.4 examines whether online users also visit traditional bookshops.

4.2.5.2 Visiting supermarkets
41% of research participants said they did buy books in supermarkets whereas 59% said they did not. Examining results split by gender produced broadly similar results. It seems therefore that while 41% of traditional bookshop visitors also buy from supermarkets, this is not such a large percentage as those who also say they buy from online bookshops (53%).

4.2.6 Consumer responses to in store marketing
4.2.6.1 Store image
Consumer responses to the image of the store they were in were examined, and were found to be broadly positive. Most respondents agreed with the positive options in the survey: 66% agreed that the store in question had a good atmosphere; 53% agreed that their store was bright; and 40% agreed that it was welcoming. None of the respondents thought the stores in question were either dingy, intimidating or had a bad atmosphere.

With the aim of establishing habitual behaviour in bookshops, fig. 4.2.9 shows the results of asking about participants’ usual behaviour.
‘Browse then purchase’ was the most popular option, regularly carried out by 76% of respondents. ‘Browsing’ also attracted a large response with 67% of respondents regularly doing this in store. Browsing therefore appears to play a very important part for the majority of bookshop visitors, while 40% of respondents said that they would usually ‘look for a specific book’. The popularity of coffee shops within bookshops is evident from the finding that 32% of respondents said that they would regularly visit the coffee shop when in a bookshop.

It is interesting to note those options which received very low response rates: ‘Meet friends’ was selected by only 3% of respondents, and the option of ‘do work, write letters or read newspapers’ was chosen by only one respondent, despite the aims of some chain bookshops to develop their stores as third places and to encourage this kind of activity in-store.

These responses were then filtered for gender and the same responses were examined for solely the female then subsequently the male respondents. The results were very similar and no notable differences were observed.
4.2.6.2 Important bookshop qualities

Looking at the qualities in bookshops which participants respond to most positively, fig. 4.2.10 below, shows the results.

![Quality Bar Chart]

### Qualities and facilities

**Fig. 4.2.10 Important bookshop qualities**

‘Range of books’ was the characteristic which received the most positive response for this series of questions, with 92% liking, or liking very much the range of books in their store. This is not particularly surprising, given consumer preferences for browsing, illustrated in fig. 4.2.9. With regard to how the bookshop users rated the ‘atmosphere’ of the chains which they were in, this was largely positive, with 83% saying they either quite liked, or liked very much the atmosphere. ‘Customer service’ was largely assessed as being positive with 73% saying they either quite liked or liked it very much.

‘Special offers’, (like ‘3 for 2’ offers for example), also received a positive response, with 70% saying they either quite liked these offers or liked them very much. Interestingly (although not statistically significant) two respondents disliked them, while one respondent disliked them intensely. 41% liked or liked very much the seating. Of those who said they disliked it, this was usually because they felt there was not enough of it. ‘Window/table displays’ received a largely ambivalent response, with 66% saying they didn’t mind them, whilst 31% quite liked them. These qualities were then analysed again, filtering out male responses. Once again, there were no notable differences, with preferences appearing in the same order as the graph above for both men and women.
Respondents were then given the opportunity to describe the atmosphere of the shop they were in. 15% of respondents described the atmosphere of the bookshop they were in as ‘relaxed’ or said they felt they could ‘browse at my own pace’.

4.2.6.3 Consumer dislikes in store
Asked if there was anything in-store which they disliked, most respondents could not think of anything, the remaining responses were a mixture of gripes such as: the security guards or security cameras (3%); not enough seating (3%); an inadequate selection of books (3%) and not enough of the respondents’ favourite subjects (2%).

4.2.6.4 Author events
Examining the responses of bookshop users to author events and signings, 69% said they felt these events were important, whereas 17% did not and 12% didn’t know. There were no significant differences in response across gender. 69% is a sizeable percentage to respond positively to this kind of event.

Fig. 4.2.11 Perceived importance of bookshop events

However, upon probing as to whether the respondents had ever attended an event in a bookshop, 33% said yes and 67% said no. It is worth noting that while only 33% of
participants had ever attended an event, 69% think it is important that bookshops stage these events. This clearly demonstrates that bookshop consumers have expectations about the facilities and events which a bookshop should offer, while not necessarily wishing to participate in these events. This is not uncommon and can be attributed to the ‘attitude versus behaviour’ syndrome, where people respond positively to something which they think is a good idea, without necessarily participating in it. (Other examples might be recycling or adopting a healthier lifestyle).

### 4.2.7 Factors influencing book choice

With the aim of establishing which factors are most influential for bookshop visitors when it comes to actually making a purchase, fig. 4.2.12 illustrates the percentages of respondents grading the listed qualities as either ‘quite tempting’ or ‘very tempting’.

![Influential factors](image)

**Fig. 4.2.12 Factors influencing book choice**

Within the options supplied in the questionnaire, the factors most likely to positively influence a purchase by bookshop customers were ‘subject’ or ‘author’. These were deemed by 94% and 87% of respondents respectively to be either quite or very
tempting. Perhaps surprisingly, the next most effective quality to influence book purchases was the ‘blurb’ on the back of a book, rated by 69% of respondents as being either very or quite tempting. It is interesting to compare this to the influence of the cover of a book which was deemed by 33% to be quite or very tempting. ‘Book reviews’ in newspapers also attracted a high percentage of positive responses with 60% saying it would be quite or very tempting as regards making them purchase. Special offers such as ‘3 for 2’ and ‘2 for £10’ offers were rated by 56% of people as being quite or very tempting. This is a reasonable response but one might have expected it to be higher, given the work and importance accorded it by the chains and also given the higher rating of ‘blurbs’ and ‘book reviews’ by the respondents (aspects of book marketing which require no additional input or financial commitment from booksellers). The bestseller sections and staff recommends sections were rated as 29% and 30% respectively. This is perhaps again rather surprisingly low since once again, there is a reasonably high level of importance accorded to these by bookshops, especially the staff recommends section. 27% of people said that in-store displays (windows/tables) would be quite or very tempting and 22% of people said ‘TV or radio advertising’ would be quite or very tempting.

Once again, these results were reassessed, analysing female then male responses, in order to examine whether there were any gender differences.
Influential factors - women

Fig. 4.2.13 Factors influencing book choice: women
Influential factors - men

Looking at the charts in tandem, it is interesting to compare across the genders, since some minor discrepancies do occur. Favourite authors seem to be more influential for women (93.4%) than for men (77%) and the blurb on the back of the book again seems to be more influential for women (73.8%) than for men (61.5%). Bestsellers once again seem to be more influential for women (36.1%) than for men (a mere 17.1%) and finally TV and radio advertising again seem to influence the purchases of women more than men with 29.5% of female respondents saying this might influence a purchase and only 10.3% of men agreeing with this. There seems to be some evidence here that, women seem to be rather more open to persuasion than men, whereas men seem to be more dedicated to their favourite subjects and stick to this criterion more rigidly than do women.

It is also notable, that whilst the above charts show cumulative results in each bar for ‘quite tempting’ and ‘very tempting’, it should also be borne in mind that clearly some categories will be made up largely of ‘quite’, whereas some might be more influential for consumers and be made up largely of ‘very’. Those categories largely made up of
‘very tempting’ responses are the author and subject categories. All of the other categories are largely made up of ‘quite tempting’ responses. As for any other factor which might tempt them to buy a book, three respondents said ‘if a friend recommended it’.

Concentrating on key marketing features (as identified by the managers who were interviewed at the commencement of data collection) of staff recommends sections; special offers and bestsellers sections, respondents were asked to rate which of these options would be most effective in making them buy a book.

Fig. 4.2.15 Selected factors influencing book choice

Perhaps the most notable finding illustrated by fig. 4.2.15 is that 40% of respondents said they would not be tempted by any of the suggested options. However, ‘special offers’ (such as ‘3 for 2’) was selected as most effective by 27% of respondents; staff recommends was selected by 17% of respondents and the bestseller section was selected by 16% of respondents. It is notable that these percentages are a reasonably accurate reflection of the results represented in fig. 4.2.12 where special offers, staff recommends and bestsellers were rated by 56%, 30% and 29% of respondents respectively as being very or quite tempting.
As asked what might improve the bookshop, again a disparate range of responses were given by the research participants, the highest percentage responses being: more seats (8%) or more of a particular subject area (again, 8%).

### 4.2.8 The newer marketing strategies

Moving on to look at the introduction of US inspired initiatives such as seating and coffee shops to UK bookshops, this section of the research aims to establish consumer opinion about these kinds of facilities in bookshops.

#### 4.2.8.1 The coffee shop

An even split was found to exist between those bookshop customers who visited the coffee shops in store, and those who did not. The 50% of respondents who did visit the coffee shop were then asked to rate various coffee shop attributes or qualities. Fig. 4.2.16 shows the percentage responses saying that they ‘like’ or ‘like very much’ the listed qualities of the coffee shop.

![Coffee shop qualities/facilities](image-url)

**Fig. 4.2.16 Favourite coffee shop qualities**
Asking the coffee shop consumers what they liked best about that environment, the most positive response was given for the fact that the coffee shop was within a bookshop. 38 people (76%) ‘like’ or ‘like very much’ this quality. Also receiving a positive response was the fact that people can drink coffee and read books at the same time. Again, 38 people (76%) responded positively to this statement. 37 participants (74%) ‘like’ or ‘like very much’ that they can meet friends in the coffee shop and 35 people (70%) ‘like’ or ‘like very much’ the coffee shop atmosphere.

Fewer positive responses were received for the other options, which included ‘coffee’, ‘food’ and ‘people watching’ although it is interesting to note that the gender breakdown of ‘people watching’ shows that 15 women but only 2 men said they liked people watching in the coffee shop. The results suggest that it is the evocative pairing of books and coffee that many bookshop users like, or like very much, along with the atmosphere and the fact that people can use the coffee shop as a meeting place. Conversely, what one might surmise to be the most important qualities - that of the coffee and the food - are in fact rated as the least important by those who use the bookshop coffee shops.

As noted above, there are some gender differences when further analysis takes place. Perhaps the most striking finding is how much women like to ‘people watch’ compared to men - 24.6% of women as opposed to 5.1% of men). It is possible that women are more willing to admit to this pastime than men. Meeting friends seems to play a bigger part for women than for men, with 41% of women and 30.8% of men saying they like or like very much that they can do this. Overall, women seem to like the facilities in the coffee shop more than men. Further opinions expressed about the coffee shop were quite varied with the largest response being that the coffee shop atmosphere was relaxing by 10% of coffee shop users. Asked if there was anything else in the cafe they liked, 6% liked being in amongst books and near to other people reading.

When the users of the coffee shop were asked if they thought the presence of the coffee shop might make them spend more time in store, 24 respondents (48%) said yes and 26 (52%) said no. It would seem that having a coffee shop in store is a useful tool for encouraging people to spend more time there. Although the percentage is not so high as those saying that the presence of seats would make them spend more time in bookshops (fig. 4.2.17) nevertheless, the numbers of respondents in this case are slightly larger and the results therefore more reliable.
On a similar note, respondents were asked whether they had been tempted to buy on impulse because of the presence of a coffee shop. 18 people (36%) said that they had in the past made an impulse purchase because of the coffee shop while most coffee shop users (64% or 32 people) said they had not. The coffee shop users were then asked if they thought that the presence of a coffee shop in store made them buy more books, therefore spending more money. 12 respondents (24%) said they thought they spent more money in the bookshop, because of the coffee shop. It is notable that this is a smaller percentage than those coffee shop users who said that the presence of a coffee shop had made them buy books on impulse. With regard to the total number of respondents to the survey, these percentages are quite small, but with regard to the numbers of people actually using the coffee shop, these percentages are not inconsiderable. It would seem that once someone actually uses the coffee shop, they are fairly likely to spend more money or at least more time in the bookshop.

4.2.8.2 Seating
Looking at whether consumers like in-store seating, fig. 4.2.17 shows the results received.

![Fig. 4.2.17 Consumer opinion about bookshop seating](image-url)
Visibility seemed to be a problem in some bookshops, given that 43% did not notice the available seating. 32% said that they did like the seating and 20% said they had no strong feelings about it. 4% said they did not like the seating although this was usually because they didn’t think there was enough seating – no-one objected to the seats per se, and a single participant did not respond. As for whether participants ever used the seats in store, the majority of 66% said they did not, but this could well be linked to the lack of visibility of seating in some stores.

Concentrating on those participants who used the seating in store, they were asked whether they thought this facility made them spend more time in the bookshop. Although this question only applied to 24 people, nevertheless, 17 of those (71%) said they thought they spent more time there for this reason. It would seem that the presence of seating has the potential to be a powerful tool in helping bookshop visitors spend more time in store.

As for whether the seating made the bookshop users spend more money, 14 respondents (41% of the 34 people who used the seats) thought having the seats in store probably made them spend more money. Although these are relatively small percentages of the total questionnaire respondents, it is a positive reflection on the use of seats in store by bookshops.

4.2.9 Interacting with others

4.2.9.1 Interacting with other customers
Exploring the degree of interaction between customers in bookshops, the results were very clear and rather surprising.
Fig. 4.2.18 Interacting with other customers

Only 8% of respondents ever speak to other customers in store. The same eight respondents were asked how frequently they spoke to others in bookshops and all eight said it was only occasionally. Further probed as to what they actually spoke about, six respondents spoke about books, one spoke about books and children, and the other was actually referring to the coffee shop, saying it was just general chat due to the proximity to other customers. The same eight people were then asked if they had ever developed a friendship, relationship or acquaintance in a bookshop. Only one said yes, but went on to explain that he had developed an existing relationship rather than initiating a new one. It seems as if the wish of chain bookshops to develop their stores as third place and centres for social interaction and discussion has rather a long way to go, certainly if interaction between people is central to this quality.

Going on to explore interaction with friends in bookshops, respondents were asked whether they ever arranged to meet friends or colleagues in the bookshop. 41% said yes, 59% no.

This is a reasonably large percentage but should be considered along with earlier questions which looked at meeting friends in bookshops. As illustrated in fig. 4.2.9, only 3% of respondents said that they usually met friends in the bookshop. The above question however, asks if they ever meet friends in the bookshop. It would therefore
seem that while people do meet friends in bookshops, it tends to be done infrequently. Furthermore, examining some of the data gathered on the use of coffee shops, as fig. 4.2.16 shows, meeting friends in the coffee shops is something that 74% of respondents said they liked about the coffee shop. On balance, it would seem that meeting friends is an activity which bookshop users seem to do more frequently in the coffee shop, rather than in the bookshop.

4.2.9.2 Interacting with booksellers
The next series of questions relate to staff in-store and customer perceptions of them. Respondents were asked whether they thought the bookshop staff displayed a given range of attributes. Asked whether they thought the staff were helpful, 69% thought mostly, asked whether they thought the staff were polite, a similar response was received; 74% thought mostly.

![Helpfulness of staff](image)

**Fig. 4.2.19 Helpfulness of staff**

As asked whether they thought the staff were knowledgeable however, the results were rather less clear cut.
Fig. 4.2.20 Staff knowledge

40% said mostly, 23% said sometimes and 37% said they didn’t know. It would seem therefore, that consumers are clear about the politeness and helpfulness of booksellers, but seem to be less convinced about their knowledge. These questions were then restated in a different way, so the respondents were then asked if they thought the staff were ever *not* very helpful; *not* polite or *not* knowledgeable. It is notable that in each of these cases, 22% of respondents chose not to answer this question. Many seemed uncomfortable with it. Of those who did respond, most disagreed with these suggestions with very small numbers agreeing with the negative comments about booksellers.

Respondents were then asked if they had ever spoken to the booksellers. This question was deliberately placed *after* the previous series of questions, in order that consumer opinions about the booksellers could be explored in the light of the knowledge of whether or not the customers had actually ever spoken to the booksellers. Therefore, it would be easier to establish whether consumer opinion was based on supposition or experience of interaction with booksellers. When asked whether they had ever spoken to any of the booksellers in store (apart from the buying process at the till), 39% said ‘yes’ and 61% said ‘no’.
It is worth comparing this statistic with the previous results (showing for example that 74% of respondents thought that staff were mostly polite). This illustrates that bookshop visitors have preconceived opinions about booksellers’ attributes, not based on actual interaction with them. Of the 39% who said they spoke to staff, 30 of these respondents said that this happened only occasionally; nine said sometimes. As for whether they had ever bought a book personally recommended by staff, 35 said no, only four saying that they had. This seems to be at odds with the focus upon the customer-bookseller relationship which many traditional bookshops have. Indeed it is arguably one of the key advantages which traditional bookshops have over online bookshops.

4.2.10 Bookshop impact on emotion
Respondents were then given the opportunity to say how they feel when they are in a bookshop. They were given a range of emotions to choose from (including ‘just the same’) and also given the opportunity to describe a different way of feeling. Respondents were asked to select more than one option, if applicable.
46% said they felt just the same, while a very similar number, 45%, said they felt more relaxed. There is then a significant drop to 10% who say they feel happier in store. Nobody said they felt isolated, which was an option, but a single respondent said they felt intimidated. These are very positive statistics and show clearly the effect that visiting a bookshop has on people’s emotions. One must bear in mind that these were all people in a bookshop, therefore these positive results are not particularly surprising; presumably those who feel intimidated or become less happy or less relaxed do not visit bookshops in any case.

Some of the issues raised in this results section (and in the previous results section) are explored and discussed more qualitatively in the following section, which sets out the results from the focus groups.
4.3 Focus groups with bookshop customers

4.3.1 Introduction
Focus groups were carried out in three separate sessions with groups of five, six and seven participants. This format of data collection allowed topics raised at the interview stage and at the questionnaire stage, to be explored in greater depth, continuing the evolutionary, developmental progress of the research. It began by looking at some of the more popular approaches to marketing taken by chain bookshops and consumer experiences of these; for instance discounting and customer service, before moving on to ask the participants’ opinions about the book shopping experience, including their opinions about coffee shops and the importance or otherwise of bookshop atmosphere. It also enabled participants to initiate topics for discussion rather than adhering to a prescriptive list of questions.

The focus group question schedule is attached (Appendix IX) as is the coding structure emerging from the analysis of the focus groups\(^1\) (Appendix X).

4.3.2 Brand identity of the bookshops
The issue of brand identity of different chain bookstores was raised and after some discussion, it emerged that the general impression was that there are no longer any real differences perceived between the chains. Participants were aware of projected brand colours, fascias and symbols, but with regard to the stock, no clear distinctions were made between different chains. Participants were aware of small differences in stores; for example one might have a very good history section, one might have a very good children’s section. However, when it came to describing a brand identity, similarity was stronger than differentiation. The point was made that unless one is talking about the really exceptional flagship stores, there is no perceptible difference between these chains. One large chain was described as being ‘quite faceless now. It’s quite sterile’. Another participant expressed her opinion on the matter;

I did think of [Bookshop X – a large chain] as being a bit more sort of esoteric and hippyish but they aren’t now, they were when they started out,

\(^1\) FG1= Focus group1; FG2= Focus group 2; FG3= Focus group3. The focus group participants are referred to throughout by their first initial(s).
they were a bit more...baby boomer generation I suppose. You could find odd choices on the shelves...you can’t really now. It's a shame.

This seems to suggest that while there are few differences between book chains currently, this was perhaps not always the case and that distinctive bookshop personalities formerly existed. One of the chains studied however, was noted as being rather different and it was interesting to note the participants expressed a preference for this chain. One participant suggested this might be because of the mixed media offering on sale, another described it as:

cosmopolitan... you know, you go in and it's laid out nice and it’s modern and the staff are helpful and you can go for a coffee, and although perhaps other bookstores offer sort of the same thing they’re not on the same level as [this chain].

This particular chain has adopted perhaps the most overtly ‘lifestyle’ approach of all the chains studied. Its stores have a much more standardised format and are generally larger, in comparison to other UK bookshop chains. There were personal preferences expressed about the decor used which seemed not to be consistently positive or negative for one store or another. Participants were certainly aware of the different brand colours and these had an influence on favourites – often linked to the chains that they were familiar with - but this was attributable to personal preference. As for changes in the chains over the years, one participant mentioned a lowering in the level of customer service, and this led to the opinion being expressed – among the more mature focus group participants – that this was matched by a drop in book knowledge by booksellers.

In FG2, an independent store in the USA was mentioned as being particularly attractive as it had personal touches such as home baking in the coffee shop and 'it really felt as if buying a book was something special and going in there was something special'. This was contrasted with the chains studied in the UK where it was felt 'you could more or less be in any shop anywhere'. However, the valid point was made that this homogeneity is becoming widespread across the whole of retail and is not unique to bookselling. J in FG2 mentioned once again the importance of leeway and autonomy for store managers and how this impacts upon store identity – she mentioned how staff have an impact on this also. She made the point that:
I think it’s going to be difficult for the chains to re-establish that sort of commitment and expertise having kind of spent the last ten years draining it out of their branch managers.

There is here evidence of a wider problem within UK chain bookshops. This perceived effect was seen to have had a wide ranging impact, on the quality of the management, the quality and quantity of available booksellers and ultimately the quality of the bookshops. This change over the years in the chains was perceived by many of the focus group participants and was contrasted with the impression that one or two of the chains had really felt quite innovative when they started out, but were currently rather uninspiring.

4.3.3 Promotional techniques

4.3.3.1 ‘3 for 2’ offers
The issue of discounted books and special offers was raised for discussion. Many participants spoke of ‘taking advantage of’ this kind of offer, or ‘getting the benefit’ of it, particularly at Christmas time. Two of the participants spoke of teaming up with friends or family in order to take advantage of ‘3 for 2’ offers; one ‘stocked up’ on children’s books for forthcoming birthday presents. In these instances it would seem that the bookshops are making very little money and possibly reducing genuine sales by giving groups of people the opportunity to do this kind of intelligent buying. For one participant, the range of discounts in bookshops meant that she trawled the shops for the best deal and bought accordingly. This clearly didn’t encourage buying more, just more wisely.

Nevertheless, several participants said that they were tempted by the ‘3 for 2’ offers. It was felt by some that these offers can encourage one to experiment with unknown authors and titles, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. Some had discovered new authors whom they loved, but others had subsequently felt their money had been wasted on poor quality books. One participant noted she had gathered many books this way and would probably never read them. Another participant felt that sometimes in these offers were titles or authors which she felt she ‘ought to read’, so recognition of well regarded authors would seem to play a part in some ‘3 for 2’ purchases. With regard to ‘3 for 2’ promotions in general, there was a perception in FG2 that there was some distinction across the chains regarding the range of books available within these
offers. One chain in particular was mentioned as consistently having better choices on offer in ‘3 for 2’s than another. However, on the whole it was felt that the quality of books on offer in these promotions was rather poor, and that the range and quality of books available within ‘3 for 2’ promotions had dwindled in recent years.

In a broader context, many felt that their own tastes were not catered for by these offers and many participants therefore tended to walk past these offers to the specialist book section they were interested in. Several participants said they had no interest in this kind of deal and in FG2, E said that she routinely bypasses them ‘because the books I am interested in are never on offers’. There was a perception that generally it is the lower end of the market that is being catered for here. As J in FG1 said: ‘It’s a fairly bland choice that’s on offer usually’ although she did go on to say that her most recent purchase had been from a ‘3 for 2’, nevertheless, ‘it took a bit of rummaging’. Many also felt that the books on offer tended towards blandness rather than being of genuine interest. The fact that people would often be milling around these offer tables was also felt to be off-putting for some participants. In this context, one focus group participant commented;

I suppose the people who are interested in books; you’re probably going to be exploring more sort of obscure titles anyway, aren’t you?

This comment illustrates a view that these offers are not catering for anyone with a genuine interest in books.

As to whether these price promoted offers might be attracting new customers, participants were generally reticent about expressing opinions on this matter; most of the focus group participants were already experienced book buyers so were not in a position to say that it had attracted them into buying books as an activity which they had not participated in before. However, it was felt by some that this kind of offer might serve to confuse rather than clarify the issue of book buying for people new to bookshops, given the broad range of titles in these offers, although ironically, despite the choice, the participants seemed unconvinced of the quality of anything on offer.

4.3.3.2 Other discounting
In FG1 one participant spoke of a more selective approach to discounting, giving the example of purchasing an item of literary fiction in hardback which had several pounds
off. Other participants in FG1 agreed that they used this approach also, selecting hardbacks which had several pounds off, rather than waiting for the paperback. This kind of selective shopping illustrates a more thoughtful approach to books purchased, exclusively driven by the item to be bought rather than the price. Indeed the participant in question said it would not have been purchased at full price, but the strategy behind such discounting is thought provoking – an item of upmarket hardback fiction is unlikely to tempt the first-time buyer; the upmarket fiction buyer will buy it as a one-off (the buyer in question said he would not have bought it at full price) so it is hard to see how this benefits the bookshop since the margin for the bookshop has been substantially cut and they have not had the benefit of attracting a new buyer.

4.3.3.3 Other marketing
On the subject of book marketing, one or two participants made the point that bookshop marketing seemed to be rather insular, and lacking in awareness of other kinds of marketing open to them. The example given was a general lack of awareness of book reviews in weekend newspapers. It was felt that if some of the reviewed books were stocked the participants would be inclined to buy them, having already read reviews. It was felt that many booksellers do not take advantage of this kind of ‘free’ marketing and that it is a missed opportunity to make more money. This supports the earlier findings from the questionnaires regarding the considerable influence which newspaper reviews can have (see fig. 4.2.12).

4.3.4 The effect of discounting on browsing
An interesting comment on the discounting approach came from L in FG1, who commented that it has ‘limited what the browser can go for... in a way because you’re being channelled in certain directions and unless you know how to go past it... ’. This feeling of being pushed, almost unwillingly, in a direction you don’t necessarily wish to go in, was raised again by other participants, and referred to the very focused, strongly branded area at the front of many chain bookshops, where tables are covered in special offers and current promotions. One participant in particular almost seemed to resent these deals as having others opinions forced on her, and referred to an ‘agenda’ which she presumed was financial behind the promotion of these books. She spoke of her annoyance even when her partner buys these books. It is interesting to note that some people have an antipathy to bookshops being driven by financial motives, whereas this would presumably not be an issue in most other kinds of store. However, bookshops do give the impression that they are selecting promotions on the quality of
the book alone, and according to the results of the interviews, as well as evidence from trade writing, this is not the case. Focus group participants were keenly aware of the heavily branded front of store area and several mentioned how they had to go past it to get to the books they are interested in.

The heavily branded front of shop approach also seems to have the effect on some, of confusing their approach to browsing: L again mentioned how browsing used to be easier, as ‘you had the tables’, referring to one chain’s former approach of having displays of books throughout their stores on large tables. Whilst this is still the approach of most chain bookshops, she went on to say ‘now it all seems to be exactly the same stuff on the tables’. There was, in her opinion, a sense of confusion as to where to find specific books you want due to the ‘limited approach to... you know, “this is what we think you should be reading”’. There was agreement about this approach to browsing and a general awareness of being pushed towards buying particular books, rather than being shown a broad choice. This often led to resentment at not being shown a broader, more interesting range of books. Participants seemed very aware of this front of shop display technique and in many cases seemed to resent it. The perception of a more limited choice was present across all of the focus groups. The homogeneity and sameness evidenced in chain bookshops was also a strong theme emerging across all of the focus groups. Overall the chains were seen as more controlling of the books which they wish the consumer to buy, in their approaches to marketing (books on tables, in windows, special offers etc.)

4.3.5 Range and homogeneity
The impact of the chains on choice of books was seen as limiting. The rise of the chains was seen by one participant as leading to the downfall of specialist bookshops; ‘in the past you could get bookshops that were more specialist I think that sold different types of books and I don’t think they are catered for in the big multiple bookshops’. J in FG2 also ascribed the lessening of choice to the buying up of independent bookshops by the chains. She also noted that while one particular chain could be seen as having expanded the choice of books when it first was opened, this had changed with the passage of time and there was currently much greater similarity across chain bookshops, especially with regard to the promoted books on the tables at the front of these shops. This was the general consensus across the focus groups – the sameness of stock, particularly with regard to the most prominent and promoted titles.
It was interesting to note that with regards to choice in chains, J was of the opinion that there was less autonomy in individual branches and that individual chain identity was also partially dependent on the autonomy or leeway given to the bookshop manager that was in charge. In her opinion this had an impact on whether a shop is ‘blander’ or has a ‘more interesting range’. Some of the participants were agreed that management autonomy and also the history (or ‘provenance’) of a bookshop (e.g. its staff, or whether it was owned by a different bookshop beforehand) can impact upon how it is stocked and promoted. C, in FG2 commented however, that in most chains, ‘you could more or less be in any shop anywhere apart from the quirks of layout and if you find an individual member of staff who’s really good well that’s ace, but it’s the exception’.

The general consensus that choice had diminished in the chains over the years, had in some cases led to a growth in the use of other sources of books by focus group participants, particularly charity and second-hand bookshops, ‘(j)ust because you can get the odd choice there. You can find things that you might not expect, and because they’re cheaper you can take more risks as well’. It is also interesting – and ironic - to note that this perceived homogeneity across the high street chains has aided the growth of online bookshops since more browsing was done by the focus group participants there, because it was felt that odd or specialist books were now unlikely to be stocked in chain bookshops.

4.3.6 Local relevance

There was general agreement that the opportunity for chain bookshop branches to be an ‘independent within a chain’ (a term coined by one of the managers interviewed) was limited as far as the groups were concerned. There was no discernible distinction for participants across different branches of the same chain and in most cases even across different chain bookshops in the UK. As one participant said regarding individual store identity, ‘it’s not necessarily about stocking lots of local books either; it’s much more about reflecting what the local population wants’. In FG2 the point was also made about the relevance of ‘local collections’ since;

In terms of local collections, I’m not even convinced that there would be that massive a market for it, in terms of chain bookstores. I mean if you’re looking for a nice Italian meal you wouldn’t go to McDonalds. I mean if you want a specialist local book then certainly my instinct would be to go to a specialist local bookseller and not to [this book chain].
Another participant made the point about not being catered for particularly well by the chains, since she was interested in poetry books. This led to the dilemma of whether to buy online for the sake of efficiency, or to order from a chain, in order to make the point that there is a demand for these less popular forms, while ironically condemning the author and publisher to getting a smaller percentage of the sale revenue.

With regard to chain efforts to capitalise on local identity and support local communities, there was no clear evidence of this being communicated to the customers. Certainly the focus group participants were not aware of any special local concessions within their own bookshops. Indeed one participant cited the difficulty a friend had in getting one of the chains to stock his own publications. As far as chain bookshop efforts to develop local relevance were concerned, this seemed to go largely unnoticed by focus group participants. In FG3, one said, ‘I would expect the stock to perhaps reflect local history or local interests but apart from that yes, they’re just the same’. This comment should be tempered by realising that customers do distinguish between stores with regards to one store having, for example a particularly good politics section, but the perception was that this is usually down to a good bookseller, or the reputation of the bookshop, rather than any policy of local autonomy or encouragement of local interest being enforced. While local relevance and support of local authors was thought to be generally a good thing, the evidence of this actually happening was rather scant.

4.3.7 The book shopping experience
The subject of the shopping experience in bookshops was raised. At the stage of the initial interviews with bookshop managers, one said it was ‘a unique retail experience...the freedom to do what you want not just shop, select and purchase – like a hobby’. However, this comment was met with scepticism by most focus group participants and, as one participant remarked, this could be applied to most kinds of shopping. Another participant remarked that this was good in theory but in reality, lack of time meant this experience was not one in which she could indulge. This point was made again in relation to the idea of the bookshop as a lifestyle destination – many of the participants felt they did not have the time or the personal circumstances to enjoy such a vision of book buying. Another participant agreed that bookshop shopping could be seen as a hobby. As she remarked,
(E)ven if I buy a book that I may not read, I never have this anxiety feeling that when, I have bought a wrong piece of garment wrong trousers or the wrong pair of shoes... when you buy a book it’s, I think a book it has an identity in itself. It doesn’t have to match something else – it doesn’t have to fit something else. It can be regarded as a single item that you will read or not. So I never have any guilt.

Some participants made distinctions between book shopping and other kinds of shopping – usually to say it is more enjoyable. Others felt the shopping experience was similar, with time needed for browsing and making choices. Overall, most participants pointed out how enjoyable book shopping was, comparing it to shopping for CDs, as it lacked the stress of clothes shopping or the ‘must do’ aspect of food shopping. One participant in FG2 commented on the therapeutic qualities of book shopping, an aspect of book shopping which was supported by many other participants in the focus groups.

If I’ve had like a bad week or a bad day I might just go to the bookshop... you know have a wander round; look at some books; go for a coffee, stay there for quite a long time, you know an hour, hour and a half, two hours and I’ll always feel better.

The notion of buying a book in order to treat oneself was also raised and it was sometimes mentioned by some participants as an indulgence. Book shopping was generally agreed to be a relaxing experience, if one had time to browse and spend time doing it. The point was also raised that browsing is a kind of leisure activity and an activity which most focus group participants found pleasurable. One participant in FG3 made the interesting point that, although she could get the same paperbacks cheaper at her local supermarket, she paid more for them at her bookshop, as this seemed to make her value them more. Also, the shopping experience in the bookshop was more pleasurable, since she was surrounded by ‘arty’ people, rather than supermarket shoppers. Clearly the surroundings and the other clientele are important in this context. The book shopping experience sometimes seemed to satisfy aspirational needs, as seen in the instance above. Another participant mentioned how she expected her bookshop to be;

I like a bookshop to be a kind of a, almost more quiet, almost refined type of atmosphere.
These kinds of qualities such as aspiration, or refinement can also be seen represented in the reasons people gave for buying books, sometimes justifying their purchases by saying that they are linked to self-improvement, particularly in the context of children’s books, where they were usually said to be educational. There was a general belief that buying books is a ‘good thing’ and therefore spending money in bookshops was more easily justified than, for example, buying clothes.

The kinds of emotional experiences which one has in bookshops seemed to range from a feeling of relaxation, treating oneself to a book and ‘losing’ oneself in the browsing experience, to a feeling of excitement, which participants compared to that experienced in other kinds of shopping – the anticipation of spending money; of being naughty and spending on something which was perhaps not strictly necessary. Most notable of these however, was that of being ‘lost’, spending long periods of time in the bookshop environment and having peace to browse at one’s leisure.

4.3.8 Bookshop surroundings

There was a widely agreed preference that bookshops be quiet rather than noisy and also that there was enough space to move around. Space was an issue raised in all of the focus groups, and seemed to be vitally important for bookshop users. People seemed to have a strong antipathy to feeling squashed or having to squeeze past people to look at a particular shelf. Having sufficient personal space seems to facilitate browsing and help potential book buyers feel able to spend more time in store. As one participant in FG2 noted,

I’m probably more likely to buy something if it’s quiet and you’ve got time to sort of look through things rather than, you’re tripping over people and sort of quick tour round, can’t be bothered and out again.

In FG2 again the issue of space to browse was raised, with encroachment on personal space being a bugbear for more than one participant; ‘I find that when you’re searching for a book it’s a personal matter, where I want my space’. This participant also made the point that if one has space to browse or sit down, then it is more likely that she will ‘lose herself’, have time to browse and consequently might buy more books. This point was also raised by S in FG1 who said that if the bookshop could keep her in there (by piquing her interest and perhaps providing a chair), then there was consequently more chance of her buying books.
An issue which came up several times across each of the focus groups was the idea of ‘nooks and crannies’. As one participant said, ‘what I like about this place is that there’s always little corners you can go round. There’s always the promise there’s something exciting round the next corner’. This idea, of finding a ‘hidden gem’ was one that was raised several times, and was mentioned in the context of nooks and crannies in bookshops. It would seem that many bookshop users want plenty of space to move around, but also plenty of nook and crannies to explore. A participant in FG2 mentioned ‘nooks and crannies’ as well when commenting on the general subject area of book choice and the personality of individual bookshops. As she said you could go in and ‘just sort of hide around the corner’:

There needs to be space... but on the other hand, I don’t like it to be... too open plan. I really like little nooks and crannies and little places that I can go. And... if there was a chair at the end of the corridor I would go and sit there, rather than the one that was in the middle, because I don’t like to feel exposed, I like to kind of hide away.

L referred to a bookshop in the same city that had been opened quite briefly before closing down. In her opinion it had been ‘doomed to failure’ because of the layout. ‘Everything was round the walls, it was hardwood floors, it was very bright... everything was there in front of you’.

It seemed very exposed... and you could see everything, it was like seeing everything in a garden all at once. You know there was no kind of, hint of mystery or sort of, things still to come.

This was contrasted with another branch which had ‘lots of little bits you could go into, there was always little nooks and crannies to go and investigate’.

There was general agreement that this sense of being exposed was not desirable; neither was lighting which was too bright. In FG2 a participant complained of bookshops that were too bright and said ‘that’s not what I want, whereas (Bookshop X) is kind of dark and that’s – I like a kind of dark, and it has chairs and it’s more sort of little corners to hide in so I would go there for those reasons’. However she did go on to say that for the particular section which the bright bookshop did better, she would still go to the bookshop that had the better sections. Lighting was an issue raised across all
of the focus groups and over-brightness seemed to make bookshop visitors feel unwelcome and uncomfortable.

With regard to bookshop atmosphere, there was a stated preference for having a chair, or a corner. There seemed to be a general agreement that older buildings which had become bookshops had good atmospheres (old church and old railway buildings were mentioned). However, as one participant mentioned, if the books in the bookshop are interesting then that takes precedence; what the atmosphere is like ‘is a long way down the list’.

4.3.9 The ‘duality’ of the bookshop experience
A point which arose in each of the focus groups was the potential duality of experience which can be had in bookshops; catering both for the browser who wants ‘peace and quiet and your own space to read’ and the person who is going in to shop in a more functional fashion, for a birthday present or an academic textbook. This was supported by L, in FG1 who pointed out how it is possible to have the ‘browsing’ experience but it is equally possible to say ‘right I need something to read right bang bang bang, ‘3 for 2’, that’s fine’. This participant said ‘you can be in and out like you buy a sandwich at lunchtime’. She referred to different types of experience, related to how often you visit particular stores and the kind of experience you want, what you are looking for and if you want the ‘relaxing coffee type experience’. As another participant very perceptively remarked, ‘this business of going in and out, is it not a consequence of this trend in displaying at the front – you know it’s there’. This is a pointed reference to the habit of chain bookshops of marketing key titles very strongly at the front of stores, often in a very formulaic layout. Indeed as another participant remarked, sometimes one wants different experiences depending on the time one has and whether one knows what one is buying, and whether one is buying for oneself or someone else. I, in FG2 again commented on the duality of the bookshop experience, depending on what one is looking for.

If you’re going in for a specific, particular book then it really doesn’t make a difference whether it’s busy or quiet. But if you’re going in looking for inspiration for something you want to take away as a holiday read or something like that then a lot of the time it is nice just to have peace and quiet and your own space to read. Flick through something as opposed to,
you know having to reach round people to grab something off the shelves, and feeling that you’re in the way if you stop to, to flick through something.

4.3.10 Bookshop customers
With regard to the types of customers who visit bookshops, the general opinion was that the growth of TV related titles had probably led to an expansion in the book buying market, attracting people who might not formerly have visited bookshops. Differences in clientele across various bookshop chains were also perceived, but were thought to owe more to the relative location of the stores in this particular city.

Interaction between customers would seem to be the exception rather than the rule. Generally, participants seemed unwilling to engage with others in bookshops (except perhaps at the point of purchase). Some examples were given of rather exceptional circumstances where conversation with other bookshop customers had taken place: signing sessions where there were long queues and the exceptionality of the situation made one more inclined to chat to one’s neighbour, and also if one was looking for a particular book and couldn’t find it, it was a chance to moan to one’s neighbour.

There seemed to be a general preference not to speak to others in bookshops, and to carry out book shopping on one’s own. This is exemplified by a comment made by P-J in FG2;

I don’t like it when there’s anybody there. I like it to be quite an isolated thing where you go in and you get lost and you look at books and it’s a personal thing. When it’s busy it just puts me off. I’d rather just walk out ‘cos you want to go in, you seek an experience where it’s quiet and you want to enjoy that, you maybe go for a coffee or a sit down if there’s people there… and I certainly wouldn’t even consider speaking to anybody, at all.

Even when shopping with friends or family, the general habit seemed to be to split up while shopping, then to reconvene when finished, perhaps at the coffee shop. ‘We’re together ‘cos we’re all shopping but it’s very much three individuals... who will then come together at the coffee shop’. On the whole, shopping for books seemed to be viewed as a personal experience, not one easily shared.

As J in FG2 said;
There’s no question of it being a social experience for me – it’s a very anti-social experience.

4.3.11 The booksellers
The issue of booksellers, their knowledge and our expectations of them was the next topic to be raised in the focus groups. Whereas there was general consensus about the helpfulness of booksellers, it was also felt that booksellers seemed to lack specialist knowledge about books. This was also felt to represent a change in the profile of booksellers. Certainly the more mature focus group participants felt that in former years, a broader knowledge of books had been evidenced by booksellers. This was not often a problem however, since only a minority of focus group participants would ask directly about books; more usually enquiries would be about what was in stock, or to order titles, all of which the booksellers were able to deal with. Expectations of knowledge about books varied across participants with some expecting high levels of knowledge about books, while other simply expected booksellers to be knowledgeable about bookselling systems, rather than books per se. There was the suggestion from one participant that choice of books is such a personal thing that personal recommendations from booksellers are not something she would want. Another participant said he used to accept recommendations from one bookshop owner, but only because he was a trusted friend. It is perhaps worth considering that these particular participants were all quite experienced bookshop users so perhaps the recommendations might be more relevant for people new to bookshops.

In FG2, participants expected a certain level of competence – being able to order books for example - but advice regarding what to read was not actively sought. Indeed, one participant thought it could potentially be rather intrusive. It is interesting to note that although the participants did not necessarily expect personal recommendations to be forthcoming, nevertheless; ‘I do expect them [booksellers] to be, more switched on, more courteous, more interested in what I want’. So perhaps while the expectation of personal recommendation is not there, there is still an expectation of a more intelligent assistant, and if they’re not up to this standard, ‘it’s proportionately more of a shock!’ As one participant in FG2 said,

Isn’t that sort of because... I think you know when you buy a book or when you go and buy...a kettle or something, a book is sort of an intimate process, you know something so extremely personal. Well...you look for
something which is close to your personality and you take it from shelf and that’s almost like acknowledgement to the rest of the world ‘Look! This is what I am about’ You know? And that’s why…I expect the same thing, I expect them to be much more sort of nicer.

There seems to be an expectation of more intelligence from booksellers, compared to other retail assistants, although one might not necessarily want to make use of that intelligence. Another participant in FG2 pointed out that he would expect the booksellers to be ‘book enthusiasts’ in a way which he would not expect or that would not be appropriate in some other stores.

On a practical note, it was mentioned by several participants that it was sometimes difficult to find a member of staff to ask them a question – many participants mentioned that booksellers always seemed really busy, behind a till or absorbed in stacking shelves, so they felt they could not ask them a question. This obviously could have a far-reaching impact on whether or not a customer ultimately makes a purchase or not.

Many of the focus group participants had very clear memories of both very good and very bad service experiences in book shops (and in affiliated coffee shops) to the extent that these experiences seemed to colour whether or not they went back to the bookshops in question. A distinctly good – or bad – experience in a bookshop seems to have a lasting impact on the customers’ impression of that store.

**4.3.12 Coffee shops**
The subject of coffee shops within bookshops was raised. Generally, people liked them, but with some notable exceptions and also some very firm caveats about their qualities. Some of the more negative comments included that of one participant who disapproved very strongly of coffee shops saying she failed to see the ‘manufactured’ connection between books and coffee. She also remarked that ‘I always get the impression that if it were up to them, they’d get rid of all the books and it would just become a big coffee emporium’. This represented a feeling of being pushed out by people who want to make book shopping a lifestyle experience. There was the feeling that genuine book shoppers were in danger of being displaced by a new breed of people primarily interested in drinking coffee in bookshops. This led to a discussion wherein some participants were moved to reject what they perceived as a move towards the ‘lifestyling’ of bookshops, and they made it clear that not everyone wants
their bookshop to be like this (i.e. coffee shop, sofas, bright colours). Another participant thought that it ‘brings together the worst aspects of each [coffee shop and bookshop] and just concentrates them. He continued;

(I)f you’re looking, trying to concentrate on which book to choose, you don’t want to hear the noise of milk being steamed ... or... water being blasted through the jets.

Stating that a bookshop with a coffee shop would put him off going in at all, he went on to say that very clear demarcation lines between coffee shop and bookshop would be the only way he might venture into such a store: ‘I wouldn’t go to a bookshop with a coffee shop in it for coffee or for a book if I had the choice’.

However, one participant in FG2 disagreed with this view of coffee shops, stating very firmly that in her opinion, they enhanced the book buying experience.

I think that it’s part of the process that when you go for, you know into a bookshop I think it adds value to the experience that when you go to buy a book or browse it, it’s something that you add on to the experience that I, well I personally enjoy and it extends the time that you’re actually in the bookstore, so I’ll maybe have a look and I’m maybe not quite sure which books I’ll buy and, and then I’ll have a coffee and I’ll think about it then go back and then I’ll decide which ones to buy and then leave. So I think it’s a social thing as well. If you maybe meet somebody there and you can have a look around. It forms for me an integral part of book shopping, now that they’ve started to have coffee shops, I mean I’d agree that I think it’s annoying if...you know you hear noise and kids running around. It has to be if it’s well thought out it can be a good thing.

Again, here we see that the presence of a coffee shop facilitates thought time for mulling over a potential purchase. This was supported by several participants, who welcomed the opportunity to sit down and think about potential purchases.

The smell of coffee was noted by some as being a very positive quality in a bookshop, and enhanced the feeling of being welcome and inclined respondents to stay longer. However, this also depended on the friendliness of the coffee shop staff since as one
participant related, a poor experience in the coffee shop could mean that she would not return, even to the affiliated bookshop.

A point made in all of the focus groups was that coffee shops need to be distinctly separate from the bookshop. The question of having space to sit and relax and not be squashed was also seen as important and it was thought better for a bookshop not to have a coffee shop than to simply squish one in regardless. It was also seen to be important not to be getting in other people’s way:

I think it can be great, it can work really well, and if it’s a good coffee shop and it’s well laid out then it’s more likely to make me go to that bookshop. But it…has to have space, it has to have sofas to make it a relaxing experience.

Generally, the feedback about coffee shops was very mixed. One notable comment was that it was felt to be representative of a change in attitude towards customers – the presence of a coffee shop did encourage one to linger and this was perceived to be a change in attitude from a time when bookshops were perhaps less welcoming places. The inclusion of coffee shops in bookshops seemed to facilitate the meeting of friends and family, whereas without this facility bookshops were not felt to be such a natural place to meet. Overall, the presence of a coffee shop seems to legitimise sitting down, looking at a book and spending time in bookshops. Several participants cited examples of when they had been spending time in coffee shops in bookshops and had spotted a book nearby which they had subsequently bought. Another participant mentioned that the coffee shop gave you thinking time – in his case he mulled over the purchase of an expensive book in the coffee shop before returning to make the purchase.

4.3.13 The bookshop as a ‘third place’

Viewing the bookshop as a third place or a venue where one might want to go simply to spend time was not a concept which came naturally to all of the focus group participants. When the term ‘third place’ was couched it was met with open cynicism. As one participant said very firmly,

If I’m going to a bookshop then I’m going to buy a book. If I’m going to hang out then I’ll go to a friend or I’ll go to a bar or a coffee shop.
However, if the question of spending time in bookshops was couched in a slightly different way, some focus group participants were happy to agree that they did enjoy whiling away time in bookshops, whether browsing or drinking coffee. There was general approval of the bookshop as a social venue, for organised events, perhaps jazz or poetry readings; again this was seen as providing an alternative venue for people to go to in the evenings, as opposed to pubs, clubs or the cinema. Indeed, the idea of late opening and the provision of events seemed to help participants envisage the bookshop as a venue, a genuine destination. As for spending time there through the day, most participants were happy to go there to browse or to buy specific books but seemed to be uncomfortable with the idea of a third place. They recognised that bookshops were pleasant places to spend time, but also felt that browsing and shopping for books were specific tasks. The idea of simply spending time in store seemed to be an uncomfortable one. C in FG2 said:

If I’ve got time to kill in a place that I don’t know, I am more likely to go kill it in a bookshop, simply because there’s something about it that, I don’t know just, you feel less, or I feel less ‘stick out like a sore thumb’, less self conscious in a bookshop because again you can just browse and lose yourself in the pages and, you know, it doesn’t matter that you’re on your own, what have you… but I wouldn’t deliberately go there, as an outing, I don’t think. The primary reason for going there would be, either because I did want to buy some books or I wanted to buy some music, or I wanted a cup of coffee, but I wouldn’t… go there as a destination, in the same way. It would be incidental.

Another comment was made about spending spare time in bookshops:

When people aimlessly wander about shops, like clothes shops and stuff like that you wonder what they’re doing whereas bookshops, it’s more expected you know. It’s more like a natural thing. So yeah, I’d go and hang out in a bookshop for a while, to waste some time. I’d probably come out with stuff.

With regard to the idea of ‘time to kill’ as mentioned in the quote above, this was agreed with in another focus group, where participants agreed it was ‘socially’ easier to go in and spend some time there, without necessarily having to be seen to do anything. In some cases, bookshops were useful venues where one could shelter from bad
weather with impunity, or spend a spare few minutes if meeting someone. The point was also made that in many instances, this is because there are not many other venues where one can go and sit undisturbed for relatively long periods of time. This quality seems to distinguish bookshops from many other retail outlets.

As for ‘hanging around’ in bookshops, one participant was quite clear that she would come to buy a book, but would not ‘hang around’ there. However, another participant noted that if he had time to spare he would spend it either at the local Waterstone’s or at the local art gallery. Here we have an example of someone who does come to bookshops to spend spare time. Asked whether the atmosphere in these environments was comparable, he concurred and said he could wander about in either, ‘quite detached’. Book shopping was seen as essentially a solitary experience, even if you go in with others or meet others there, the actual looking for books and browsing seemed to be an activity which focus group participants indulged in alone.

When the idea of spending time in bookshops was allied with the idea of having music, or poetry or late–night opening, focus group participants seemed to become much more open to the idea of the bookshop as a venue. As one said;

I’m not sure if they would get me by saying ‘this is the lifestyle, this is your third home’…but I don’t think that would be the way they would advertise it. They’d probably say ‘we’ll have a poetry reading at nine o clock, come along’ you know or something like that. I’d like that.

Another added,

I think in the last five years or so, a lot of new independent coffee shops have opened and quite a few of them are open until 10 or 11 o clock and have jazz or have live music and things, so I think it’s the next step to bring it, I’d love to have a bookshop that had all of that. I’m quite happy, I don’t have a problem with my bookshop having jazz and poetry and coffee shops and all of it.

This comment seems to underline the fact that while the bookshop users questioned seemed uncomfortable with the term ‘third place’, nevertheless when the suggestion of a bookshop as an evening venue, or a venue for music or poetry is suggested, many seem very open to that idea.
4.3.14 Online book shopping

Online bookshops were used by most of the participants. However, there was a split in the kind of use made of online bookshops. P said he only ever used them for specific purchases, and also academic titles which were impossible to buy off the shelf in any local bookshop. There were participants across all of the focus groups who concurred that this was the way that they too used online bookshops. However, AB in FG1 said that, upon reflection, her online book buying probably was a type of browsing as she could look for specific subject areas (in this case specific periods of history) in which she was interested. She added that she had bought books online this way. One can see how this has comparisons with traditional browsing. The feature of directing browsers to others’ purchases of similar books was also found to be enjoyable and led to extra purchases. Generally positive comments were made about online shopping but, the process of physically browsing in a traditional bookshop and the tactile element of being around books and being able to pick them up and leaf through them in a bookshop were elements mentioned by participants as to why they preferred shopping in traditional bookshops. However, one participant’s experience of online book shopping was echoed by many others;

I was looking for quite a specific book on Amazon, and then there was, you know they have these things ‘oh people who bought your book bought also this and this’ (murmurs of assent) and somehow it caught my eye and I ordered that one book and that’s it, I’m an addict now!

This change in attitude towards online book buying was evidenced by many focus group participants; namely, they had initially been wary of buying anything other than specific titles or academic books online, but had been drawn in by reviews and recommendations and had found it to be possible to ‘browse’ online – albeit to browse in a different way to how browsing is done in a traditional bookshop. This particular facility used by online bookshops - ‘other people who bought that, bought this’ - was mentioned favourably by many focus group participants and seemed to have led to many online purchases being made. It was said to be able to point one in a ‘new and exciting direction’. Another point worth noting in this context was that the element of trust of online recommendation did not seem to be less than that afforded to a ‘real’ bookseller’s recommendation. It was also noted by many participants that online book shopping makes looking for unusual titles rather easier and means not always having to order titles in traditional bookshops without really knowing what you are ordering, if you are a person with a particular interest in a rather more specialist subject.
On a practical level, convenience of access at any time; not having to physically go to a bookshop and special offers on delivery were also aspects of online book shopping which were all mentioned in very positive terms by some participants. Indeed, as delivery is free on some sites if a particular amount is spent, some participants said they ‘saved up’ their purchases in order to get free delivery. Another participant mentioned how much he liked seeing a book, then being able to ‘purchase’ it instantly, without having to go physically to a bookshop. The time gap between paying electronically and having the book sent did not seem to be an issue in this case.

It’s just so much more convenient and there’s so much more choice and consumer feedback. It’s much more of a…even though it’s much more of an individual thing in terms of actually doing it, there’s much more community feel to it and it’s much more of a shared experience I would say.

This comment refers to the consumer comments and reviews available online, much more easily accessible than in a traditional store, where the availability of reviews is limited to recommends titles by staff and perhaps a few book reviews clipped from newspapers. The ability to focus on reviews of books in which one is specifically interested was a plus point for this particular online book buyer. The other technical advantages which online bookselling has were also mentioned favourably, such as the ability to look at prefaces and to look at selected pages inside selected books. One participant relayed her online experiences of customer reviews and she asked if this was a kind of browsing. This raises the idea that browsing and the definition of browsing perhaps need to be redefined in an online context. It is such a different physical experience compared to browsing in a shop, that participants seemed unsure as to whether it really was browsing. Nevertheless, it was agreed that the bookshop experience online is an entirely different one to that experienced in a traditional bookshop. L mentioned;

just the idea of coming in for half an hour on a wet Sunday afternoon... you’re not going to get that on the internet. That whole feeling is lost, when you do it online.
4.4 Online surveys with newer bookshop users

4.4.1 Introduction
The aim of this survey was to evaluate whether or not the marketing and branding strategies adopted by chain bookshops are effective at attracting new customers. However, it was also hoped that information gathered at this stage might help to identify any factors which deter people from visiting bookshops.

Online surveys were used at this stage since it was proposed that it might be possible to target people who were interested in books, but who perhaps had other keener interests, or were relatively new to book buying or bookshops. Using www.sondage.online.be an online survey site, the survey was loaded onto the web. It was publicised in the local press as well as the local online press and an electronic link to the survey was made available. In addition, a link to the survey was posted on the books thread of Empire online. This is an online cinema website which allows subscribers to chat online about various topics of interest. 70 questionnaires were completed.

4.4.2 Demographic information

![Pie chart showing age distribution of survey respondents.]

Fig. 4.4.1 Age of survey respondents
It is clear to see the dominance of respondents in the age group 21 – 30 years. This is perhaps partly explained by the fact that the survey was carried out online and that therefore one might expect a large percentage of relatively young people to respond. Around 77% of respondents were aged 40 or under. The gender of the respondents was roughly balanced with 32 males and 38 females.

4.4.3 Habitual bookshop behaviour

4.4.3.1 Period of bookshop visiting
Examiner the period of time the respondents had been going to bookshops, the chart below shows the spread of respondents, with regard to this question.

![Chart showing the period of bookshop visiting](image)

**Fig. 4.4.2 Period of bookshop visiting**

A large number of survey respondents were long-term bookshop users, despite concerted efforts at this stage of data collection to target newer bookshop users, or those with bookshops as a secondary or peripheral interest. 49 of the respondents said they had been going to bookshops for over ten years. Six had been going between five and ten years; eight between one and five years and seven had been going for under a year.
Those respondents who had only been visiting bookshops for five years or less were examined, in order to find out their respective ages. Of the 15 respondents who fell into this bracket of ‘new’ bookshop users, seven were aged under 20, six were aged between 21 and 30 years, and the remaining two respondents were aged between 31 and 40 years. As one might expect, the newest users also tended to be the youngest respondents.

4.4.3.2 Frequency of bookshop visiting
Research participants were very positive about bookshops: 69 people said ‘yes’ they like bookshops, a single person said ‘no’. The pie chart below (fig. 4.4.3) demonstrates the frequency with which bookshops are visited. 29 people (41.4%) go into bookshops more often than monthly, 14 people (20%) go to bookshops about every month, while 24 people (34.3%) go every few months. Two people (2.9%) said just for Christmas and birthdays and a single respondent (1.4%) said they do not visit bookshops.

![Fig 4.4.3 Frequency of bookshop visiting](image-url)
4.4.4 Bookshop use

4.4.4.1 Potential barriers to bookshop use

Various statements about bookshops and in particular reasons for not using them, were put to the research participants, and their responses measured. Fig. 4.4.4 below shows the percentage of respondents who agreed with each of the statements.

![Barriers to bookshops graph]

**Fig. 4.4.4 Barriers to bookshop use**

It is notable that three of the most negative options provided, received no response, i.e. ‘bookshops are for other people’; ‘I am not interested in bookshops’ and ‘I don’t read books/ I find them boring’. It is striking that the option receiving the highest response was ‘prefer to buy online’. Of all the statements provided above, this one would seem to present traditional bookshops with their greatest challenge. Further analysis was carried out with this data, selecting only the cases where bookshop visitors were a little newer (visiting for five years or less).
Barriers to bookshops – newer visitors

Fig. 4.4.5 Barriers to bookshop use: newer visitors

This is broadly in congruence with the overall chart, again showing the predominance of people who prefer to buy their books online. It is notable that there appear to be no significant differences in this case, between newer users of bookshops, and the broader cross section of those questioned. Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that by selecting only these cases, fig.4.4.5 above relates only to a total of 15 people, therefore numbers of responses to each statement are shown, rather than percentages.

The data for this particular question was then analysed once more, this time including a rather wider set of responses; including those research participants who said they had been visiting bookshops for up to 10 years, and excluding only those who had been visiting for longer than 10 years.
Barriers to bookshops – visitors of up to ten years

**Fig. 4.4.6 Barriers to bookshop use: visitors of up to ten years**

The responses again are broadly similar although once more, it is important to bear in mind that the number of respondents is still relatively small, just 21 people, as opposed to the overall survey of 70 people (whose responses are illustrated in fig. 4.4.4). Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that of the relatively newer bookshop users, the only significant responses were ‘prefer to buy online’, ‘read other things’ and ‘have other hobbies’. It is the more *experienced* bookshop visitors (those using bookshops for longer than 10 years) who chose to give responses such as ‘prefer to get books in supermarkets’ and ‘prefer to get books in libraries’.

**4.4.4.2 Encouraging more bookshop use**

In an attempt to establish which qualities might make bookshop visitors visit more frequently, choices were presented to the research participants with regards to which options they would respond to most positively.
Incentives to visit

Fig. 4.4.7 Encouraging more visits

‘Cheaper books’ is clearly a facility to which people would respond positively (70% of respondents, or 49 of 70 people). Furthermore, it is important to remember that the respondents were not necessarily arguing that books are expensive, just that, were books cheaper, they would buy more of them. It is also interesting that potentially, having seats in stores might affect the frequency and perhaps even length of people’s visits. 25.7% of respondents or 18 people said they would visit bookshops more often if there were more seats there. This supports earlier research findings from the questionnaire stage (see section 4.2.8). 16 people (22.9%) said they would visit more often if bookshops had cafes in store. It is perhaps of note that in this particular survey, providing seats seems to be at least as effective at making people visit bookshops more frequently, as going to the expense of providing a coffee shop in store. Again 16 people (22.9%) agreed that they would visit more often if bookshops were nearby – not an easy problem for bookshops to address – and 16 people also agreed that they would visit more often if they could find what they wanted. (This refers to the ease with which books are located in the shop – there was a separate option dealing with personal preferences).
These results were once again analysed further, selecting the newer bookshop users in order to see what might make them visit more often.

![Graph showing incentives to visit - newer visitors](image)

**Incentives to visit – newer visitors**

Fig. 4.4.8 Encouraging more visits: newer visitors

Again, numbers of respondents are represented, rather than percentages. There is once again broad concurrence when comparing these results with those across the wider cross section of customers, but it is worth noting some minor discrepancies. Cheaper books would be a big attraction for newer users of bookshops and also, perhaps more significantly ‘if I could find what I wanted’. Perhaps these newer users of bookshops are less familiar with bookshop convention regarding location of titles and subject areas. The inclusion of cafes in store is surprisingly lacking in influence for this demographic, in comparison to the wider group, but once again the numbers we are looking at are quite small.

The results were analysed once more, again pulling in a slightly wider demographic; this time including those bookshop users who had been visiting bookshops for up to 10 years.
It is interesting to note that when one compares each of the three above charts, it would seem that coffee shops and seating are marginally more influential for established bookshop visitors, rather than for the newer ones. Some of the respondents went on to give details of other facilities which they thought might make them visit bookshops more frequently. The responses were extremely varied. For instance two people said in-store directories and computer databases showing what was in stock and the location of the book in order that customers could find things for themselves. This might also be used for linked readings, or suggested readings for customers. Two people also mentioned reward schemes for loyal customers. All other responses were different and occurred only singly.
4.4.5 Purchasing behaviour

4.4.5.1 Frequency of purchasing

Looking at the frequency with which the respondents spent money when in a bookshop, 14.3% said always and 38.6% usually. Therefore, over 50% of this sample usually spends money when in a bookshop. A further 31.4% said sometimes – the largest percentage. This would seem to suggest that the potential for more sales is there, and bookshops need to find a way of turning these potential sales into real sales. It is significant to note that none of the respondents said ‘never’. This was again re-analysed selecting only the newer bookshop users of up to five years bookshop experience and then including those bookshop users who had been visiting bookshops for up to and including ten years. The results were very similar across each of these groups.

4.4.5.2 Reasons for not purchasing

Reasons for not making a purchase - or potential barriers to purchasing - were examined.
As one can see from fig. 4.4.11 above, there was very little agreement with any of the negative options supplied in the survey. ‘I only go in to browse’ received by far the most substantial response. This reflects well on bookshops, in that there seem to be no major barriers to purchasing, apart from people’s own enjoyment of ‘just browsing’. 52.9% of people agreed with this. The second most popular answer ‘too much choice’ received assent from eight people (11.4%) implying that there is an element of confusion because of the choice available. So, from this particular question, it would seem that non-buyers are not put off buying, they just did not intend to purchase in the first place. Once again, this set of questions was re-examined, selecting only those cases of the newer bookshop users. The responses are represented by the chart below.
while the shape of the chart is broadly similar when comparing the cross section of respondents with the newer visitors, some points are worth noting. All of those respondents saying they are ‘too embarrassed to ask’ belong to the newest sector of bookshop visitors. They represent the 5.7% in fig. 4.4.11. The newest visitors also represent four out of six of the respondents who said they cannot afford to buy books (again see fig. 4.4.11).

it might therefore be worth bookshops bearing in mind that if they are trying to attract newer customers, making information easily accessible might be useful. This need not necessarily mean asking an assistant, but, as was suggested in an earlier survey, providing a search facility for what is available in store, on a p.c. Given the small number of respondents represented in the chart above, the data was analysed once more, this time capturing respondents who had been going to bookshops for up to 10 years, excluding the most experienced bookshop visitors. However, a very similar set of results emerged.
4.4.6 Brand awareness

The chart below illustrates the awareness of various bookshop brands, from the 61 respondents who answered this request.

![Brand awareness chart](chart.png)

Fig. 4.4.13 Brand awareness

Clearly Waterstone’s has an especially high degree of brand recognition, and Ottakar’s (still in business when the survey was carried out) is widely recognised also. Relative newcomer to the UK, Borders is present also and has overtaken Blackwell’s, but this may be because Blackwell’s is perceived of as a specialist retailer of academic and professional titles, rather than a general interest store. It is notable that brand awareness of smaller stores – ‘other’ - makes up a significant percentage of responses. Analysis of the above question with regard to newer bookshop users found similar results with 11 out of 12 respondents naming Waterstone’s and 6 out of 12 respondents naming Ottakar’s.
4.4.7 In-store marketing/qualities

4.4.7.1 Consumer responses to in-store marketing/qualities

Examining the in-store qualities in bookshops and in particular how people respond to these, respondents were given eight statements and were asked to note those with which they agreed. The results are shown in the following chart.

![Chart showing consumer responses](chart.png)

**Fig. 4.4.14 Consumer responses**

This chart (fig. 4.4.14) shows the percentages of research participants who agreed with the given statements. It is clear that the special offers so favoured by the chain bookshops are also favoured by the majority of customers, supporting the data illustrated in fig. 4.2.10. Sofas and coffee shops also, largely, find favour. Responses in the focus groups to coffee shops were much more mixed, with certain caveats to their popularity. It is obviously much easier in a focus group setting to expand on these issues and the complexity of responses which they evoke. It is also of note that a significant percentage of respondents agreed that bookshops are ‘more welcoming
now’. However, it should be borne in mind that all the above statements are positive, and there were no negative options for respondents to select. This data was then analysed again, selecting only the newest bookshop users, to determine whether they agreed with the given options.

![Consumer responses – newer visitors](image)

**Fig. 4.4.15 Consumer responses: newer visitors**

Overall, the newer bookshop users tended to agree with the above statements. For example, they too like the special offers, but 53.3% (eight people) said they liked them as opposed to 69.6% of the general cross section of respondents. This pattern is repeated across all of the statements. However, once again, it is important to bear in mind that the ‘newer users’ of bookshops account for 15 of the overall survey of 70 people. Finally, the results were analysed once more, this time examining a slightly wider section of respondents; those who had been visiting bookshops for up to ten years, cutting out those who had been visiting bookshops for ten years or longer. Again, the same pattern of responses was observed in the resulting chart.

### 4.4.7.2 Consumer responses to key marketing tools

#### 4.4.7.2.1 Attractiveness of discounting
Fig. 4.4.16 Attractiveness of discounting

In store discounting has a considerable impact upon consumers, with 35 people (50%) saying it would definitely make them more likely to go into a bookshop. A further 18 people (26.1%) thought they would probably be more inclined to go in. This would seem to support data from the in-store interviews with bookshop users, where the discount offers were an influential factor when it came to actually purchasing a book. Overall therefore, a substantial majority of 76.1% said discounting would make them more likely to go into a bookshop. 17 (24.6%) people said it would make no difference. It is noteworthy that nobody said that the presence of discounted books would put them off entering a bookshop.

Once again, this question was reanalysed, selecting only responses from the newer bookshop users. The chart below represents the considerable influence which discounted titles seem to have on the newer bookshop users, with 12 people saying they would be more likely to go in to a bookshop, if it had special offers in store. Two people said it would probably make them more likely to go in and a single respondent said it would make no difference. Once again, it is important to bear in mind that the chart below represents the responses of 15 people.
Fig. 4.4.17 Attractiveness of discounting: newer visitors

The responses to this question were analysed again, this time focusing on a slightly broader cross section of respondents, including those who had been visiting bookshops for up to 10 years. However, a very similar set of results was generated once again, showing that the effect of discounted books seems to be very strong, especially amongst rather newer visitors to bookshops.
4.4.7.2.2 Attractiveness of the coffee shop
The effect of a coffee shop in store on respondents’ inclination to visit was investigated.

Fig. 4.4.18 Attractiveness of the coffee shop

A largely ambivalent response was received regarding the power of coffee shops to draw people into bookshops. 41 people (almost 60%) said the presence of a coffee shop makes no difference to whether they go into bookshops. Eight people (12.9%) said it definitely would make them more likely to go in, 13 (18.6%) said probably. It is interesting however to note that seven people (10%) said that a coffee shop in store would put them off. This seems to tally with the mixed feelings about coffee shops emanating from the focus group results.

This set of responses was again analysed further looking solely at the newer bookshop users (of 5 years or less) and the following chart represents the findings.
The existence of a coffee shop in store appears to be rather more influential at getting newer bookshop visitors inside bookshops than the more established bookshop customer. Five (one third) of the newer respondents are more likely to go in as opposed to 12.9% of the wider book customer cross section. This amounts to eight people, five of whom obviously belong to the section of newer bookshop visitors. However, it is interesting to note that there also seems to be rather more antipathy to coffee shops in the newer visitors, with three people saying that coffee shops put them off from entering. This would deter just around 10% of the wider community of bookshop customer – seven people. Again, the largest percentage said the presence of a coffee shop would make no difference. Once more, it is important to remember that the newer customers are made up of just 15 respondents, so represent a relatively small sample of bookshop users.

This analysis was run once again, looking at a slightly wider cross section of readers, including those who had been using bookshops for up to 10 years and excluding those who had been using bookshops for longer. Once again a very similar pattern of results to that of the newest bookshop visitors emerged. The presence of a coffee shop seems to be equally effective at attracting this sector of bookshop users, again a third of them said that a coffee shop would definitely make them more likely to go into a bookshop. Overall the presence of a coffee shop seems more effective for rather newer users of bookshops, rather than the more long-established bookshop users.
4.4.7.2.3 Attractiveness of sofas

The presence of sofas has a much less marked impact on consumers, with 37 people (52.2%) saying it would make no difference to whether they would go in to a bookshop or not. 11 people (15.9%) said it would definitely make them go in and 22 people (31.9%) said it would probably make them go in. Therefore, while an overall positive effect is certainly clear, the effect is not so powerful as that of discounted books. This is similar to the findings (above) with regard to the coffee shop, where around 50% of respondents said they liked the fact that these facilities were in store now, but the lure of them to get people into bookshops, while still apparent, is not as effective as the special offers. Consumer responses to the presence of sofas were analysed again looking at the newer visitors to bookshops. The research suggests that the presence of sofas is a slightly more powerful draw for the newer visitors to bookshops, whereas the more experienced users of bookshops are less attracted by sofas.

The following section goes on to set out the results from the interviews with the managers of online bookshops.
4.5 Interviews with online managers

4.5.1 Introduction
Three interviews were carried out with managers of online bookshops. The objective of these interviews was to evaluate the degree to which the marketing and branding strategies used by traditional bookshops have been extended to online settings, with a view to assessing any differentiation which bookshops make between online and traditional bookshop customers. As referred to in the Methodology chapter, an interview with personnel from Amazon was not possible; therefore, the interviews which were carried out were with much smaller online organisations; one independent bookshop and two chains. Much of the interview and survey data gathered from both consumers and from managers referring to online bookselling is referring specifically to Amazon, therefore, the data from this set of interviews must be seen in that context. This is borne in mind throughout the analysis and in the later discussion and conclusions sections. The online managers are referred to as Managers W, X, and Y throughout.

4.5.2 The online site

4.5.2.1 Inception and development of the site
Each of the online sites under discussion had developed in a rather ad hoc manner, with little thought seeming to have been given at the preplanning stage with regards to medium or long term strategy. The driving force behind the initial online start up of the bookshops involved seemed to be the desire to have an online presence, almost regardless of whether that would be profitable or even beneficial to the existing business.

Manager X noted that her company was actually;

(P)ioneering in many respects and has been over the years and the website was one of those projects where they saw an opportunity – they knew it wasn't going to be an instant profitable business but they knew they wanted to be in there and they wanted to embrace the new technology.

The lack of strategy regarding site development seemed in many cases to be matched by poor resourcing; the interviewees mentioned that the online aspect of their business
was run by just a few people, sometimes with little technical ability as they frequently seemed to be drawn from bookselling, rather than from an IT background. It was also felt that the online design of the site was often limited by technical possibility. Therefore, it was not always possible to promote either the brand or the goods in the way which the bookshops wished. In these instances, the online aspect of bookselling seemed to be being used simply as an alternative conduit to selling books, rather than a new bookselling medium to be used in an innovative way.

4.5.2.2 Site redesign
Manager X noted that her company was currently undergoing some rebranding, due to the arrival of a new management team and new Marketing Director. She noted that at a recent managers’ meeting each manager had been asked to think of words and qualities which they associated with the brand. This would then be used to assess how shop managers understood the brand and to assess whether it needed to be changed. It was interesting to note that under the previous management also, the traditional stores were all being rebranded in order to standardise the fixtures, fittings and visual branding.

With regard to the online site, Manager X commented upon how it had been recently redesigned.

It had a homemade feel to it because we never had anybody professional come in and design it. It was always done in house and obviously we’re not designers... we kind of moved away from the very distinctive look and feel we had, to a more streamlined... I wouldn’t say it was the same as every other website but it is more standardised. So I wouldn’t say we stand out in the same way as we did before, but we have a much more professional looking website.

This comment seems to illustrate the quandary between having a ‘home made’ site which may seem unprofessional but will probably be unique, and having a more professional one which inevitably draws on the design standards set by more established bookselling sites and runs the risk of appearing ‘standardised’. One other site manager said that his site had been designed by an ex-employee who had left to set up his own web design business. As for the design strategy involved, this particular manager said that beyond having the name of the store at the top of the page, the rest
was left to the designer. Once again, this demonstrates the rather ad hoc approach to site design and online identity which some bookshops seem to have adopted.

Manager X when describing the qualities of the brand was very focused upon the changes which were being made due to the rebranding which was taking place. She emphasised how the new site would be cleaner and more streamlined and how it would not be as bright, but would appear darker and therefore, ‘more serious’: ‘We have a more serious brand than we’ve had in the last year or so’. It is interesting to note her conception of the brand as something which is fluid and easily changed. She also noted that the brand image of the online store had already changed quite markedly over the past few years since it started. This is perhaps in the nature of online stores however, given the technological development which has allowed increased functionality to affect the appearance of many online sites.

4.5.3 Consumers and personal relationships
Examining the qualities which the online managers wished to convey via their website, Manager W’s response was typical; ‘I would say that it’s very similar to the offline shops... ’. She went on to explain that what was projected was ‘very much about people’ so there was a high degree of visibility of actual named bookselling experts on the site as well as emphasis upon the importance of accessibility and easy access to stores. Much emphasis was placed on contact phone numbers and how easy it is to contact real people in local stores. This was felt to distinguish her particular store from other, larger online stores in that some of the larger online bookshops seem to dissuade direct contact with people – electronic contact tends to be encouraged in the larger organisations, rather than direct conversational contact. It is notable that this is a key quality which seems to set apart the online sites referred to here, from Amazon, where contact is almost entirely electronic.

Manager X also noted the ease with which online customers can – and indeed are encouraged to – contact the online site with customer comments about any aspect of the online experience. This seemed to highlight the loyalty of customers using the online site and the fact that many of them are also traditional customers of that chain, keen to stay loyal. As she said,

We do have a customer services team here who...are on the phone all day every day...and you can actually speak to them! Which is something which
other online booksellers don’t tend to do. So there’s that reassurance that if something goes wrong there is a very friendly person here who will, you know, deal with their problem for them.

It is perhaps ironic to see once again that direct contact is very much encouraged by this online chain, just like that of Manager W’s chain. It seems that electronic bookselling has not in these cases negated the need for customers or booksellers to communicate directly with each other.

Manager X went on to talk about the close and personal contact which has led to the development of relationships between the customer services team and some regular customers.

There are customers who probably know the whole team by name, I have to admit. There’s customers which the team will mention quite regularly...there’s a lovely customer that will place an order then immediately phone us up to make sure we got the order, and then ask us how long we think it will take...and he will literally ring us up every single day until he receives the book and he will do that every single time he places an order and he places a lot of orders. We don’t know whether he really loves us or whether he’s just very lonely! But, we have customers like that who will ring us a lot...there’s a couple of people in our customer services team who have been here over 20 years. So obviously...there are customers who do phone up and ask to speak to those people by name.

Again, Manager X emphasised this as distinguishing her online bookshop identity from those of others, seeing this personalised service as being unique.

4.5.4 Customer loyalty
In every case, the online managers thought there was significant overlap between customer profile in the traditional stores and those in the online stores; the same people seemed to shop online as shop in the traditional stores, in many instances. It is interesting to note that given the encouragement which online customers are given to contact online services directly, the online managers were aware of regular online customers, in many cases being familiar with names, likes and dislikes. This is largely due to the high level of contact they make and was in one case due to the manager’s
familiarity with regular competition and quiz entrants. There seems to be a large degree of familiarity with customer habits – knowing that some enter every online quiz time and again for instance. Relationships are often built up between the online customers and the online managers but, ironically, this is usually due to direct contact being made to the site by telephone. The familiarity with customers is facilitated by the fact that in the cases studied, the online personnel were often few in number, making contact with the same customers more probable. Manager Y concurred with the view that many online customers were regulars and that she was familiar with them; a situation to be expected in the case of her single independent shop and online site. However, she also made the case that perhaps there comes a stage when an online customer is no longer an online customer, once one makes ‘direct’ contact with them, they become a telephone or a mail order customer. Nevertheless, again in her case, the online bookshop seemed to facilitate direct contact with her customer, or serve as a conduit for bookselling and contact with customers. Manager W said ‘we know a lot of them by name. We know if they’ve e-mailed us before and we certainly know who enters the quiz regularly’.

Manager Y said the reason behind the start of her online store was to serve existing customers who were unable to come to the terrestrial store. Therefore, there was no real push to expand the market, just a wish to make it easier for existing customers to shop. Manager X was also aware of a large percentage of loyal online customers. Returning customers were measured as a percentage on her site which was thought to be around 30%. Manager X concurred that the profile of the largest section of online customers was the same as those in the traditional stores, judging by the nature of the books which were purchased online. She also mentioned that some were customers who had been loyal to the terrestrial stores who had perhaps moved abroad and wished to continue shopping at the same chain. This particular chain certainly seemed to engender a high degree of loyalty. This sometimes gave rise to resentment from customers about the chain making a profit or being business-like. As Manager X said,

They… get very upset with us if anything goes wrong because they almost take it personally, because they feel that we’re…their friend as well as their company… but they can be quite amusing because they forget we’re a company sometimes and treat us almost as if… we’re not looking to make a profit and get very offended if they see us do something they construe as commercial.
This comment seems to demonstrate the relationship which some customers have with their bookshop. Obviously, this particular bookshop has an offline presence as well as an online presence and it is not possible to say whether customers feel the same way about profits in the context of exclusively online bookshops. It is arguable that the presence of an offline store allows customers to develop a relationship and a sense of ownership with their bookshop which then gets extended to the equivalent online store.

There was also a sense of *earning* customers from the managers interviewed; Manager X said that some of her online customers had been loyal customers of her chain’s traditional stores before moving to the online stores. Therefore, she felt they belonged to her company and that they had put in the hard work to earn them and deserved to keep them. There seems to be a very personalised approach to customers with the online stores – they seem to be viewed as real people with views and opinions and there seems to be little distinction made between online and offline customers. Indeed, in many cases as mentioned above, making direct contact with the online equivalent seems to be easier than exchanging views and opinions with a high street store.

Familiarity with customers also came to the fore in the redesign of the site for Manager X. While they outsourced the technical design of the rebranded site to a web design organisation, nevertheless,

(W)e were obviously then predominantly in control of the navigational element as well, because we felt we knew our customers better and what they would support, and what they would be looking for.

**4.5.5 Characteristics of online bookselling**

The managers interviewed were asked to comment upon the characteristics of their online bookselling sites and the diagram below shows the qualities which they focused upon.
Fig. 4.5.1 Characteristics of online bookselling

It is notable that the qualities they mentioned seem to be personalised, almost human characteristics and perhaps not those that one would automatically associate with an online bookshop (as opposed to a traditional bookshop). Once again, this may reflect the fact that those operations examined represent rather smaller online operations where individual relationships with customers were found to be surprisingly prominent. Comparing these characteristics with those which the traditional managers felt they were promoting (fig. 4.1.1) one can see that those qualities relating to ‘community issues’ are absent from the online descriptions, as one might expect. It is interesting to note that while the online managers mentioned terms such as ‘warm’ ‘personable’ and ‘friendly’, these were not qualities which arose when traditional managers were describing the characteristics of traditional bookshops. This reflects the profile of the particular online sites represented.

Regarding the advantages which the online managers felt online bookshops offered, the focus seemed to be upon convenience, range and value. However, they also spoke about brand loyalty and customer service and while these attributes may apply to their own particular bookshops, it is arguable that customer service in particular was not a quality which was mentioned by any of the online consumers in other parts of the research. Of course, the consumers were in most cases referring to Amazon and other exclusively electronic sites, rather than those with a traditional presence.
Fig. 4.5.2 Online advantages

One manager pointed out the convenience of book buying online, commenting:

You have a broader backlist which is very transparent, more so than it is in a shop, and you have the convenience of being able to sit there and search and find what it is you want and then buy it.

Manager X pointed out that rather than comparing or contrasting online and offline shopping, she thought of them as two entirely different experiences. Browsing online and offline for example, were seen as entirely different experiences by Manager X.

The managers interviewed were all very clear about what customers miss out on when they shop online; the benefit of booksellers’ knowledge and service: ‘Personal touch and recommendation’ according to Manager W. While she was quick to acknowledge that Amazon, for instance are trying hard to overcome this disadvantage, nevertheless, as she saw it,

It’s no substitute to having a relationship with your local store and going in there and them saying, “Oh, you like these things don’t you? This has just come in” or, you know, that kind of thing.
Other points made about the disadvantages of online shopping include the loss of the tactile element of book shopping.

The high street, the advantage for me, as a book buyer, I do love books, is being able to browse. You can walk in, you can pick up the book, you can feel the weight of the book, you can flick through it. Many of our shops you know they’re very welcoming, there’s seats to sit down in. You can look on the shelves and see you know, ‘I like this author’ there’s other authors there, or you can browse through a category. So I think that’s a distinct advantage there, is actually being able to pick up the books and flick through and also to be able to speak to the staff and ask questions and recommendations and I think that, the first part obviously we can’t replicate online. As much as you’d want to…you can’t feel a book if it’s online.

Manager X commented upon the linked recommendations online. I.e. ‘other customers who bought that, bought this’. While she felt it could be a useful tool, she did point out that it could throw up unlikely choices, if people were buying entirely unrelated books. Therefore, the search engine was not intelligent enough to disregard odd or irrelevant choices.

4.5.6 Brand heritage
Manager X commented on the history of her store and upon its ground-breaking approach to online bookselling, being the first transactional bookshop in the UK. It is interesting to note that she commented upon this fact as ‘The best kept secret ever… it’s very rare that somebody actually does know that we were the first bookshop online’. It seems ironic that this brand strength demonstrating innovation and technological expertise is not being capitalised upon during brand promotion, whereas ‘lightening and brightening’ is.

Manager X was also clear that the identity of her online site was very much supported by what she felt was the strong history and heritage attached to the offline stores. She felt that this had led to the high level of trust and loyalty which the online store experienced. She also felt that the brand identity was broadly similar whether one considered the online or the offline sites. This is clearly a point which applies only to those online bookshops with an existing offline presence and notably not to online-only bookshops, like Amazon.
4.5.7 Marketing and branding online
Manager X noted that when the online site started, staff in the traditional stores were worried about online sites taking away their trade. The relationship across online and offline branches of the same chains seem to be more relaxed now and are sometimes complementary. For example, Manager W mentioned that when she worked in a high street bookshop, customers would come in clutching printouts of book details from online bookshops, wishing to order in a traditional bookshop. From this point of view, another task of the online site is to,

(T)ry and stop the migration of sales which do go online, away from [our chain]. Now we’re trying to work closer together with the shops to pass orders their way, but the shops are also using the online website now as their ordering system. So if a customer wants to order a book, their order will actually be placed on the website. So we do work together.

Online and traditional branches of the same chain therefore recognise the need for them to work together, in order to be competitive with the larger online booksellers, as well as other chains.

The promotions and offers undertaken online seem largely to be those present in the equivalent offline stores. Sometimes extra offers or promotions are done online, if there is space to do it. As Manager W said, ‘it is probably 75-80% offline promotion’. Manager X concurred that ‘we have to reflect the offers in the shops; we have to support the shops and be there when they’re shut’. With regard to the offers in the online stores, ‘We’ve always aimed to replicate the offers in stores, at least the central offers in stores, such as book of the month. But apart from that we do have our own offers which kind of feed on from central promotions’. These exclusively online promotions include an online top ten. Manager Y also emphasised the importance of brand consistency across the online and offline stores. However, in this instance, she was managing an independent store with a single branch, so she felt that brand consistency was particularly important in this situation. On a similar note, when offers or reviews were undertaken in her offline store, they were usually done online as well, simply from the practical point of view of making the most of the effort that had gone in to these marketing promotions. Again, it is important to bear in mind that in the case of Manager Y, an independent bookshop is being assessed.
The online store of Manager X also highlights the expertise of booksellers from terrestrial stores, giving contact e-mails for online customers in order to contact these experts directly for enquiries. Once again it would seem, ironically, that online bookselling is encouraging a more personalised approach and more contact between bookseller and customer. It is hard to think of any terrestrial chain bookshop where one would be made aware of booksellers' expertise and, as a result, be encouraged to talk to them and make enquiries. Another traditional marketing tool which has been picked up by Manager X’s chain is having last minute buys situated by the checkout. Her chain used this to sell cheap goods near to the online shopping basket and this ploy worked very well.

An increasingly professional approach seems to be being taken to online bookselling by online bookshops, partly, as Manager W said, in response to the higher expectations which customers seem to have with the passage of time. Nevertheless, it is still possible to see initiatives taken by some of the interviewees’ chains which do not seem to be dealt with to their conclusion. For instance, Manager X noted that while her online site has the facility to say ‘other customers who bought that bought this’, they do not measure the effectiveness of this recommendation tool. Different aspects of online functionality have been added to the site over the years it has been running, but it seems that their effectiveness is not always monitored.

4.5.8 The future of online bookselling

All of the interviewees felt that online bookselling had a healthy future. Manager W felt that rather than ‘carry on exponentially increasing forever’ it would probably develop into different niche markets. For example, she felt that second hand bookselling in particular could do very well online. She felt that Amazon was becoming over complicated while conversely she was wary of some supermarkets reducing the choice online, and simply having ‘top tens’ available, rather like they have in their terrestrial stores. Manager X thought that specialist print on demand titles could in the future be done very easily online. She also thought that online bookselling would expand into different more specialised areas. For example, in the future, an interactive forum was thought likely on her online site in order to facilitate online chat about books. As Manager X said, ‘I think we do have that kind of customer base, who are knowledgeable and would like to share that knowledge’.
The following section examines consumer responses from online bookshop users, to the topics arising from data collection to date.
4.6 Online survey with users of online bookshops

4.6.1 Introduction
Respondents to this online survey were reached by providing a link via an online book group and also by posting the link on the website of an online bookshop. These methods of reaching respondents were used in order to pinpoint those with an interest in books as well as online access to bookshops. 88 surveys were completed.

The survey contained quantitative questions as well as providing respondents with the opportunity to respond in a qualitative fashion to selected aspects of the online book shopping experience. The survey aimed firstly to assess basic usage habits of online bookshop visitors as well as to establish basic opinions about online bookshops. Having established these basic pieces of information, the survey then went on to examine in more depth the qualities and facilities available online, and consumers’ reactions to them. Levels of interaction with other online bookshop users were then examined as was the concept of online community and consumer emotions when book shopping online. The term ‘traditional’ is used in this context to refer to any bookshop which is not online (i.e. chain bookshops, independent bookshops, second hand bookshops).

4.6.2 Demographic information
The largest majority of those participating in the survey were aged between 31 – 40 years (33%). The age brackets on either side of this (21 – 30 years and 41 – 50 years) each accounted for 20.5% of respondents. Therefore, the vast majority - 80% of participants - were aged between 21 and 50 years.
With regard to the gender of participants, while it is clear that the majority of respondents are female, it should be borne in mind that participants were reached via an online book group as well as a non-commercial online bookshop. It is possible that this kind of sourcing may have skewed the gender balance.
4.6.3 Habitual behaviour in online bookshops
The bookshop visiting habits of online users were analysed. With regard to the online bookshops which the survey participants use most often, the overwhelming reply was ‘Amazon’ with 75% of respondents saying this was the site they visited most frequently. Respondents who mentioned Amazon in conjunction with another bookshop were categorised separately, as were those who specified Amazon.com or Amazon.de. These respondents account for another 7.8% of respondents overall. Therefore, 82.8% of respondents mentioned Amazon in their answer. Waterstone’s, Ottakar’s and WH Smith each accounted for 3.4% of the respondents’ most frequently visited online bookshop. While the dominance of Amazon is not particularly surprising, nevertheless, the percentages show the truly overwhelming dominance which Amazon has in the online book market.

Examining the frequency of visits to online bookshops, the chart below illustrates the fact that just over 35% of the group surveyed visit online bookshops weekly and just over 28% visit more than twice a week. These groups make up the bulk of online bookshop visitors, the next biggest group being those who visit every day – almost 15% of respondents. Therefore, 78% of online bookshop visitors visit at least weekly. This is notably more frequent than traditional bookshop visitors where 33% visit twice a week or more.

Fig. 4.6.3 Frequency of online visits
It is interesting to compare these findings with those illustrated in fig. 4.6.4 below, which show that the time spent on online visits tends to be rather limited: Almost 41% spend around 10 minutes, while most (45%) spend around half an hour there. Only 13% spend an hour or more in online bookshops. One can surmise that this is due to
the ease with which one can visit online bookshops very quickly, without needing to leave one’s desk. It is very clear therefore, that although visitors to online bookshops tend to do so quite frequently (see fig. 4.6.3), nevertheless, they tend to spend a relatively small amount of time on each visit.

Fig. 4.6.4 Time spent on online visits

Comparing these findings with the frequency with which online bookshop visitors actually purchase online, the chart below shows that purchases take place surprisingly often. 50% said they ‘sometimes’ purchase online and 29.5% said they ‘usually’ purchase online. It is interesting to note that these categories make up almost 80% of respondents with only 20% saying they rarely or never purchase online.
Fig. 4.6.5 Frequency of purchasing

It is worth examining each of the three charts together; looking at time spent; money spent and frequency of purchase. It seems that the tendency is to visit online bookshops frequently and purchase frequently despite the amount of time spent on each visit being relatively small.

Looking in more detail at what online users of bookshops tend to do in online bookshops, Fig. 4.6.6 below illustrates the activities which participants tend ‘usually’ to do when online.
We can see from the above results that the most common online activity from the options supplied is to ‘look for specific books’. Indeed, the least commonly selected option was that of ‘just browse’, although it was still selected by 35.2% of respondents. ‘Reading reviews’ of books is a popular activity online, cited by 56.8% of respondents. 51.1% said they ‘look for something which I fancy’. ‘Look for bargains’ and ‘get ideas for books’ which they would then look at in traditional bookshops, were options each selected by 39.8% of people. Further comments by respondents on this question could mostly be described as information gathering. For example, some respondents tended to follow links to recommendations of titles; others checked customer reviews and some checked information on favourite authors or forthcoming books. While much of this kind of information would be available from booksellers in traditional bookshops, it seems that the ease and speed of accessing it online is an attractive part of online book buying. Some of the individual comments given by the research participants are shown below.

I follow their links to other books that they recommend. And I check the online database of my local library to see if I can borrow the book I am interested in from there.
Write reviews

If I am unsure about a title or author can try to look it up also find other things by same author or about the same subject

I look for recommendations and links to books that I may like that are similar to those I am looking for.

4.6.4 Crossover between traditional, online and supermarket use

Far from being an exclusive activity for book buyers online, the crossover between users of online bookshops and users of traditional bookshops is significant. Fig. 4.6.7 below illustrates that the overwhelming majority of those who use online bookshops (almost 97% of those questioned) also buy from traditional outlets. It would therefore seem that online bookshops are not catering for a separate book clientele, but have provided an additional source of books and book related information for existing book consumers.

Fig. 4.6.7 Numbers purchasing in traditional bookshops

With regard to the crossover between online bookshop users and those who buy books in supermarkets, once again the majority said that they did also buy books in supermarkets, although the majority was not as overwhelming as in the previous question – 61.4% of respondents said they also bought books in supermarkets.
It is interesting to note that while this survey was targeted at users of online bookshops, they seem to spend more *time* in traditional bookshops than online, as illustrated in fig. 4.6.8, below. Around 48% said they spend more time in traditional bookshops and around 20% said they spend about the same amount of time in traditional as in online bookshops. About 31% said they spend more time in online bookshops. This would seem to support the findings illustrated above (fig. 4.6.4) which show that the amount of time spent in online bookshops tends to be brief – usually between ten minutes and half an hour.

![Fig. 4.6.8 Comparison of time spent](image)

Comparing where respondents spend more *money*, the following results emerged.
Fig. 4.6.9 Comparison of money spent

Here we can see that just over 44% of respondents say they spend more money in traditional bookshops, with almost 40% saying they spend more money in online bookshops. Almost 16% said they spend about the same amount of money in each. So once again, we can see that despite targeting online bookshop users, a very slightly larger margin still seem inclined to spend more money in traditional bookshops as well as more time. However, it is worth bearing in mind the frequency with which they tend to spend, with almost 80% saying they spent money in online bookshops either ‘usually’ or ‘sometimes’.

Examining respondents’ preferences of bookshops, specifically, whether they prefer traditional or online bookshops, Fig. 4.6.10 below illustrates that almost 49% said they prefer traditional bookshops over online bookshops. Again, this seems a rather surprising result. Even the next largest group of responses (22.7%) came from those who say that while they prefer online bookshops, they still like traditional bookshops. 17% said they had no preference and 9.1% said they used to prefer traditional bookshops but now prefer online bookshops. Only 1.1% of those questioned said they preferred online bookshops and no longer liked traditional bookshops.
Of those participants who said they preferred shopping in traditional bookshops, some of the most important factors in this choice were the physical elements of book shopping. For example, the ability to handle the books, to browse, to see the books and to look inside the books. Other reasons given included the feeling and atmosphere in traditional bookshops, as well as the smell of the books. Spending time seemed to be an important part in the enjoyment of traditional bookshops. Of the participants who said they preferred online bookshops, the most important qualities mentioned were price and choice of books available. Convenience also played a part, with ease of access at any time of day or night being mentioned by several participants. Ease of access to book reviews by other customers was also referred to as being an attractive factor. Some of the comments made by research participants to this question are shown below.

Those who prefer online bookshops said:

It is the sheer range of choice that swings my vote in favour of online bookshops, so they are excellent if you know what you want. I do like...
browsing the shelves of traditional bookshops though because that way you can find little gems you didn't even know you wanted to read.

In reality I tend to purchase books online due to the increased convenience and speed. I also find the online reviews very helpful along with the facilities to easily trace other books by the same author or find other authors' books you may be interested in based on what you are currently looking up.

Those who prefer traditional bookshops said:

I love the feeling of being in a traditional bookshop - the smell, the atmosphere and being able to browse and pick up the books.

It is much easier to browse, and to see the inside of the book before buying. Bookshops are a very friendly and welcoming place to be, and I often go in even when I am not planning to buy anything, just for the atmosphere.

Figures 4.6.11 and 4.6.12 below illustrate the qualities most often referred to when participants spoke of their preferred book buying environment.
Fig. 4.6.11 – Reasons for preferring traditional bookshops

Fig. 4.6.12 – Reasons for preferring online bookshops
4.6.5 Browsing

4.6.5.1 Comparing online and traditional browsing
Investigating the interaction between traditional and online bookshops further, it was found that 56.8% of respondents sometimes browse online for books, but then go on to purchase in a traditional bookshop. The most common reason given for doing this was a desire to check the book physically: this included checking the contents as well as a desire to physically feel and see the book(s). The other most common reasons given revolved around postage issues; either not wanting to wait for the book to be posted, or not being able to wait in for the post, or simply wanting to get the book more quickly. Other reasons for browsing online then purchasing in traditional bookshops included; if the price was better and if participants wanted to support their local store. There also seemed to be an element of research being carried out online, but then a final decision on purchase being made once the book has been physically checked. Overall however – and mirroring the responses tabulated above – the most important factors seems to be a desire to handle the prospective purchase. Some of the comments of participants are shown below.

I browse online to see what is available, then look at the real thing to further refine my choice.

I like to browse the contents of the book, check quality, see what’s on the shelf next to it.

It is interesting to note that when the same question was then asked the other way around - whether respondents ever browse in traditional bookshops, then buy online – the response was more decisive, with 69.3% of respondents saying that they did this. The overwhelming reason given for doing this was the better prices available online. This response was given by 47 people – almost 75% of those who answered the question.

4.6.5.2 The browsing experience online
The research participants were keen to offer their opinions on the browsing experience online, particularly contrasting the browsing experience in traditional stores with their experiences of browsing online. Many people focused once again upon the fact that there is no tactile element to online browsing. However, again, the convenience of looking at books online was raised, particularly in evenings or if users of online bookshops are unable to get to a traditional bookshop. Time seemed to be an
important factor in the enjoyment of traditional browsing whereas online, browsing seemed to be a more focused, linear experience. Some of the following comments illustrate the general thoughts about browsing.

I tend to examine a narrower range of subjects / genres online, but those in more depth. In a traditional bookshop I may find myself in an unfamiliar place and examine books that I would not even think about when online.

If I want something in particular, an online shop is best. For unfocussed perusing a B&M (bricks and mortar) shop is nicer.

Online browsing is a way to check out books and read reviews all from the comfort of your own home, ideal if you are ill or work long hours, but not the same as walking in to a bookshop, chatting to the staff, wandering around and taking your purchase straight home with you.

You generally need a starting point even to browse online. In a traditional bookshop you can mooch and see what catches your eye.

It seems that online browsing is a much more focused, linear experience for people than is traditional bookshop browsing. Furthermore, it also encompasses many other qualities inherent to online book buying such as convenience and speed. It would seem that many people going online to look for books have a much more specific idea of what it is they are looking for, than those going into a traditional bookshop. There is a much more unfocused, serendipitous approach to traditional browsing. Nevertheless, there was acknowledgement by the research participants that time is a precious but necessary commodity if one wants to browse in a traditional bookshop.
4.6.6 Impressions of online bookselling

4.6.6.1 Site design

![Site design](chart.png)

**Fig. 4.6.13 Consumer opinion**

As Fig. 4.6.13 above illustrates, 83% of respondents found the site they usually visit to be ‘user friendly’ and 59.1% found it to be ‘well designed’. 43.2% also found it to be ‘welcoming’. Clearly, a positive response to site design of online bookshops is much more common than a negative one. With regard to the more negative responses, 10.2% found the site to be ‘confusing’; 5.7% found it to be ‘badly designed’ and 1.1% of respondents thought it was ‘intimidating’. It is worth bearing in mind that the majority of these responses (over 80%) are referring to Amazon. Other comments made of the respondents’ own volition all referred to Amazon.co.uk. Overall, the comments pertained to different aspects of convenience, such as constant accessibility and also good information provision on the site.

4.6.6.2 Online qualities

Fig. 4.6.14 below shows the percentage of respondents who thought each of the named qualities were either ‘important’ or ‘very important’ online.
Online facilities/qualities

Fig. 4.6.14 Important online facilities

Book range would seem to be the most important quality, more important – albeit marginally – than secure payment procedures. All of the other qualities would seem to be important to online book buyers, although there is a drop in the numbers who think that ‘familiar brand name’ is important. This is rather ironic given the dominance, worldwide, of Amazon, even if consumers are unwilling to acknowledge the importance of ‘brand’. It is interesting to note the disparity between the percentage who thought brand name was important, as opposed to those who think reputation is important in fig. 4.6.14. One could argue that reputation and brand are inextricably linked, although the results would suggest that the respondents perceive differences between these qualities.
Fig. 4.6.15 Favourite online qualities

Fig. 4.6.15 illustrates the qualities and facilities which are most favoured by users of online bookshops. ‘Good prices’ is clearly a very important consideration for online book shoppers and is cited as a favourite quality by almost 80% of respondents. The ‘range of books’ and the ‘convenience’ of online shopping are also favourite options each selected by 71.6%. These three options were each selected by a considerable majority of the research participants. It is interesting to note that in the context of online shopping, special offers and discounted books seem to hold less appeal for book buyers than they do for those buying books in traditional bookshops. Further comments on favourite online facilities found that most of the responses pertained to the ease of searching, and particularly searching for obscure or specialist books. Other answers once again referred to various aspects of convenience relating to book shopping online, particularly the constant accessibility.

Some of the comments made are shown below.

Wish lists - I can add books to the wish list and go back later to see if I really am interested in it.
You can do it from home whenever you have a spare ten minutes or so. Also you can follow links to similar books/styles of writing to find authors you haven't read before.

You don't have to spend money going somewhere and then find that they haven't got the book you want.

No queues 24 hour 7 days a week availability

Mostly I order books online between midnight and 3am, when all my other things are done - a sort of unwinding.

Regarding qualities of online bookshops which the participants particularly disliked, the most common responses related to the lack of a tactile experience when online shopping: people said they missed the smell; picking up; browsing; feeling; holding; touching; seeing and checking the physical qualities of the books online. The other most commonly cited drawback to buying books online was the wait for books to be delivered.

The comments made by the research participants (below) illustrate some of these points.

Miss getting to feel the book in my hand, and instant purchase.

You cannot look through the books and you actively have to search where as in book shops you might come across something in a display which attracts you

Sounds obvious but you can't hold and smell the book

Lack of specialist knowledge and interaction

The recommendations are never intelligent, e.g. If you've purchased a compilation, they always recommend the individual text.
While ‘site recommendations’ was chosen by almost 40% of participants as something they particularly liked about online shopping, there is an aspect of this facility that is disliked by some. Some online bookshop users felt overloaded with recommendations and felt that sometimes too many titles were recommended, causing confusion. Others pointed out that links to other books were sometimes nonsensical; based only upon another customer’s buying patterns rather than an intelligent link by subject or author.

4.6.6.3 Trust
Exploring further the access to information online, compared to traditional bookshops, participants were asked whether they trusted reviews and recommendations more online or offline.

![Pie chart showing trust distribution]

**Fig. 4.6.16 Trust**

The majority (62.5%) seem not to trust one environment more than the other. Of the remainder, 27.3% say they trust traditional bookshop reviews and recommendations more, whereas 10.2% say they trust online reviews and recommendations more. Overall, there does not seem to be one bookselling environment which inspires more trust than the other.
4.6.6.4 Tactile quality
Examining in more detail a point made by many research participants earlier in the research, the survey looks at the tactile element of bookselling – picking up, leafing through and feeling books - and whether this is missed by those shopping online.

Fig. 4.6.17 Tactile quality
An overwhelming majority of 88.6% said they did miss the tactile element of book shopping when online and this is illustrated in fig. 4.6.17 above. This shows very clearly that the lack of a tactile quality in online bookselling is one of the most significant qualities which people miss; more even, than having a bookseller around for consultation and interaction (see fig. 4.6.22).

4.6.7 Impulse buying online
In order to establish the percentage of planned purchases as opposed to the percentage of unplanned purchases online, survey participants were asked to say whether most of their online purchases were planned or unplanned. Fig. 4.6.18 shows that most online purchases appear to be planned (62.5%), whereas around 26% are unplanned. (The remaining 11% of respondents did not respond to this question).
In an attempt to establish patterns of impulse buying, survey participants were asked in which bookselling environment they felt more inclined to buy on impulse.

It seems quite clear that the majority of those questioned are more likely to buy on impulse in traditional stores (59.1%) as opposed to online (10.2%). 28.4% thought the
likelihood of buying on impulse was equal, whether shopping online or in a traditional store. While this result may at first seem rather surprising, given that the survey is targeting users of online bookshops, the results of previous questions had already established that the majority of online purchases are planned (fig. 4.6.18) and that the most common activity online, was to ‘look for specific books’ (fig. 4.6.6). Moreover, browsing is the most common activity in traditional bookshops (see fig. 4.2.9).

In order to explore further the subject of impulse buying online, participants selected various qualities or facilities online which they felt might make them more inclined to buy on impulse.

### Qualities influencing purchase

**Fig. 4.6.20 Qualities influencing purchase**

‘Author’ and ‘subject’ are the most influential factors when it comes to a potential impulse buy, selected by 62.5% and 53.4% respectively. The ‘blurb’ and ‘newspaper reviews’ were each selected by 37.5% of people as being influential factors. ‘Online recommendations and reviews’ was selected by 36.4% of people and ‘discounts and special price offers’ was selected by 27.3% of participants. 19.3% of those questioned
said they did not make impulse buys online. A further 19.3% said they could be influenced by ‘radio and television advertising’. The options selected the least were the ‘book cover’, a ‘prominent display’ of books and books that were in the ‘top ten’.

Some of the respondents who had selected the option ‘I do not make impulse buys online’ had nevertheless gone on to select other options which they felt might tempt them to buy online. In the light of this potentially contradictory data, the data was analysed again, excising these responses, but no notable difference in results was obtained.

4.6.8 Interaction with others online
Exploring the kinds of interaction that users of online bookshops have with others, 35.2% of respondents said they had at some point added reviews or book ratings to an online bookshop site, while the remaining 64.8% had not. As to whether participants had ever communicated directly with another person about books online, whether this was in an online book group, a discussion thread or chat room, 42% said they had while 58% said they had not. While this might seem like a large percentage communicating with others about books online, it should be borne in mind that a large section of the participants for the survey were reached via an online book group. This would perhaps make them more inclined to communicate with others online, than a broader sample of online bookshop users.

Exploring further the concept of interaction with others online, participants were than asked whether they thought online book shopping could ever be a social experience.
A large majority - 85.2% - clearly feel that this is not possible, as illustrated in fig. 4.6.21, whereas the remaining 14.8% think that it is. Of those who thought it could be a social experience, there was a feeling that exchanging opinions about books in the form of reviews had the potential to be a social experience. There was also a feeling that the exchange of ideas about books would become easier and more common online. Some of the comments made are shown below.

I think this depends on the definition of "social experience". Reading other people views and adding your own views about books could be described as such.

Not at the moment, but in the future I am sure it will be. There will be more immediate discussion forums (e.g. using video conferencing!) and this will allow those who want the freedom to interact.

Only to the extent that customers can exchange opinions on books easily and help each other make the right choice.

The internet is continually evolving and this will be the norm one day, if people want it.
Research participants were asked whether they missed having a ‘real bookseller’ around online, in order to ask for advice or recommendations.

Fig. 4.6.22 Bookseller presence

While the majority - 55.7% - said they did not, the remaining 43.2% said they did, as demonstrated in fig. 4.6.22. Interaction with booksellers was mentioned in some of the qualitative responses given, yet most of the participants were clear that online bookselling gives the consumer much wider and easier access to information than traditional bookselling. It is arguable that it is the bookseller as part of the wider traditional bookselling environment which some people may miss, when online: in a similar fashion to online book buyers missing the atmosphere and the smell of books and bookshops.
4.6.9 Emotion change online

Fig. 4.6.23 Emotion change

As the chart illustrates, the majority of respondents said they feel ‘just the same’ when online book shopping. Of those who experienced a change in emotional state, the most commonly selected response was ‘more relaxed’, chosen by 31.8%. 13.6% say they feel ‘isolated’ when book shopping online. The other options all elicited much lower response rates of between 5.7% and 6.8%. Given the emphasis on convenience and the relative speed with which online transactions appear to be carried out, it is perhaps surprising that such a sizeable percentage of respondents feel more relaxed while book shopping online.

Other comments made on the emotions experienced while book shopping online included guilt at spending too much. Irritation or impatience was also experienced by some, usually related to having to wait for the book to be delivered. This occurred even though there was acknowledgement that the books ordered would be unlikely to be found in a traditional bookshop in any case. Again, the lack of a tactile quality to online shopping was mentioned. Some of the comments made illustrating these points are shown below.
when shopping in a trad shop you get instant gratification as you can [take] the book home with you.

I think [online] it’s a non-experience. There is a nice feeling in being in a spacious bookshop, possibly with sofas available. Maybe coffee being brewed.

Finally, participants were invited to make any further comments they had about online book shopping. Some of these responses are shown below.

It is a convenience - I buy some 30 - 40 books a year on line for myself and the family but it is not a pleasure.

Online book shopping will never match the full experience you get walking into a traditional bookshop. It is not just the books but the whole experience of sight, sound and smell of the shop and interacting with other browsers.

Online ‘may’ be OK (or even better) for cost but the buzz of handling a book and taking it home straight away to read cannot be met.

I find that I am much more likely to buy an unknown author in a traditional shop than risk that online.

These comments in some ways can be seen to draw together the results from the whole of the survey. Online book shopping is very popular and is assessed as having very many advantages over traditional bookshops, such as convenience; price; search facilities and ease of access to obscure information. A key aspect of traditional bookshops which is felt to be lacking in online bookshops is the tactile element of bookshops. Picking up and browsing through books is clearly very important to many people who buy books. Also, albeit to a lesser extent, the atmosphere of traditional bookshops seems to be important and is not something that has yet been replicated online. Another key distinction emerging from the research is the serendipitous versus linear approach to browsing across traditional and online settings respectively.
The following Discussion chapter draws together the main findings from the results set out in this chapter and examines these findings in the context of the literature in this field.
Chapter 5 - Discussion of key findings

5.1 Introduction
This chapter discusses the main findings emerging from the different stages of the data collection, drawing them together and triangulating the results in order to form a valid set of findings and to underpin the subsequent Conclusions chapter. Chapter 5 examines the preliminary findings from the managers’ interviews, examining the strategic perspective towards marketing and branding in both traditional and online bookselling, as well as how that strategy is practically implemented in the bookshops setting. More importantly for the focus of the research, this chapter examines the impact on the consumer, as well as drawing on the consumer responses from the research carried out with questionnaires (online and face to face) and focus groups. All of these results are discussed in the light of relevant literature and trade commentary.

5.2 Expanding the book buying market
The research revealed a significant similarity regarding the approach to marketing and branding adopted across bookshops, particularly traditional bookshops. The driving force behind the overwhelming similarity of strategies adopted is explained by the key underlying aim among all the traditional bookshops studied; that is, to expand the book buying market. It is notable however, that this applies more to the traditional bookshops rather than to online bookshops. Indeed, the research found that the online booksellers studied seemed surprisingly content to play a supportive role to their corresponding traditional stores. Fig. 5.1 draws the key projected traditional bookshop qualities together, but it should be emphasised that the underlying strategy throughout was one of market expansion. This is usually supported by promoting a welcoming store image; having knowledgeable and helpful staff; promoting local relevance and community spirit and – most notably – adopting a discount oriented approach.
The current ‘charge for the market’ (Manager C) is at least partly explained by the intensely competitive environment in which chain bookshops currently find themselves, particularly given the success of both online and supermarket bookselling and is also reflected in the current focus of the trade upon getting more non-readers to start reading (Rebuck, 2005; www.rif.org) rather than focusing upon the needs and wants of existing readers. However, it is certainly in marked contrast to the environment of chain bookshops perhaps ten or fifteen years ago. Alan Giles, then chairman of Waterstone’s made this point in 1999 when comparing British bookselling with the accessibility of US style bookselling, using Borders as an example, commenting that ‘at its worst’ Waterstone’s could be ‘intellectually intimidating’ (Lottman, 1999, p.24). This perceived elitism has historically been a problem in bookselling, although it was never seen as such until increasing competition made it necessary for bookshops to be less selective about the kind of clientele coming into their stores and to make it easier for people unused to being in bookshops, to feel comfortable in the bookshop environment. Therefore, a more welcoming less - arguably - elitist environment was called for.
Although Alan Giles was referring to Waterstone’s when it first started trading in 1982, nevertheless, the elite quality which many bookshops have traditionally had has been evident for much longer. Writing about bookshops on the Charing Cross road in the late 1960s, Mann (1971, p.27) says;

> Few concessions appear to be made to the stranger who might not know where to find what he wanted. There were a few exceptions, but some shops were more like private collections than public shops.

This suggests that people unused to bookshops were not made to feel welcome, or encouraged to browse. Mann also comments that he had witnessed ‘a heartening sign to some extent of the breakdown of the ‘bookshop barrier’ which is believed to deter working-class people from frequenting bookshops’ (ibid, p.105), moving away from the educated, middle-class bias. So it seems that the kind of concentration on the upper echelons of society by bookshops is actually a historical social phenomenon and as such may be rather difficult to overcome.

Bookshops have instigated many initiatives to overcome this problem and to expand the book buying market (Book Marketing Limited, 2005b) albeit this is arguably driven by a need to improve sales, rather than an inherent altruistic desire to draw a wider range of consumers into bookshops. This empirical research however, highlighted a genuine desire to get people reading. In particular, the managers interviewed expressed this viewpoint, often regardless of the quality of the material which customers might be reading:

> As much as you [might] criticise Oprah for...‘Oprah’s book club’..., it was a brilliant thing because it got lots and lots of people reading who weren’t reading, which not only generates customers for us here but is a great thing.

Manager C here expresses his genuine desire to encourage the reading habit, despite the quality of some of the highest profile book promotions not being particularly high brow literature. The phenomenal impact of the book review programme run by television personalities Richard and Judy is well documented in the trade (Times, 2006; Horner, 2007) and underlines how this kind of accessible approach has been much more successful at promoting books to readers, than any kind of publisher or bookshop initiated promotion. The success of Richard and Judy in reaching readers and
promoting books serves to underline the limited reach of bookshops and publishers. Clearly television reaches a vastly wider audience than any bookshop or publisher could ever hope to do. However, there is a wider issue at work, which is to do with the historically limited approach of the retail industry - and arguably bookselling in particular - towards consumer research. Wileman and Jary (in Gilbert, 2003, p.25) point out how (albeit in 1997) in most retailing companies, a discrete marketing function did not exist. They say ‘(t)he established sales mentality has preserved the customary, long-established ways of doing business’. McGoldrick concurs with this, pointing out that without understanding the consumer in particular, there is a tendency ‘for strategy formulation to dwell upon the range of existing solutions, rather than developing formats to satisfy specific sets of consumer requirements’ (2002, p.86). While this seems to be slowly changing in bookselling with relevant research being carried out by Book Marketing Limited (www.bookmarketing.co.uk) nevertheless, much of the decision making processes seem to be based on trade experience, rather than evidence based results. There is a widespread adoption of various marketing and branding techniques, as detailed in this section, such as discounting, an emphasis on heavily branded front of shop areas, and the adoption of coffee shops. However, the current research highlights a distinct lack of evidence regarding consumer feedback or monitoring of response to these kinds of approaches to marketing.

Looking at the (related) publishing industry, Sanderson (2001a) interviewed trade personnel regarding their approaches to promoting new titles. Approaches varied, but were based variously on; trusting to gut instinct; experience or getting a ‘good deal’ from the advertiser. While none of these approaches is wrong per se, nevertheless, it is surprising that such a long established industry has so limited an approach to research. The exception to this is the work carried out by Book Marketing Limited, referred to above, the research organisation concentrating on the book trade and the publishing industry. Nevertheless, much of their work is syndicated, and there still seems to be a lack of real evidence regarding consumers’ responses to the generic marketing approaches outlined above. As Underhill points out:

Information which stores collect is quite sophisticated. However, they are much more adept at collecting it than at designing systems or processes to use that data in a timely fashion (1999, p.28).

One example of this is mentioned by Manager X, referring to her online store and how they can recommend titles, based on buying habits of other consumers. When asked
how this is monitored, her response was; ‘That’s a good question. It’s not something that we measure a lot at the moment to be honest’. Even with the facilities to track this kind of data for usefulness and value to the customer, there seems still to be unwillingness, for whatever reason, to do this, in some parts of the book trade. Therefore, customer satisfaction does not seem to be routinely measured.

5.2.1 Monitoring marketing strategy
The examination of the kinds of marketing and branding initiatives undertaken by chain bookshops revealed not only the similarity of their promotional initiatives, but also a surprising lack of monitoring of these initiatives within the trade, in order to check effectiveness. This is clear in a trade article by Phillips (2003) where book trade marketing personnel are asked about the success of various marketing initiatives. Most of their responses seem to be based on industry experience rather than any actual monitoring of results.

This lack of monitoring was evident in responses to questions about the coffee shops, specifically with regard to whether the managers knew whether coffee shops had expanded the market or not. However, any evidence seemed to be based on observation of customers and of their behaviour, rather than any clear cut figures. Similarly, managers of the online sites also provided evidence of marketing initiatives whose success had not been monitored. For example, ‘other customers who bought that, bought this’ was considered an effective tool by Manager X, but was not actually monitored in any way. This lack of cohesion and analysis with regards to marketing was also related in regard to the inception of online sites, where the driving force behind starting up online seems to have been a desire to have an online presence, rather than a clear, researched response to consumer need. This does not apply to all of the online sites examined however, since the independent store studied started specifically to cater for existing consumers who were unable to access the high street store.

5.3 Discounting
Following the interviews carried out with various chain bookshop experts the strongest impression – and arguably the most significant overall finding – was the similarity of marketing and branding methods used. Of the three chain bookshops examined, every one adopted a significant discounting approach, usually led by ‘3 for 2’ offers, but sometimes tailored for the time of year. For instance, with a focus upon ‘summer
reading’. This was also true of most of the online bookshops too, particularly those affiliated to chains. Other promotional techniques included the use of staff recommends section, top ten sections and a stated desire to focus on excellent customer service and have a bookshop which was relevant to the local community. Various kinds of discounting were a central part of the marketing of each of the stores examined; indeed it would be impossible to browse in any of these stores without being very aware of the predominance of discounted titles.

5.3.1 Consumer responses to discounting

Given the emphasis which is placed upon the importance of discounting by the chain bookshops studied, it is clearly imperative to see if this is matched with enthusiasm from consumers. As detailed in the Results chapter, 69.6% of respondents said they like the special offers (supporting results from an earlier survey, where 70% said that this was an aspect of bookshops they particularly liked). However, it is notable that while overall 69.6% of respondents said they liked these kinds of discount offers, of the newer visitors, only 53.3% said this.

Analysing the impact of discounting in more detail however, slightly different results come to light. Discounting seems to have a powerful effect on people, with 75% saying it would either probably or definitely make them more likely to go into a bookshop. The results looking at newer bookshop users are even more striking. 93% of this group said the presence of discounting would make them probably or definitely more likely to go into a bookshop. While the newer bookshop users’ views are represented by only 15 people, even when this question was reanalysed with a wider cross section of people, including users of bookshops of up to ten years standing, the results were very similar. Research suggests therefore, that the presence of discounting has a powerful effect on attracting many consumers, but especially newer users of bookshops into the stores. Retail pricing and the various price offers and promotions open to retailers is a complex area and the effect on the sales or consumer perception of other goods in store can be difficult to predict (McGoldrick, 2002, pp. 371, 374). It would certainly seem to be an area needing close monitoring to ensure that consumer perception of store quality is maintained (ibid). Nevertheless research findings show that discounting is a feature which is enjoyed by other more experienced bookshop users as well as new visitors to bookshops. However, as the following section discusses, the enjoyment of discounted titles comes with certain important caveats.
5.3.1.1 Experienced consumer responses to discounting

It is interesting to note that in the focus groups – mostly comprised of experienced book buyers - many spoke of ‘taking advantage’ or ‘getting the benefit’ of discounted titles. Some shopped as a family to take advantage of these offers, such as ‘3 for 2’, while others stocked up on titles for forthcoming birthdays. Reflecting upon the use of discounting, particularly the stated aim to expand the market, it is useful to bear in mind the comment by Van Mesdag who says, ‘by seeking to extend one’s target group of customers not hitherto catered for, one may estrange one’s original, faithful, long-standing customers (1997, p.159). While this does not seem to have been the case, judging by the results from this research, nevertheless there has been the effect of altering the brand perception by long-standing consumers of bookshops; largely blurring brand identity across bookshop chains, as well as giving the overall impression of homogeneity, which is largely assessed by the consumers as being the result of focusing upon discounted titles and the ‘sameness’ of offers in the highly branded front of store areas.

While many research participants said they liked these offers, and found them tempting, there was nevertheless a perceived drop in standards regarding the books in these offers: it was felt that there tended to be very little distinction across the bookshops regarding the books, or at least the kind of books in these offers. Generally, they were felt to be of a lower standard than those titles available from the rest of the bookshop. It seems that these kinds of offers are projecting a homogenous bookshop image in the minds of consumers. It also seems that by the very kinds of promotional techniques adopted, particularly the ‘3 for 2’, some consumers almost automatically perceive the books in these offers to be of a lower standard than others in bookshops, or at least to be very similar to the books on offer in other stores. It is interesting to note that many consumers in the focus groups felt that their own interests were not catered for in these kinds of offers – many walked straight past them to their own favourite subject areas. It was felt that if a customer was interested in anything remotely specialised, these offers were not catering for their interests. The view was also expressed that these offers are not really aimed at experienced book buyers in any case. As one focus group participant commented:

I suppose the people who are interested in books; you’re probably going to be exploring more sort of obscure titles anyway, aren’t you?
This same focus group participant tended to avoid these display tables, simply because of the quantities of people often milling around them. As Underhill (1999, p.29) points out, many stores have ‘more than one constituency. Sometimes they co-exist in perfect harmony, other times they want nothing to do with each other’. The example above would seem to illustrate this point.

Despite the widespread adoption of discounting across the book trade, there have been doubts expressed from retail analysts outside the trade regarding the strategic wisdom of such an approach (Rickett, 2003a; Phillips, 2003) as well as objections raised from within the trade, which have tended to focus more upon the perceived homogeneity and lack of value projected by tables of discounted titles (Publishing News Online, 2005; Wilkinson, 2005). Scott Pack, Waterstone’s Buying Manager until early 2006 made the point, however, that despite the perceived emphasis upon discounted titles and the highly branded front of shop area in traditional bookshops (and indeed online bookshops) ‘(t)he majority of sales come from thousands of books that are not on promotion’ (Hall, 2005). It would seem that the effort to draw in new bookshop consumers and to make bookshops welcoming to all people has led to this concentration of offers on tables, which has changed the perception of choice in bookshops, certainly by more experienced or loyal book buyers. Crucially however, although there was significant objection to this approach to bookselling, especially evident in the focus groups conducted, it seems that the ‘experienced’ consumers still go in to bookshops and are prepared to go past the area at the front of store in order to get to the area where their subject interests are shelved. Furthermore, it should be remembered that many of the most experienced book buyers are also attracted by the discounted, ‘3 for 2’ approach to bookselling, even though it is difficult to determine the commercial sense of booksellers in selling this way (low margin) to experienced book buyers. The stated aim is to attract new buyers. Selling low margin books to long term bookshop visitors clearly does not fulfil this aim.

5.3.2 Further effects of discounting

It is interesting to note the effect that the presentation of discounted titles seems to have on some more experienced book buyers. There was an air of resentment from some at the feeling of being directed towards titles, which they felt – in many cases correctly - were being promoted for financial reasons, rather than for reasons of quality. Many were suspicious of this ‘agenda’ for promoting books and preferred to trust their own judgement rather than be swayed for ‘dubious’ reasons. Most focus group participants were keenly aware of the highly branded front of shop area, full of
discounted tables, promoted titles and top tens and spoke of having to ‘get past’ this area in order to get to the books they were interested in. This awareness of the marketing ploys of retailers is an indication of how shoppers across the whole of the retail sector have become much more sophisticated over the years, and more aware of the various marketing ploys used by retailers (Christopher et al, 2002) as well as how they are ‘supposed’ to react to the ‘marketing tricks’ used (Stallard, 1999).

There was also mention of the confusion caused by an apparent change in strategy by chain bookshops. As one participant said, formerly ‘you had the tables’, referring to the habit of displaying new titles on tables in their relevant sections. However, it was now felt that table displays tended to have largely similar titles displayed regardless of the chain bookshop visited. As one participant mentioned, there now seemed to be a more limited approach to displaying titles which in turn made it more difficult to choose what was felt to be a genuinely ‘good’ book. The research indicated that for most consumers in traditional bookshops range is a vital element of what they look for. An important part of this would seem to be consumer perception of range. Therefore, despite manager emphasis on the importance of good range, if this is not perceived by the consumer for whatever reason (usually similarity of offers on display) then it seems that traditional bookshops have a serious problem.

5.4 Branding

5.4.1 The predilection for rebranding

The predilection for rebranding by bookshop chains has been well documented in the trade press (Rickett, 2003b; Fraser, 2005). It became clear via the relating of head office approaches to branding and rebranding of the stores by the managers interviewed, and often, the rebranding of online sites, that head office bookselling personnel seem to view brand image as something which is fluid and easily changed. Manager X for instance made an interesting comment about the visual brand image of her chain, referring to how it had been lightened and brightened in recent years, but was now being darkened, since the brightening had been taken too far and was projecting a rather less serious image than was desired. This ‘re-darkening’ was being undertaken in order to show that, ‘(w)e have a more serious brand than we’ve had in the last year or so’. As Manager X went on to explain:

We’ve actually had a new management team arrive in the last few months, who’ve obviously come in with their own ideas and they’ve also come in
with a new marketing director who has got some very, clear ideas about our brand. But at the same time, we’re in a process at the moment of defining that brand.

This seems to indicate the view that brand identity simply has to be projected in order for consumers to absorb and accept any brand changes: also, that it is completely controlled by brand strategists. However, as Christopher et al (2002, p.219) point out, any attempt to change brand identity must be considered holistically:

> Changing a company’s superficial identity may signal a change of direction, but it will have no significant or lasting cultural impact. To change its culture successfully a business needs to back up its intentions with actions.

Furthermore, Knapp comments that:

> Many once-formidable brands have lost their clout and distinction through poor management. They no longer provide unique emotional and functional benefits for the consumer... The brand name survives, but its value erodes... Ultimately, the power of the brand dissolves, presenting a huge corporate loss (1999, p.72).

There is clearly a danger that the blurring of identity, as expressed by bookshop users, will have serious results for chain bookshops, given the current similarity of brand image perceived by the consumer (see section 4.1). There seems to be an inherent contradiction in the conception of the brand illustrated by this point: the brand of an organisation is made up of many different aspects and qualities, but there still seems to be a focus upon physical appearance, despite the verbal acknowledgement by bookshop managers that branding is much more complex than a mere physical representation. As Manager B said:

> It’s... the name the livery and by that I mean the colours chosen, uniform, the mission statement…but most importantly what that brand makes people feel. Whether people like that brand, like to be associated with that brand and are loyal to that brand.

The managers agreed that there are other vital brand qualities, many to do with consumer experience and atmosphere, which will affect consumer response to a
bookshop. However, all of the bookshop experts agreed that the most important aspect of the brand is how it is perceived by the customers. This is of course supported by many authors in the field (Van Mesdag, 1997; Hall, 2000) who emphasise that consumer perception dictates brand image: regardless of how a brand is projected, it is the perceived image which is important. Indeed, Manager A pointed out the difficulty in changing the view of the public towards company brand image:

Companies spend lots of money trying to establish brand and almost manipulate your brands, but it's actually quite hard to change brand perception.

Clearly changes in colours and lightening or darkening a store is just a starting point, if a business wishes to change the consumer perception of its brand. It would seem that some bookshops are inclined to view brand identity, and in particular rebranding, as an activity which can be carried out on a fairly regular basis, rather than taking a long term view. This could potentially be damaging for brand integrity, as well as proving confusing for regular consumers, given the constant tweaking of image which seems to go on in some chain bookshops.

5.4.2 Consumer perception of brand identity
Kotler’s oft cited definition of branding says that it is;

(A) name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors (1996, p.571).

While a brand can be conceptualised as a much more complex entity than this, with deep associations and meaning for the consumer, the idea of differentiation is an important one in terms of branding. However despite the best efforts by bookshop managers and strategists to promote the uniqueness of each individual branch of a chain bookshop, i.e. the concept of an ‘independent within a chain’, it seems that this is not the impression gained by consumers. Although habitual bookshop users participating in focus groups were aware of brand insignias and colours, they did not perceive any essential differences in terms of stock profile, across the chains. As one participant said ‘you could more or less be in any shop anywhere’. This kind of comment was particularly applied to the promoted materials at the front of many chain
bookshops. While consumers were aware of variations in stock profile from branch to branch, usually ascribed to the skills of a particular bookseller looking after a specific department, or the autonomy allowed to any branch manager, they were still clear that the majority of chain bookshops could be viewed as interchangeable. It seems therefore that homogeneity is unwittingly being promoted by chain bookshops as a result of the similarity of their promotions and even the similarity of the books within those promotions. Despite their stated wish to have local relevance, the very similarity of the marketing techniques they adopt – ‘3 for 2’, top ten, homogeneity of titles - immediately makes this very difficult for them to achieve.

As one participant commented,

I did think of [bookshop X – a large chain] as being a bit more sort of esoteric and hippyish but they aren’t now, they were when they started out, they were a bit more…baby boomer generation I suppose. You could find odd choices on the shelves…you can’t really now. It’s a shame.

This perceived drop in range evidenced by homogenisation of stock and less knowledgeable booksellers was acknowledged particularly by the more mature focus group participants and was also felt to be indicative of changes taking place across the wider retail environment. This homogenisation has also been commented upon in the trade press (Taylor, 2005; Wilkinson, 2005; Smith and Sulaiman, 2005). The standard of particular, once well-respected chain bookshops was felt to have dropped so that the focus was now upon highly-promoted highly discounted titles, rather than quality. Indeed this important point about the homogenisation of the bookselling industry is supported in the trade and it is also proposed that the situation is set to deteriorate given the buyout of Ottakar’s by HMV Media which owns Waterstone’s (Guardian, 2006a; Tagholm, 2006; Jardine, 2006).

5.5 The consumers

5.5.1 Consumer value
Intensive discount marketing may be comprehensible in a highly competitive environment and where new titles and authors may fail to attract a readership unless they receive this kind of exposure.
Nevertheless, while discounting may work in the short term at increasing sales figures (regardless of the drop in net profits) there is another consideration which must be taken into account: it is commercially sensible to pay some attention to loyal consumers since they are the most profitable. Conversely, it makes little sense to draw in consumers who will take advantage only of the special offers or discounted items and will display no store loyalty. i.e. low value consumers. Zikmund et al (2003, p.6) point out that ‘a fundamental principle of marketing is that customers are different. Different customers represent different levels of profit for the firm’. Therefore, a consumer who comes into a bookshop in order to take advantage of discounted titles and ventures no further is clearly of much less long term value than one who goes to the full price racks of books and buys non-discounted items. It seems ironic that the focus of bookselling recently has been upon the promotion of discounting and the acquisition of consumers who are primarily interested in discounted bestsellers. As Ryals (2002) comments; ‘Marketing strategies based on conventional profit-based thinking focus on increasing returns from low value customers’ (p.247). Ryals says that this view is based upon the misapprehension that ‘profits come from products, not from customers’ (ibid, p.242). Indeed the book trade seems to have taken this a step further, not even gaining profit from low-value customers, if the sales are based on low profit discounted goods. Indeed the challenge may be in getting strategic management within the book trade to agree that this is the path that they follow. As Christopher et al comment:

In mature markets and as competition intensifies, it becomes imperative for organisations to recognise that existing customers are easier to sell to and are frequently more profitable. But though managers may agree intellectually with this view, the practices within their organisations often tell a different story [my italics]. They take existing customers for granted, while focusing their attention and resources on attracting new customers. Only when there is a breakdown in service quality and the customer leaves or is on the point of leaving does the company turn its attention to existing customers (2002, p.40).

The development of a relationship with loyal consumers seems to pay dividends, according to the relevant literature. However, this does not seem to be a strategy which traditional bookselling chains want to adopt. Christopher et al (2002, p.5) comment that ‘maximising the lifetime value of a customer is a fundamental goal of relationship marketing’. Nevertheless, current bookselling conditions are extremely competitive and
market expansion is viewed by many chain bookshops (certainly all of those studied) as an essential strategy.

5.5.2 Habitual bookshop behaviour
Examining what people actually do in bookshops when they visit, the research findings showed that in traditional bookshops there was a fairly even split between those visiting weekly (25%), monthly (28%) and less frequently (25%). However, when one compares these results with visiting habits of online bookshop users, there is a marked distinction: one finds that online users are much more frequent visitors to online bookshops, with 78% visiting at least weekly. This is in marked contrast to just 25% of bookshop customers who visit traditional bookshops weekly. Given the ease of accessing online bookshops, and the comparative difficulty of visiting a traditional bookshop this is not unexpected, however, despite the frequency of visits to online bookshops there is a relatively small amount of time spent there on each visit.

With regards to time in store, it is worth noting that while 20% of the respondents to the online survey (targeted at online bookshop users) tended to spend the same amount of time in traditional bookstores, 48% said they spend more time in traditional bookshops, even though visits to online stores were more frequent. However, it is also interesting to note that of the online bookshop users surveyed, slightly more (44%) said they tended to spend more money in traditional bookshops, whereas rather less (40%) said they spent more online. This again underlines the significant overlap in use between online and traditional outlets. There is a possibility, which perhaps should be explored in future research, that this is connected to the increased time which people tend to spend there. This could be linked to a feeling of ‘occasion’ – they have made the effort to visit, might not be back soon and want to make the most of their time there. Therefore, while visiting and spending is more frequent online, time spent and overall amount spent is larger in traditional stores.

Users of traditional bookshops are also frequent users of online bookshops; 53% said they also visit online bookshops. This overlap between traditional and online bookshop users is even more marked for respondents to the online survey; 97% said they also used traditional bookshops. It is clear therefore, that while there is significant overlap between traditional and online bookshop users, it is nevertheless more likely that someone will use exclusively traditional bookshops, rather than exclusively online bookshops.
The research also found significant overlap between traditional bookshop users and those who buy books in supermarkets, with 41% of traditional bookshop customers saying they also buy books in supermarkets. It is also interesting to note that it is the more experienced bookshop users (of ten years or over) who were rather more inclined to say that they preferred to buy books in supermarkets, rather than newer users. This is perhaps surprising, given that one might assume that the supermarket environment would be more accessible, to people unfamiliar with bookshops. Looking at online bookshop users, 61% said they also bought books in supermarkets – clearly a much larger percentage than that of the traditional bookshop users. While booksellers are in direct competition with the supermarkets, one has to remember that supermarkets have, in the view of many publishers, aided book sales, even if that aid can be viewed as a kind of poisoned chalice; their tendency to concentrate on bestsellers and to ‘cherry pick’ those sales, has inevitably resulted in further diminution of range from publishers. However, Dallas Manderson, group sales director of Orion Books commented in a trade interview that ‘(g)enerally, supermarkets have expanded the market by making it easier for people to buy books’ (Kean, 2003b, p.23). This ease of accessibility is a point agreed upon by James Heneage, then MD of Ottakar’s (Bookseller, 2003c). In one trade interview, a publisher notes that ‘it is nearly impossible to get to number one without the support of Tesco in particular’ (Kean, 2003b, p.23). The power of the supermarkets to sell books is phenomenal (Mintel, 2005) and only serves to increase the pressure on traditional booksellers. Of course, the bookselling environment is entirely different in these bookselling venues, and this point is certainly something which bookshop users as well as those who buy books in supermarkets, are keenly aware. For example, one participant in FG3 made the point that, although she could get the same paperbacks cheaper at her local supermarket, she paid more for them at her bookshop, as this seemed to make her value them more. Another participant mentioned how she expected her bookshop to be;

I like a bookshop to be a kind of a, almost more quiet, almost refined type of atmosphere.

Looking at overall preferences of book purchasing environments, 49% of the online respondents said they preferred traditional bookshops. There is clearly an inherent quality to traditional bookshops which continues to attract even those book buyers who are predominantly online book shoppers (see section 5.8.5).
5.5.3 Factors influencing purchase: traditional customers
Examinining in more detail those qualities which consumers find tempting, the most influential factors impacting on consumers about to purchase a book were those of author or subject. Given the importance of range to consumers this is not surprising. Nevertheless, it does clearly illustrate the most important factors for consumers. While this does not seem to support previous findings in this area from BML (2007), it is important to remember that the categorisation of purchase prompts were quite different in the BML research. While those book trade experts interviewed were quick to emphasise the importance of range and how this is central to the brand they portray as well as their approach to marketing, nevertheless, this is in contrast to how consumers perceive range and choice in those chain bookshops studied. In the focus groups in particular there was a general perception of sameness across the chains, which ranged from similarity of brand image across chain bookshops, to a similarity in the kinds of books stocked, especially those included in special offers, or promoted titles. For example, as one of the focus group participants commented:

In the past you could get bookshops that were more specialist I think that sold different types of books and I don’t think they are catered for in the big multiple bookshops.

Manager A acknowledged that while there is still an effort to stock as broad a range of titles as possible in her stores, nevertheless, each title has to earn its place, and if sales do not meet the required standard of turnover, it will not be stocked. Indeed, Richard Knight (then MD of sales data agency Whitaker BookTrack, now Nielsen BookScan) made the point in 1999 that ‘many titles on sale in bookshops might be regarded less as stock than as fixtures and fittings’ (Lind, 1999, p.12). Manager A acknowledged that this was a change in approach from several years before, where her experience was that some titles should be stocked, regardless of the sales they engendered. This clearly indicates a change in approach from a focus upon cultural obligation, to one focused upon commercial sense. However, it does raise the debate about the role of bookshops in society and whether they have a cultural or educational as well as economic role to play. The impact upon the traditional book trade has been that ‘riskier’ items will simply not be stocked at all, or will be stocked for a few weeks, then returned to the publisher to make way for more predictable, profitable titles.

While Manager B noted that just a small percentage of his actual profit came from these offers, and all of the bookshop managers emphasised the importance of range,
clearly, this impression is not being conveyed to consumers. It seems that the emphasis on promoted titles and the highly branded front of store area is having the opposite effect; implying that these are the most important books, even though the similarity of titles from store to store in these offers is creating the effect of homogeneity in the minds of the consumers. The view was expressed – both by Manager C as well as in the focus groups - that the impact of chain bookshops on book choice was limiting. There was a perceived diminution of the range of bookshops, especially independent bookshops, available and the consensus was that this had had an effect on the range and choice of titles available for consumers. However, Willie Anderson, Deputy Chairman of John Smith’s Bookshops says ‘The accusation that the chains have in some way reduced the quality of books is a misconstruction. They could perhaps be accused of confusing quantity with quality, on the ground that the have made far too many books accessible, causing confusion in the readers’ choices’ (Anderson, 2002, p.147). Nevertheless, the focus group participants disagreed with this point; they perceived a drop in quality and increased homogeneity, whatever the reality of range or choice might be.

5.5.4 Factors influencing purchase: online customers

Just like the traditional bookshop users, the most influential factors for online customers were author, subject, blurb and newspaper review, in that order. Again it is worth noting the lack of emphasis that there seems to be on the blurb of a book either by traditional or online booksellers, and how this is important for prospective buyers. Similarly, the influence of newspaper reviews does not seem to be fully exploited by traditional bookshops. While online reviews by readers are readily available, nevertheless, the professional reviews by critics are a resource which could potentially be exploited to a much greater degree by both traditional and online bookshops. Newspaper reviews for example, despite having an impact on 60% of potential customers (fig. 4.2.12) seem to have very little overt influence on the books stocked or promoted. Certainly the link between reviews and books stocked are not made clear to bookshop consumers. Indeed, this very point was made by a participant in one of the focus groups, pointing out that bookshop sometimes seem unaware of the ‘free marketing’ that is available from these reviews. Her experiences in bookshops had shown that booksellers often seemed unaware of these reviews and were certainly not thinking about how to exploit this sales potential.
It is useful to compare these influencing factors with special offers, which influences 56% of prospective book buyers. While 56% is still a sizeable portion of consumers, nevertheless, there are other factors which seem to be more influential, which are focused upon to a much lesser degree by bookshops and publishers. It is interesting to note the least influential of factors on purchase, of those options supplied. These include the staff recommends section, the bestsellers section and window/table displays. Staff recommends in particular is given a great deal of emphasis by bookshops, but perhaps a refocusing of emphasis upon newspaper reviews would be worth exploring since this might be more influential on purchases.

5.5.5 Factors influencing unplanned purchasing
While it was found that the presence of a coffee shop encourages impulse buying, just as it encourages people to stay for longer in traditional bookshops, the element of impulse buying was then examined in online bookshops, since facilities such as coffee shops are clearly not available online. Asked whether most online purchases were planned or unplanned, 62.5% said most purchases were planned and 26.1% said most were unplanned. If one revisits results from traditional bookshop users, looking at habitual behaviour, one finds that 40% of traditional book shoppers tended to look for a specific book, whereas 81.8% of online shoppers tended to look for a specific book (fig.4.6.6). This is quite a striking difference and clearly there is a much greater percentage of ‘unplanned’ shopping going on in traditional bookshops, rather than the dominance of planned purchases when book shopping online. There seems to be potential for online stores to encourage browsing and browsing-inspired purchases (rather than just recommended or linked titles).

In an effort to further establish how online buyers behave in traditional bookshops, online buyers were asked to say where they were more likely to impulse buy. It is notable that over 59% of online bookshop customers said they would be more likely to impulse buy in traditional bookshops, whereas just 10% thought this was more likely to happen online. In the focus groups too, some participants were clear that they would only ever go to online bookshops for specific purchases, especially those which they deemed ‘specialist’. These findings all support the quality of the traditional bookshop which makes it more ‘browsable’, more serendipitous and a more ‘open’ experience compared to that of the online shop, which seems to be more focused, linear and inclined towards planned purchases. As one online participant said, ‘I find that I am much more likely to buy an unknown author in a traditional shop than risk that online’.
5.5.6 Gender issues
Analysis of the data collected found few differences attributable to gender. However, those few that did occur are worthy of comment. Looking in more detail at the gender breakdown of bookshop customers in coffee shops who said that they liked ‘people watching’, this consists of 15 women but only two men. Even taking into account the 3:2 female to male gender split of respondents, this is still notable. It may be that women are more willing to admit to this pastime than men.

Some evidence of gender difference also emerged in the field of shopping as therapy, as women were more inclined to use shopping as a mood enhancer:

If I’ve had like a bad week or a bad day I might just go to the bookshop... you know have a wander round; look at some books; go for a coffee, stay there for quite a long time, you know an hour, hour and a half, two hours and I’ll always feel better.

Peter and Olsen (in Coley and Burgess, 2003, p.291) note that ‘women have been found to be more aware and more concerned with their moods and in return more able and more motivated to change or maintain their feeling and moods compared with men’. While the issue of gender was not investigated in a particular degree of detail in this research, further studies could investigate in more depth the impact of third place facilities such as the coffee shop and sofas on buying behaviour.

5.6 Organisational differences

5.6.1 The wider impact of discounting
As was established in the interviews, the strategic thinking behind the use of ‘3 for 2’ discounting was part of chain bookshop efforts to expand the market beyond the traditional dominance of ABC1 consumers (Mintel, 2005). When discounting is also applied to student and corporate publications – where margin from publishers is usually even lower – one has to question the long term strategy of chain bookshops. Clearly corporate and student discounting is done in an effort to engender store loyalty and to capture consumers with low levels of loyalty. Nevertheless, one would have to surmise that these ‘discount weekends’ for example are perhaps just attracting consumers with no real loyalty, simply attracted on a single occasion to take advantage of the discounting on offer. This would seem to apply more markedly to the wider range of consumers (rather than specifically students and corporate customers) since they are
the targets of this kind of discounting, according to the book trade experts, and are a key part of the effort to expand the market. However, consumers demonstrating little loyalty may not be worth cultivating (McGoldrick, 2002, p.114). As retail analyst Hugh Phillips comments:

Discounting is the least imaginative way to sell and is sometimes indicative of a desperate attempt to raise sales... price is the last resort of the unintelligent, uneducated or unimaginative – the easy no brainer option. In contrast, working out what the consumer really wants and supplying it requires time, ability and effort (2003, p.22).

It is interesting to focus upon consumer response to the key factors emphasised by bookshops as central to their book promotion. Looking in detail at ‘staff recommends’, ‘bestsellers’ and ‘3 for 2 or special offers’, it is of note that of those customers questioned in chain bookshops, 40% said that none of these options would tempt them to purchase a book. It is also the case that many discounted titles would have sold at full price in any case – the ‘Harry Potter’ titles being a good example. Commenting on the trade approach to blanket discounting, marketing consultant Michelle Harrison recommends a ‘more sophisticated model of price elasticity to disentangle strategic thinking behind discounting and marketing initiatives’ (Rickett, 2003a, p.12). This certainly supports the findings from this research where discounting is applied so broadly that it is often difficult to establish any kind of strategy at all.

If one understands the difficulties of the book trade and the very competitive trading situation it is currently facing, one may well feel sympathy for the trade and the position which it faces. In many ways, books are indeed different from other parts of the wider retail trade. While past sales of a particular author or series may give booksellers and publishers an idea of projected sales, nevertheless, each new book can be viewed as an entirely new product, the sales of which are entirely unknown (Cooper, 1998). In Sanderson’s research one marketing expert commented on these kinds of difficulties;

Books are not tried and tested on the public in advance, so asking them to spend £6.99 just like that is asking them to make a big leap of faith. What’s more, you are also trying to reach a comparatively small public with an astonishing number of new lines every year. Making your particular product stand out among all the others is a huge challenge (2001a, p.28).
However, it was notable that the bookshop experts interviewed (with the exception of the Marketing Director) all expressed doubts and a lack of conviction about the wisdom or even the point of carrying out this kind of widespread discounting. There was certainly acknowledgement that customers to some extent now seem to expect this kind of discounting, (Manager D referred to value for money as a ‘hygiene factor’) but with regard to long term economic sense, there was a lack of conviction about this strategy. Manager A acknowledged the expectation that customers have regarding ‘3 for 2’ offers, but doubted the power of the offer to contribute to brand identity. Manager B was more forthright in his opinions, saying:

I make more profit from non promoted titles, so that the ‘3 for 2’ message...is actually not the most significant part of our business and is costing me profit.

Manager C also expressed reservations about the wisdom of other kinds of discounting:

I'm not entirely sure...if long term it’s the greatest thing to be doing...(T)here’s definitely a push towards net sales and a slight push away from margin consideration and that’s definitely something that ...price promotion facilitates in lots of ways. It facilitates that change in your mindset that instead of guarding your margin, what you’re doing is you’re pushing your sales, so as long as you’re selling more, it’s not mattering that much that you’re selling it at half price, lots of it.

This underlines an approach which concentrates on selling, regardless of the profit made (since much of it is sacrificed with discounting and ‘3 for 2’ offers). The focus is therefore upon drawing in consumers and increasing gross sales rather than necessarily focusing upon net profits. While one could perhaps argue the case for this approach in the short term, the aggressively discounted approach has been undertaken by bookshops, traditional and online, for several years now. Couple this with the lack of analysis of consumer responses to this kind of approach and one has to question the wisdom of the trade in adopting blanket discounting.
5.6.2 The question of cultural obligation

The juxtaposition between selling books and having a cultural obligation to society (Miller, 2006) is highlighted here and is further heightened by Manager C’s own awareness that while his remit is to sell the maximum amount of books to the maximum amount of people, nevertheless, for him at least, a cultural obligation remains. Figure 5.2 illustrates this dichotomy.

![Diagram showing cultural obligation vs. commercial viability]

Maintain/Recapture the elite consumer (Retain the cachet of bookselling)

Cultural Obligation

Commercial Viability

Expand the book buying market

Fig. 5.2 The cultural/commercial dichotomy

This quandary serves to point out some of the contradictions at the core of contemporary bookselling, with its history of catering for the most literate in society (Mintel, 2005). This is perhaps especially difficult for contemporary chain bookselling, since there has been a perceived obligation to widen the scope of books stocked (according to those book experts interviewed) whereas independent bookshops are still in a position where they can afford to take the moral high ground – the former cultural position of the more upmarket chains - since, while commercial pressures mean most independent bookshops may be partaking in discounted promotions or even stocking
celebrity biography for instance, this tends not to be done to such an intense degree as the chains. Miller (1999) points out that the growth of the chains and book superstores has meant that independents stress their ‘superior selection and service, but gave these familiar retail slogans a particularly moral and political cast’ (p.387). Fig. 5.2 illustrates the key tensions which many chain bookshop managers expressed; the pull between commercial viability and cultural obligation and similarly the commercial need to expand the market as opposed to the desire of many managers to cater for the ‘old Waterstone’s customer’, (a term couched by Manager A) who tended to buy specialist titles and be more interested in literary, high quality books.

It is possible to argue that these different qualities are not necessarily in direct opposition to each other. It may be possible to view these qualities as existing on a continuum rather than being in direct opposition. It is also possible that the best bookshops are able to strike a balance and satisfy all of these qualities, simultaneously expanding the market while catering to high level cultural needs. Otherwise bookshops, even branches of the chains, may have to concentrate on the market that they are catering for, and concentrate upon expanding it, rather than risk alienating even the consumers they already have.

5.6.3 Management autonomy
Some of the more experienced bookshop users commented upon how the autonomy allowed to the manager of a particular branch could impact upon what was stocked there. There was felt to have been a diminution in autonomy allowed to managers over the years with the increased focus upon stocking prescribed titles.

Autonomy allowed to managers was stressed by Manager A as being vital, and this was also a point made in the focus groups, by a participant who is a librarian. She seemed very aware of the pressures on bookshop managers and commented upon the kind of freedom which it is necessary to give managers if stock range is to be developed. However, she also said:

I think it’s going to be difficult for the chains to re-establish that sort of commitment and expertise having kind of spent the last ten years draining it out of their branch managers.
It is clear from her comment that a change in approach from bookshops is evident, from the consumer’s point of view. The level of autonomy available to managers varied across the chains studied, but they were all very clear that at some level, a strict adherence to marketing plan was very much expected of them. Manager B for example, commented on the physical layout of the display tables at the front of his store:

If you take for example the front of store tables, there is...an increasingly strict set of expectations and guidelines as to how they should be physically laid out... there’s fairly rigid expectations, in terms of standards.

Manager C commented that much of his time was spent making sure his store was ‘to plan’ (stocking the correct books and promoting them correctly), thus leaving little time to spend on shop-generated promotions. Manager B also went on to say that with regards to his power to select books for promotion or his own autonomy in store, his impact was minimal. He also commented that publishers have considerable impact with regard to the books chosen for promotion: a point which most of the managers (except the Marketing Director) agreed with:

We don’t have much control at branch level over what signs are in the window. That’s all ordered from central suppliers...I don’t have any input to the...strategic direction or decisions made (Manager B).

The element of independence and the desire to cater for the local community despite being part of a chain bookshop was stressed by all the managers, but this sometimes seemed to be at odds with the levels of prescriptiveness emanating from their respective head offices regarding planned promotions and their nationwide application. Indeed, the overall approaches to marketing taken by the book chains studied were so similar, that differentiation according to brand identity would, one might anticipate, be rather difficult for many prospective bookshop customers. Once again, there is an inherent tension evident in the strategic approach to marketing demonstrated by each of the chains studied. While each chain was very keen to foster an individual approach and to be relevant and responsive to the local community, this sometimes seemed to be at odds with the level of adherence which each branch manager required to follow marketing plans and promotions. While the level of autonomy allowed to managers varied from chain to chain, there was a clear tension between the desire to have the freedom to promote what they wished, as opposed to the need to follow head office
marketing plans. This was a feeling expressed by all of the store managers, but pointedly not by the Marketing Director. The Marketing Director was clear that, not only was the same concept of brand identity held by head office as well as the booksellers on the shop floor, but the choice of books for promotion was never influenced by financial incentives from publishers. In her words, ‘it is all about the book’. This is clearly in direct contrast to the quote from Manager B, above.

The much touted ‘increased professionalism’; an increasingly commercially-led approach from chain bookshops, seems inevitably to lead to this kind of tension. This in turn leads to the perception by consumers of homogeneity across branches and has the concomitant effect of decreasing the amount of time and budget which managers and booksellers have left to devote to genuinely shop-led promotions. Branch managers seem to be increasingly emasculated with regards to the autonomy they are allowed in order to demonstrate that they are genuinely each an ‘independent within a chain’ (Manager A).

While there was overall loyalty shown by the managers to the ethos and commercial direction of the various chain bookshops examined, there were topics raised in the research which underlined some deep-seated issues regarding the direction which chain bookselling in the UK has taken. It is also noteworthy that these issues highlighting organisational differences were very similar regardless of which chain was examined. These organisational differences seem to centre on the changes which have taken place in chain bookshops over the past few years. While there is acceptance that increased professionalism and a more commercial approach was probably necessary for the book trade to survive, nevertheless, there was the impression that the managers felt that this professionalisation of chain bookselling has been taken too far. Again, looking at the views of the Marketing Director, she was clear that changes had had to take place, since there was a need to be more accessible to people, indeed to welcome anyone at all who wanted to buy a book. She was also of the opinion that value for money was a ‘hygiene factor’, which would seem to go some way to explain the concentration upon discounted titles and ‘3 for 2’ offers by chain bookshops.

These differences of opinion between store managers and strategic directors manifested themselves in simple doubts about the wisdom of the proliferation of discounting, especially the ‘3 for 2’ offers. Both Managers B and C expressed doubts about giving away margin this way, and Manager B also commented upon the widespread use of this kind of promotion, saying ‘I think the ‘3 for 2’ is an opportunity
for...bookselling to set a new course, by not doing the 3 for 2!' The implications of this approach are outlined by Ryals who says that:

Retail marketers can come to believe that profits come from products, nor from customers. The focus then becomes selling more products and increasing market share (2002, p.242).

This approach would seem to be demonstrated by the discounting approach which many bookshops take. Despite being relatively late adopters of a discounting approach compared to other retailers because of retail price maintenance in the book trade until 1995, the ‘charge for the market’ (Manager B) seems to have superseded the focus on the (loyal) consumer. Furthermore, any store adopting a ‘discount approach’ should be aware of the potentially detrimental impact which it can have upon consumer perception of brand image (Sharma and Stafford, 2000). Specifically, consumers are less easily persuaded by salespeople in a store which has ‘environmental cues supporting discount image’ (p.185).

All of the managers expressed an interest in developing backlist (as opposed to the concentration upon new title promotions) and in developing promotions based on backlist titles. This was sometimes expressed as a wish to recapture the ‘old Waterstone’s customer’. This phrase, coined by Manager A refers to the kind of customer formerly seen in bookshops, particularly interested in highbrow literature and specialist titles such as history, books on militaria and art. This kind of customer nostalgia was raised in the context of the acknowledgement that current bookselling caters for a ‘less challenging readership’ (Manager A) but also, that ‘the old Waterstone’s customer’ is still out there, but is not particularly being catered for. In many ways, the managers’ views can be seen to be the most commercially sensible, given the increased revenue which existing customers can bring, as opposed to the expense of gathering new clientele (Gilbert, 2003; de Kare Silver, 1998; Schiffman and Kanuk, 2004). The kinds of suggestions made for this approach to marketing, included promotions of literature in translation, and promotions of classic literature, perhaps with the participation of a local theatre group. In tandem with this wish to recapture a more literary customer was the very open regret expressed by Manager C about the loss of independent bookshops.

I think in my ideal world, there would be a lot of space for very good independent bookshops... we wouldn’t be concerned with something like a
brand or a corporate identity and so on and it would be more about it being an excellent community bookshop in lots of ways. But… obviously the market for these types of places is constricted and it’s constricted by me!

There is emphasis placed upon the wish to be an ‘excellent community bookshop’, yet this is arguably at heart a contradictory statement when one considers chain bookshops. There exists a tension between the need to meet standards set down by head office on marketing, and weekly marketing plan regarding which titles are promoted, as opposed to the wish to have some autonomy to promote titles which can be supported by local community groups or which can redefine bookshop clientele. Manager C again points this out, as well as the constraints of working for a large chain bookseller:

The whole nature of large organisations dominating the whole market is, it limits choice: it limits maybe the success of books that should be more successful but aren’t; it limits the time and effort that can go into making those choices about what’s going to be successful and what’s not, what you’re going to push and what’s not, because your time is constricted with dealing with all this other information, sifting all and making sure that you’re ‘to plan’… and therefore ‘to brand’.

The idea of local relevance is also made by Andy Ross, owner of Cody’s bookstores in the US. He makes the very practical point that if bookshop chains are concerned about the local community then they would probably not build their stores in out of town sites, automatically cutting out the section of society without their own transport (usually the poorest people) and making it difficult for booksellers to support the local community financially, buying sandwiches, using local banks, post offices etc.

This tension between commercialism and cultural obligation (see fig. 5.2) is at the heart of Miller’s argument regarding the book trade (2006). She points out the essential ‘difference’ of books as opposed to any other saleable commodity and how customers feel uncomfortable when they are faced with the fact that bookshops need to make a profit to survive, rather than simply providing a cultural service. Andy Ross goes on to make the point that ‘(t)he distribution of ideas in our culture is far too important to be left in the hands of a few corporate executives’ (2002, p.79). It is interesting to note that he sees part of his role in his bookstores to be a distributor of ideas. Certainly none of those bookshop experts interviewed were as overt as this in talking of their ideas for
their stores and there is obviously a marked difference between being the owner of a small range of independent bookstores, as opposed to being a shop manager in a large UK chain. Nevertheless, there was a definite yearning to fill a cultural role evidenced by the managers (and wished for by many consumers) which seemed to be stifled simply by the need to have a similarity of promoted titles across the branches, often leaving little time for promotion of other titles. This desire for titles not stocked by bookshops is made plain by a Waterstone’s Manager in 1998. ‘We stock 150,000 titles, and yet we take hundreds upon hundreds of individual customer orders every week’ (McCabe, 1998, p.45). This comment illustrates first that the vast number of published titles is impossible for any bookshop no matter how large to stock profitably. However, it is also notable that this comment was made in 1998, and given the growth of online bookshops (especially Amazon) since that time, it is arguable that a large number of these customer orders are now placed online.

This point about booksellers and publishers having a cultural obligation to their public was also a point which emerged from the online managers. Linked to the level of customer loyalty to the online stores (often linked to the pre-existence of a high street branch or store, which has engendered high degrees of loyalty), some customers seemed to express resentment about bookshops being a profit-making business. As Manager X said:

They forget we’re a company sometimes and treat us almost as if…we’re not looking to make a profit, and get very offended if they do see something they construe as commercial.

Here it is clear that at least some consumers feel that bookshops have a cultural obligation, or at least that cultural considerations should be present alongside a focus upon profitability. Underhill comments on ‘the attitude among [book] sellers that they purvey not mere merchandise but ideas’ (1999, p.201). This again would seem to set the bookselling industry apart from other areas of retailing, although the publishing industry could also be said to take this view.

There was certainly a huge furore in the trade when it became clear that promoted titles were chosen often because of financial incentives rather than because they were ‘good’ books (Thorpe, 2004; Publishing News, 2005). Indeed it is interesting to see that this expectation of choice based on merit is extended to online sites also, since a similar fuss was made over the revelation that publishers were paying to have their
books reviewed on Amazon’s ‘Destined for Greatness’ and ‘What we’re Reading’ pages (Hennessey, 2000). There was further evidence of this attitude towards books in the focus groups, with some demonstration of suspicion regarding recommended titles: ‘On what basis do they recommend those?’

5.7 Community relevance

5.7.1 The role of the bookshop in the community
Manager A mentioned the term ‘independent within a chain’ and this term could be applied to each of the bookshops studied, with regards to their aims in this respect. There was a strong theme emerging of wishing to be individual and of tailoring stock to reflect what the local community wanted. In most cases, this seemed to manifest itself through the local ‘tailoring’ of stock in order to cater for local needs, but in few other ways. The exception to this was Manager C’s store, who took a rather more proactive approach to their local community.

We’re involved in community outreach… we’re looking to be a space where people come to not necessarily just to purchase stock from us and so on but also somewhere that becomes a kind of a part of the community in lots of ways.

This approach was evidenced by Manager B’s store being involved with local primary schools, giving readings and having school children in for visits, as well as sponsoring them. It is notable that this particular chain is a US store, where the idea of community involvement seems rather more developed than in the UK. While this kind of involvement is arguably driven more by promoting brand awareness and capturing future consumers young, nevertheless, it does seem to be genuine community involvement, and is demonstrated by more than the simple ‘tailoring’ of stock for different locations. Miller (1999) points out this confusion of motives, referring to chain bookshop adoption of traditionally independent qualities. This has resulted in a lack of clarity regarding which bookshops’ actions might be regarded as authentic gestures aimed at community enhancement.

Once again, it is notable that this desire to be community responsive and have local relevance was evident across each of the chains studied. It is also rather ironic that a strategy for establishing competitive advantage is virtually duplicated by other stores which are in direct competition (Porter, 1985).
5.7.2 The Bookshop as a third place
Nozzi (2004) acknowledges Oldenburg (1997) when he describes a third place as:

distinctive informal gathering places, they make the citizen feel at home, they nourish relationships and a diversity of human contact, they help create a sense of place and community, they invoke a sense of civic pride…and they enrich public life and democracy.

The notion of the bookshop as a third place was raised by Manager C and was given as an example of the kind of atmosphere that his particular chain of bookshops was promoting for their customers.

As Manager C commented:

We’re aiming to create a relaxed atmosphere; we’re supposed to be a ‘third place’ in lots of ways. This whole idea of the third place…you’re not just a store that’s involved in selling; you’re involved in other things…(T)he air that we…succeed in portraying that it is a relaxed place for people to come…we’re obviously pushing that by providing comfy seats…by the very fact that there is a café in the store, by the fact that browsing is encouraged.

Compared to bookshops even 10 years ago, one can see how the influx of coffee shops and sofas (Kreitzman, 1999b; Cardew, 2004; Clements, 2005) has changed how bookshops are promoted as well as how they are potentially perceived by the bookshop-visiting customers. Obviously these changes can be observed across the broad spectrum of retailing. However, it is arguable that bookshops are one of the few retailing outlets that could reasonably be described as a destination store, or a ‘third place’. This is an important quality for bookshops to develop, simply in terms of remaining competitive with online sites, since this is a quality which online booksellers and supermarkets cannot capture. The idea of the bookshop as a third place intrinsically accepts that consumer motivation for visiting bookshops is more complex than simply that of utility. Tauber (in Gilbert, 2003, p.172) suggests that one kind of shopping motivation is simply ‘social experience outside the home’. More complex reasons include mixing with peer groups who have similar interests, and also associating with socially aspirational groups. The idea of mixing with others who have similar interests is discussed in more detail in the following section.
5.7.3 Coffee shops and their contribution to ‘third place’

The widespread adoption of coffee shops and the ‘lifestyling’ of bookshops with sofas and browsing areas has been well documented in the trade press (Kreitzman, 1999a; Sanderson, 1999, 2001b). Manager C was the most forthcoming about his chain’s desire for their bookshops to be perceived this way: indeed, his chain is known for their large, superstore type bookshops, so the idea of lifestyle or destination stores may fall more naturally to that size of bookshop.

I think...having a coffee shop definitely...contributes to the identity. It adds...to the idea that it’s a third place. Definitely, I mean hugely. People come in not just to purchase books or music or DVD’s or whatever. They come in because it is a lifestyle choice.

There is a greater expectation in the current bookselling climate, that bookshops will have a coffee shop in store. As is clear from Manager C’s comments above, the feeling is that it enhances the ambience of the bookshop. Manager A was also clear that the presence of a coffee shop in her store was attracting a different clientele, but the example she gave was of people going straight to the coffee shop without pausing in the bookshops. Her perception seemed to be that it had attracted a new, but separate clientele; one that she did not necessarily feel was drawn to spending in the bookshop. Manager C concurred with this view, and also felt that the coffee shop in store attracted a new, separate clientele.

Manager B felt there was a benefit in having a coffee shop in his store, in that it gave an advantage which online and supermarket booksellers could not provide:

A big part of the buying decision for books is looking at them and browsing them, comparing them. Maybe going for a coffee or popping in or being brought in so the, the human enjoyment of physically going shopping and seeing other people and being seen; you’ll never compete with that.

Although, overall, there seems to be an acceptance that the presence of a coffee shop provides an advantage for traditional bookshops over the online competition, as well as potentially attracting new clientele, this, once again, seemed to be based on informal observation rather than any monitoring of consumer responses. There seemed to be an acceptance of the inevitability of the coffee shop within bookshops in the current bookselling climate. However, there did not seem to be any monitoring of the
effectiveness of coffee shops; either for attracting new consumers into the store, or for enhancing the book buying experience of existing customers. Once again, bookshops do not seem to be very good at evaluating the success and impact of marketing initiatives.

Miller (1999) discusses the role of the bookshop in the community in the US, although she is concentrating upon independent bookshops and how they have filled the role left vacant by the gradual disappearance of local facilities in recent years. Thus, as village halls and local post offices have disappeared, bookstores in the US have naturally filled these roles, providing a meeting place, even a community centre, for local communities.

It is interesting to extrapolate this theory to the adoption of the term ‘third place’ by large chain booksellers, and to see how they have adapted it to fit their large stores and sometimes, even superstores. As independent bookshops find competitive trading to be more and more financially challenging, the growth of the chains seems inevitable. Their adoption of qualities traditionally associated with independent bookstores, such as the promotion of local relevance and the provision of areas for browsing and working, may have less to do with altruistic community inspired motives and more to do with making money and arming themselves with a competitive advantage which supermarkets and online booksellers can never have. Nevertheless, in urban areas, this may be the closest to community spirit - even cultural community spirit - which many people may experience.

5.7.3.1 Consumer responses to the coffee shop

Examining the effect of the coffee shop on attracting people into bookshops in the first place, the majority (60%) responded ambivalently, saying that the presence of a coffee shop would make no difference to whether they would enter a bookshop or not. While 31% said it would have a favourable effect and it would either definitely or probably encourage them to go in, it is notable that 10% (or seven people) said it would put them off. This antipathy to coffee shops – albeit a minority response - is an important finding and should be monitored by bookshops. Re-running the analysis of the attractiveness of coffee shops for newer bookshop users, the effect is seen to be rather stronger, with 40% saying it would either probably or definitely make them more likely to go in. It would seem that the presence of a coffee shop in this instance is rather more effective at attracting newer users than long term bookshop visitors. However, this is countered
by the results of a further research question, showing that 52.2% of respondents agreed with the statement ‘I like the coffee shop’ whereas reanalysed with newer users, 33.3% agreed with this statement. While there is a difference between ‘liking’ and ‘being attracted in by’, nevertheless, these results are rather contradictory and one must also bear in mind the relatively small figures used, when studying newer users in particular. The research findings show therefore that most people respond ambivalently to coffee shops.

It is interesting to note that a key quality which consumers seem to appreciate about coffee shops in bookshops, is the fact that they are in bookshops; the mix of the two, seems somehow to be important for consumers. This is supported by the fact that consumers also especially like that they can read and drink coffee at the same time. The atmosphere of the coffee shop seems to be important to consumers. Seemingly less important are the coffee and the food. Satterthwaite makes the point that bookshops can offer an inviting and relaxing destination for people;

The surprising popularity of bookstores and the increase in the number of stores and the sales of books are partly due to the communal nature of the stores. The bookstore can be a community gathering place, a safe and friendly harbour in an increasingly impersonal world. Amidst automation, sound bites, isolated computer communication, and all the effects of stretched living, the image of a small bookstore with a library ambience, piles of books to explore, helpful clerks to discuss your potential purchases, fellow customers with shared interests, and cozy cafes produces a warm, collegial feeling (2001, p.234).

There are obviously elements of this utopian vision of bookshops which do not apply to UK chains (Satterthwaite is writing about American independent bookshops). Nevertheless, one can understand the inviting nature of a relaxed atmosphere where one is free to spend virtually unlimited amounts of time, drink coffee and read books. Stallard’s research (1999) into bookshops found that some bookshop users made suggestions for the addition of coffee shops to their local bookshop. It is impressive that 48% of those respondents who said they used the coffee shop, said that they felt it made them spend more time in the store. Rather smaller numbers also agreed that they were encouraged to buy on impulse and to spend more money in general, because of the presence of the coffee shop. It would seem that the presence of a
coffee shop in store is a potentially useful tool for attracting consumers, as well as enticing them to spend more time and money.

While some negative opinions about coffee shops were expressed very strongly by a minority, it was still clear that many were in favour of coffee shops in bookshops, and particularly the enhancement of the experience which the coffee shop can offer.

I think that it’s part of the process that when you go for, you know into a bookshop I think it adds value to the experience that when you go to buy a book or browse it, it’s something that you add on to the experience that I, well I personally enjoy and it, it extends the time that you’re actually in the bookstore, so I’ll maybe have a look and I’m maybe not quite sure which books I’ll buy and, and then I’ll have a coffee and I’ll think about it then go back and then I’ll decide which ones to buy and then leave.

The coffee shop seemed to allow consumers a little extra thinking time to make decisions about book buying, as well as legitimising the spending of large amount of time in this environment – like the presence of seating in some ways.

One of the most interesting findings from examining users of coffee shops in bookshops is that they like to meet friends there (74% in fig. 4.2.16 above). This is possibly unsurprising in itself, but when one compares it to what people say they do in bookshops, where ‘meet friends’ was only selected by 3% of people (fig. 4.2.9), one can see that the contrast between meeting friends in the bookshop, as opposed to meeting friends in the coffee shop in the bookshop, is clear. The coffee shop within the bookshop seems to take on a socialising aspect which is not present in the bookshop itself.

5.7.3.2 Negative responses to coffee shops
Examining responses to the coffee shop in more detail in the focus groups, the rather more negative responses were able to be explored in more detail. While overall, responses tended to be positive, there were some very strong negative responses (mirroring responses from the questionnaires where a few were actually put off shopping by the presence of a coffee shop). Although these respondents were in the minority, there was a feeling that traditional book buyers were being pushed out by the new era of ‘lifestyle’ bookshops, and there was a general dislike among many
participants, of coffee shops being ‘squeezed in’, at the expense of books. This led to a general consensus that coffee shops, if present, should be in a clearly demarcated area within bookshops, and should not interfere with browsing or the quiet required by some book shoppers. Some even went so far as to say that coffee shops ‘brings together the worst aspects of each [coffee shops and bookshops] and concentrates them’, adding that given the choice, he would not use a bookshop with a coffee shop either for books or coffee.

It is worth sounding a note of caution about brand extensions – such as coffee shops – which are commonly adopted by bookshops. Corstjens and Corstjens (in Kent, 2003) comment that common brand extensions can in some cases ‘obscure meaningful distinctions between products and store image’. Therefore, bookshops must ensure that the impact of a coffee shop upon the overall brand of the bookshop, is not detrimental. Of course, a further consideration might be the widespread use of bookshops and how it is difficult to find a reasonably sized branch of a chain which does not have a coffee shop in store. Once again, competitive advantage seems blurred, given the widespread adoption of coffee shops by bookshops. The issues of differentiation and creating unique selling points are not really applicable to bookshops in this respect.

5.8 The Bookshop experience

5.8.1 Consumer activity in bookshops
Miller notes that:

Theorists of urban and consumer culture have shown, shopping is increasingly seen as an activity which can provide individuals with entertainment, fulfilment and the opportunity for meaningful connections with others (1999, p.388).

Shopping as a social experience and its role in our emotional wellbeing has been studied by many researchers in the field; (Miller, D., 1998; Satterthwaite, 2001; Underhill, 1999). Miller says that ‘shopping is not about possessions per se, nor is it thought to be about identity per se. It is about obtaining goods, or imagining the possession and use of goods’ (1998, p.141). Shopping for books was deemed to be a pleasurable experience by focus group participants, with little of the pressures of many other kinds of shopping. Online respondents also commented on the pleasures of book
shopping, but also tended to concentrate on the pleasures of traditional book shopping rather than online shopping, even though almost 32% of online book shoppers said they felt more relaxed when book shopping online. Many participants compared it to music or CD shopping, with the element of personal choice playing a large part in the activity. Time was felt to be an important factor in having an enjoyable book shopping experience, and judging by the responses from many book shoppers, it became clear that there is a distinction to be made between shopping in a leisurely fashion, or book shopping as a hobby, and shopping in a functional way – the duality of book shopping.

5.8.2 Browsing – online and offline
The chart below reveals the important role which browsing clearly plays for most people when visiting traditional bookshops.

![Bar chart showing bookshop behaviour](chart.png)

**Bookshop behaviour**

**Fig. 5.3 Consumer behaviour - traditional bookshops**

It is interesting to compare the chart above (fig. 5.3) with results from the survey of online bookshop users’ habits (fig. 5.4). It is clear that people visit online bookshops with a much more focused purpose: almost 82% say they go with a particular book in mind. Contrast this with traditional bookshop users, who usually browse. Just 40% of
them go to look for a specific book. In contrast, just 35% of online bookshop users say they ‘just browse’ online.

Fig. 5.4 Consumer behaviour - online bookshops

Rowley (2002) notes that little information is available as yet on browsing behaviour in online environments. Crucially, Rowley also notes that browsing is not just a ‘choosing mechanism’ or a means to an end, but a valid activity in itself which affords the browser pleasure. Most of the research participants were keenly aware of the differences when contrasting the browsing experience online with browsing in a traditional bookshop. Indeed, many said the experience was almost incomparable, it was so different in these contrasting environments. Time seemed to be an important quality linked to traditional bookshop browsing; the ability to lose oneself and perhaps find something unexpected. This quality of losing oneself was also a topic arising from Cartwright’s research into book superstores and libraries (2001). The serendipity of bookshop browsing is key to traditional bookshops. Online browsing, however, seemed to be a much more linear process for consumers. Some comments about browsing experiences from the current research illustrate quite clearly the inherent differences:
I tend to examine a narrower range of subjects / genres online, but those in more depth. In a traditional bookshop I may find myself in an unfamiliar place and examine books that I would not even think about when online.

You generally need a starting point even to browse online. In a traditional bookshop you can mooch and see what catches your eye.

Rowley (2002) comments on the distinctions between browsing online and browsing in a traditional store, saying ‘it is difficult to replicate the richness of this real-world shopping experience in an on-line shop’ (p.371). Indeed an examination of online consumer responses to this setting would seem to support Rowley’s research findings. Many focus group participants responded very positively to the recommendations online and this also led to a discussion of how many had changed their attitude towards online browsing. While all acknowledge that it is indeed an entirely different experience to that in a traditional bookshops, nevertheless, many said that they had become more open to ‘temptation’ online – especially with regard to online recommendations and ‘others who bought that, bought this’.

Research highlighted that the physicality of the experience is important in traditional bookshops – being able to cast one’s eye along a shelf of books, or find oneself ‘in an unfamiliar place’. As one participant commented, online browsing always necessitates the inputting of information as a starting point. Traditional browsing can be much more unfocused and the surroundings play a key role in this, providing the ambience, bookshelves, booksellers and the whole physical experience. The notion of serendipity is important in the traditional bookshop – the unexpected; finding something you didn’t know you wanted. While it is of course possible for this to happen online, nevertheless, traditional book shopping retains this unique serendipity and makes traditional browsing an entirely different experience to browsing online. It seems that atmosphere and all of the physical qualities associated with atmosphere: lighting; space; surroundings, serve to contribute to the serendipitous browsing experience in traditional bookshops.

Regardless of how much research participants agreed with the enjoyable aspect of book shopping, they were clear that in order to browse pleasurably, plenty of time was necessary. This also served to define the two different kinds of book shopping – the duality of the experience. Indeed this convenience factor was usually mentioned in
tandem with online book shopping and how convenient it is, allowing access whenever convenient and for as long or as short a time as desired.

5.8.3 The duality of book shopping
Further discussion took place regarding the duality of the book shopping experience and how the experience was defined by the available time, and the kind of experience required by the consumer in question. ‘You can be in and out like you buy a sandwich at lunchtime’ defines the swift, functional approach, as opposed to the ‘relaxing coffee type experience’ according to one focus group participant. The ‘functional’ approach to buying books was also seen by one participant as ‘a consequence of this trend in displaying at the front – you know it’s there’. There was also awareness that the different kinds of experience available were very much dependent upon the kind of experience and indeed time available to the book buyer:

If you’re going in for a specific, particular book then it really doesn’t make a difference whether it’s busy or quiet. But if you’re going in looking for inspiration for something you want to take away as a holiday read or something like that then a lot of the time it is nice just to have peace and quiet and your own space to read. Flick through something as opposed to, you know having to reach round people to grab something off the shelves, and feeling that you’re in the way if you stop to, to flick through something.

As demonstrated by the diagram below however, it seems that the more leisurely approach to book buying also brings greater demands for the bookshops. This idealised approach to book buying also brings with it prerequisites for bookshop atmosphere and qualities. It is important to note nevertheless that the more leisurely book buying experience also happens to encompass many qualities which are unique to the traditional bookshops and cannot be satisfied by online bookselling. This would seem to be an important point for traditional chain bookshops to bear in mind.
**Bookshop requirements for a leisurely browsing experience**  
- Somewhere to sit down
- Perhaps a coffee shop
- Adequate personal space
- Leisurly 'browsing' purchase
- Time to browse

**Bookshop requirements for a swift, functional purchase**  
- Reasonably quiet
- Easy to find books
- Swift Functional Purchase
- Quick payment

Fig. 5.5 The duality of book shopping

### 5.8.4 Physical surroundings in the bookshop

One focus group participant made the point that, although she could buy many of the same books at her local supermarket, she was prepared to pay more at her bookshop, since the shopping experience there was more pleasurable and she was surrounded by ‘arty’ people, rather than supermarket customers. Tauber (in Gilbert 2003, p.172) also suggests that ‘peer group attraction’ may be a motive for shopping in particular settings. This would seem to suggest the desire for an ‘aspirational’ quality to be present in bookshops, at least for some shoppers. Palmer makes the point that:

> There is an extensive literature on the emotional relationship that consumers develop between a brand and their own perceived or sought personality (1996, p.253).
Palmer continues, ‘some segments of markets…are likely to continue to seek an emotional relationship through a brand’ (ibid, p.255). While Palmer is referring to a consumption industry here, one can nevertheless see how this kind of relationship with a bookshop can develop, especially given the kinds of qualities which consumers – and managers – deem to be important; i.e. atmosphere, time to browse, seating and coffee shops. Durfee and Chen (2002) note that sometimes ‘a customer’s primary identification is with a company and how they see themselves reflected in that company’s image’ (p.15). As one focus group participant commented, ‘I like a bookshop to be a kind of a, almost more quiet, almost refined type of atmosphere’. This raises the subject of atmospherics: ‘The changes made to the design of buying environments that produce special emotional effects that subsequently enhance the likelihood that a purchase will take place’ (Gilbert, 2003, p.129). The term was first couched by Kotler in 1973 in an attempt to name the holistic shopping experience, rather than concentrating only upon the product. Kotler noted that,

In some cases, the place, or more specifically the atmosphere of the place, is more influential than the product itself in the purchase decision. In some cases, the atmosphere is the primary product (1973, p.48).

Kotler emphasises the physical qualities of a place and how these physical qualities impact on what we describe as the ‘atmosphere’. This theory clearly has important implications both for the bookshop and also for any coffee shop which happens to be inside a bookshop. Certainly the bookshop experts affiliated to the traditional stores were all very clear about the importance of the atmosphere of the bookshop. Manager C said:

There’s definitely a lot of positive feedback on a day to day basis about the store and about the atmosphere and about... I suppose... about how people feel when they come here and therefore why they come here.

Indeed, this was strongly supported by feedback from all of the bookshop users. As one can see from fig. 5.3, browsing is an activity which the majority of bookshop visitors enjoy, but perhaps more importantly, 83% of traditional bookshop visitors said they liked or liked very much the atmosphere in bookshops (fig.4.2.10). Again, however, one has to wonder at the real effect of the various marketing ploys adopted to
impact upon consumers; the projection of brand image and the effect of such facilities as coffee shops and seating areas. Bitner (1992, p.57) comments:

In marketing there is a surprising lack of empirical research or theoretically based frameworks addressing the role of physical surroundings in consumption settings. Managers continually plan, build, and change an organization’s physical surroundings in an attempt to control its influence on patrons, without really knowing the impact of a specific design or atmospheric change on its users.

There has been widespread adoption of facilities such as coffee shops in particular, especially by chain bookshops, but examination of qualitative consumer responses to these kinds of facilities have not been carried out.

5.8.5 Personal environment
The research found that vital qualities of traditional bookshops seem to be plenty space, especially personal space, and relative quiet. These qualities seemed to be less important if the planned purchase was a functional one – for a specific book or gift - but if browsing was involved, these qualities seemed to take on an added importance. There was strong antipathy to feeling squashed or having to ask to move past people, or even of feeling that one was in the way oneself. As one participant said,

I’m probably more likely to buy something if it’s quiet and you’ve got time to sort of look through things rather than, you’re tripping over people and sort of quick tour round, can’t be bothered and out again.

This clearly has important implications for bookshop design, although there is possibly little to be done about the numbers of customers in a bookshop. Indeed, bookshops obviously want to have as many consumers in-store as possible. However, allowing plenty of space between tables and shelving would seem to encourage spending more time there.

There was an element of contradiction emanating from bookshop users with regards to space in bookshops however. While there was a predilection for plenty of personal space and a real antithesis towards feeling squashed or in the way, nevertheless, many focus group participants mentioned that they liked bookshops to have ‘nooks and
crannies’ – places where they could hide away and read their books, or explore and hunt for items of interest. As one participant commented, ‘what I like about this place is there’s always little corners you can go round. There’s always the promise there’s something exciting round the next corner’. Another participant summed up the required balance between space and nooks and crannies:

There needs to be space…but on the other hand, I don’t like it to be open, too open plan. I really like little nooks and crannies and little places that I can go. And if I can find like, if there was a chair at the end of the corridor I would go and sit there, rather than the one that was in the middle, because I don’t like to feel exposed, I like to kind of hide away.

Bookshop users seem generally positively disposed towards seats in bookshops, and those people that use the seats agreed that they spend more time there and spend more money there because of the presence of seats. Focus group participants responded positively to the presence of seating, commenting that it legitimised their presence in bookshops – something some were not sure about, particularly of they were there for a long period of time, and also, it allowed them to browse at items of interest at their leisure, and often in more comfort. Generally, the visibility and availability of seating seemed to be the main gripes from consumers and given their otherwise positive reaction to seats in bookshops and the fact that it seems to encourage both time and money spent there, it would seem that seating is a worthwhile investment for bookshops. As one focus group participant said, ‘I like to have a chair, so that if there’s something that I want to have a look at, I can have a proper look at it’.

As for actually attracting people into stores in the first place, again, a largely ambivalent effect was observed, with just over 50% of respondents saying it would have no effect. However, the remainder thought it would either probably, or definitely make them more likely to go in. Overall, it would seem that the presence of sofas, like coffee shops, legitimises consumers’ presence in bookshops and is a facility which they tend to like.

5.8.6 Bookshop impact on emotion
Fenech and O’Cass (2003) have called for research on ‘how…consumers feel when they are operating in the traditional mall environment versus the virtual mall environment for retail activity’ (p.374). The empirical research carried out on emotional change in traditional and online bookshops goes some way to addressing this. While
most people surveyed in traditional bookshops (46%) said that they felt ‘just the same’ while in a bookshop, nevertheless, almost as many (45%) said they felt more relaxed. Clearly bookshops can have a significant relaxing effect on their users. There were definitely therapeutic aspects to the book shopping experience and many of the focus group participants referred to these qualities:

If I’ve had like a bad week or a bad day I might just go to the bookshop… you know have a wander round; look at some books; go for a coffee, stay there for quite a long time, you know an hour, hour and a half, two hours and I’ll always feel better.

Shopping for books can be viewed therefore as a kind of therapy for some people. This was supported by other comments that book shopping can include ‘treating’ or indulging oneself.

Comparing this to findings about emotion change in online bookshops, a surprisingly similar statistic (46.6%) said they felt ‘just the same’ when shopping online. Almost 32% said they felt more relaxed – a significant percentage, yet notably smaller than those traditional books shoppers who experience this emotion change (45%). Other online shoppers gave further comments about emotional change when online, but these were sometimes linked to frustration or impatience, often due to waiting for delivery. This was experienced despite acknowledgement that books ordered were in many cases unlikely to be found in a traditional bookshop in any case. For example:

When shopping in a traditional shop you get instant gratification as you can [take] the book home with you.

This delayed gratification is acknowledged by Sattherthwaite (2001, p.206) as being a problem for online shoppers:

Placing the order may be the swiftest and most gratifying part of the online shopping transaction. The ultimate gratification of physically possessing the purchase is postponed in online retailing. For many avid shoppers, the disappointment of “delayed fulfilment”, what happens between clicking on your intended purchases and receiving it, prevents them from shopping online.
There was clear acknowledgement from the online book buyers of the distinctly different experience online as opposed to traditional, and in most cases, experientially, traditional bookshops were favoured.

5.8.7 Negative experiences in store
When bookshop users have had a negative experience, either in traditional or in online bookshops, this had a significant impact on whether they revisited that bookshop. Negative experiences usually centred on what they felt to be poor customer service and this perceived poor service could quite easily result in the consumer not visiting the store in question again, as well as holding the immutable opinion that service in that store was poor. However, a very good experience could also have a very strong impact on future behaviour, ensuring continued loyalty to a particular store. Babin, Babin and Boles (1999) studied the relationship between consumers and salespeople and the impact that that relationship had on sales (albeit of cars).

The strong relationship between salesperson and retailer attitude makes it unlikely that a consumer would consider a dealership further once a bad interaction with a salesperson is experience. However, the relatively independent effect that attitude toward the product has on purchase intentions suggest that the consumer may still pursue the product at an alternative location (p.95).

This underlines the importance of offering at the very least a decent level of customer service to customers, particularly since in the instance of books, there are numerable other venues where books can be purchased. The research findings suggest that while consumers are less reliant upon booksellers for information, nevertheless, they still expect a good standard of customer service and react very badly to what they perceive as poor or ill-mannered service. While the research suggests that the actual development of a consumer/bookseller relationship (whether for two minutes or ongoing over several years) is less likely to take place, when it does, it is vital that that relationship is handled positively by the bookseller.

5.9 The role of bookselling staff
5.9.1 Traditional bookshops
Babin et al (1999) point out that the impact of salespeople on purchase intentions, and consumer attitudes towards stores and salespeople is relatively new in terms of
research. Each of the managers interviewed pointed out the prime importance of the role of the booksellers in the perception of the brand by consumers, given that booksellers are often the only direct contact which bookshop customers will have with the brand of the store. Earlier research by Stallard (1999) had revealed that one Waterstone’s Director participating in the research felt that booksellers had a vital role in the projection of brand identity:

You (the bookseller) are the brand as much as we are the brand in a way that is not the case in a more centralised retailer. The booksellers are integral to the brand in a way that the staff are probably not in another retailer.

However, given the important role which they are acknowledged to hold, this philosophy does not appear to be carried through to its logical conclusion, given the reasonably high turnover of bookshop staff and the low pay which they receive (Bookseller, 2003d, Kean, 2003a). Time and again, the impact of staff upon the brand of bookshops emerged as a strong theme in this research, particularly when required to interact directly with bookshop customers. Indeed, Babin et al (1999) found that a quality sales force provides a competitive advantage for firms, by improving the image of that company in the mind of the consumer. It would seem that booksellers do have the potential to play a vital role in the brand image of bookshops. In the broader context of retailing, Knee (2002) comments upon the ‘unique value of people’ and the important role they play in supporting and maintaining the brand. This is supported by other data which underlines the key role in brand promotion which staff can play in the retail environment (Spillane, 2000; Travis, 2001; Rickett, 1999).

Booksellers have some degree of scope (depending upon which bookshop they work in) to take ownership of their store, or at least their own sections: they are given the opportunity to recommend titles for inclusion in the staff recommends sections and in at least one of the stores studied, can take on specific promotions, on condition that these are deemed commercially sound by the store manager. Furthermore, given the acknowledgement by managers of the increasing focus upon personalised recommendations and hand selling, booksellers seem to wield a considerable amount of power or at least potential sales power in bookshops. However, it should be borne in mind that this kind of approach to bookselling is a labour-intensive one. It is much more expensive to dedicate a bookseller to hand selling than it is to have electronically generated recommendations in an online bookshop. While the experiences are vastly
different, it is undeniable that electronic recommendations are also much more reliable – there will be much fewer knowledge gaps compared to asking a bookseller for guidance. Online, one also has the facility of customer reviews available. While these are also available in a ‘traditional’ form, via the staff recommends sections in bookshops, nevertheless, reviews of a much greater range of books, usually by more than one reader appear online.

It seems that consumers have some preconceptions, or expectations about booksellers, and bookseller service, politeness and intelligence. Despite most respondents in this survey saying that they had not spoken to a bookseller, apart from during the sales transaction, most were clear about the helpfulness and politeness of booksellers, if less convinced about their knowledge. It is also notable that while the managers interviewed tended to emphasise the importance of booksellers and their relationship with customers, this was not reflected in the responses of the consumers. Most were happy to browse and search by themselves, seeking booksellers only to find or order items, rather than for suggestions or recommendations. Some of the more mature book buyers in the focus groups were clear about the drop in standards of booksellers regarding helpfulness, and more particularly book knowledge, over the last few years. However, there is an important point to bear in mind, particularly in the context of stores which place a lot of focus upon discounted titles. Sharma and Stafford (2000) found that,

In general, retail salespeople working in “prestige ambience” stores were perceived to have higher levels of credibility when compared with salespeople working in “discount ambience” stores (p.188).

Of course, overall, the chain bookshops in the UK with which most people are familiar could not be described as discount stores. However, if one concentrates on the front of store area, and if this is where some consumers are doing all of their book buying, not delving into the ‘real bookshop’ further into the stores, then this might have an impact on the perception of bookseller credibility.

It became clear that for most bookshop visitors, advice on what to buy was rarely sought from booksellers, and given the increased level of book information now available to most bookshop visitors via the internet it is arguable that in many cases booksellers need not be anything more than a presence at a till point. While some focus group participants did say that advice on some specific points, such as buying for
Teenagers or specific advice on children’s books, would be useful, it is arguable that it is their contribution to the ambiance – the idea that they have great book knowledge - that consumers like, rather than having any real intention of using this knowledge. As one focus group participant commented, ‘I do expect them to be, more switched on, more courteous, more interested in what I want’. Looking at online users’ thoughts about booksellers, asked if they missed the presence of ‘real’ booksellers online, 43% said yes, but 56% said no.

It is interesting to look at this statistic in the context of wider findings about booksellers, and consumer interaction with booksellers. While the vast majority of bookshop customers have no conversation as such with booksellers, nevertheless, there are strong pre-conceptions about knowledge and general bookseller intelligence. For example, the questionnaires carried out in chain bookstores asked for consumer opinions about booksellers: 69% thought booksellers were mostly helpful and 74% thought they were mostly polite. However, a subsequent question discovered that only a minority (39%) had had any direct interaction with the booksellers in the store, beyond paying at the till point. Therefore, it is arguable that it is the presence of the bookseller and what they add to the overall ambience of the traditional bookshop that is missed, as much as their specific knowledge and ability to recommend. From these findings, it would seem that bookseller-customer relationships are the exception rather than the rule.

5.9.2 Online bookselling and the bookseller’s role
Perhaps ironically, the increased access to information about books which the internet and online bookselling has afforded the book buying public, and indeed booksellers, seems to have had the effect of improving standards in the book trade. Earlier research had also found that online bookselling resulted in wider knowledge of books and their availability (Royle and Stockdale, 2000). Perhaps more importantly, the growth of online bookselling has served to change the role of the bookseller, from that of the key source of information, to that of facilitator: helping the consumer to access a particular book, rather than helping them to select that book in the first place. However, this also marks out an important diminution in role of the bookseller. This can be seen as having taken place as online information about books has become more accessible. As online access has become more widespread, so the bookseller is relied upon less as a guide and source of information and suggestions about books, and more as someone who sells books at the till point, or simply informs customers as to whether they are in stock.
Before internet access and access to online bookshops (which many chain bookshops now have at till points) bookseller knowledge of current trends, bestsellers and customer favourites meant that this kind of knowledge could genuinely be regarded as a skill (Horner, 2005). Each of the bookshop experts interviewed both online and in traditional bookshops emphasised the importance of booksellers’ knowledge, and the element of personal interaction between consumer and bookseller. In this context, Manager W commented upon one of the limitations of online bookselling:

It’s no substitute to having a relationship with your local store and going in there and them saying, “Oh, you like these things don’t you? This has just come in” or, you know, that kind of thing.

Manager A also commented on how staff in her own store had their own ‘coteries’ of customers. From the managers’ point of view staff knowledge, enthusiasm and ability to recommend for customers is vital. This in turn can lead naturally to the development of relationships between booksellers and customers. Manager A mentioned the ‘sets’ of customers which exist in her store, where regular customers have built up relationship with particular members of staff. These booksellers know the kinds of titles which their customers like and can therefore carry out the kind of ‘hand selling’ which all of the chain bookshops seem keen to promote. Underhill points out how this kind of relationship can have a positive impact on sales; ‘The more shopper – employee contacts that take place, the greater the average sale. Talking with an employee has a way of drawing a customer in closer’ (1999, p.37). In larger chain bookshops, ongoing relationships with customers are obviously much more difficult to develop given the greater footfall, and the ‘hand selling’ experience becomes a one-off, where the knowledge about a consumer has to be drawn out in one meeting, rather than being able to develop this kind of knowledge about a customer over weeks and months. Obviously this illustrates that ‘hand-selling’ can work on different levels and is perhaps harder for booksellers when they are trying to recommend for a customer whom they are meeting for the first time. Clearly in a chain with branches of different sizes and in different locations, hand selling will be different on every occasion. It seems as if ‘hand selling’ is necessary only for certain sections of consumers; perhaps those who do not have access to current information about books, or those who actively seek out the kind of personal service which a bookseller can give. In this context, it is important to remember that consumers are different from each other, and imbue varying level of importance to any kind of relationship with shop assistants (Palmer, 1996).
Nevertheless, while these very specific customers looking for personalised information may naturally stick in the minds of booksellers, it still seems that the majority of consumers do not wish for or need this kind of hand-selling approach. As Sheth and Parvatiyar (in De Wulf and Oderkerken-Schroder, 2003, p.97) note, ‘all consumers do not need to be served in the same way’. Therefore, if customers are looking for individual guidance and advice it is (hopefully) available. Conversely, if customers simply want to be left to browse and make their own choices about books, dealing with the salespeople only at the point of purchase, booksellers can adapt to this situation also.

Much of the information about books which was once restricted is now easily accessible and bookseller knowledge of books is arguably less vital, although this would most certainly be denied by the managers of traditional bookshop who were interviewed. Booksellers now are able to direct customers to out of print sites and other sources for books which are unavailable to chains, rather than simply having to say ‘it’s unavailable’. The increased availability of book information has irreversibly diminished the role of the bookseller. As Horner (2005) points out, it is easy for most people to find out about publication dates and ‘good reads’ thanks to widespread access to Amazon. This has the resulting effect of making the bookseller’s ability to recommend or source information less impressive.

The diminution in the role of the bookseller is just one part of the changing face of bookselling, the arrival of online and supermarket bookselling and the resulting change in expectations of consumers who buy books. Indeed Christopher (2002) not only recommends further research into the field of customer service in order to identify crucial service issues (p.172) but also makes the vital point that consumers tend to change their minds about what is important. Given the lack of monitoring of consumer responses to bookselling already commented upon, this would seem to be particularly apposite to the bookselling trade.

Berry and Lovelock (in Palmer, 1996, p.252) point out that ‘(w)here services are complex and involve a high degree of buyer uncertainty, the likelihood of customers seeking a relationship is increased’. However, while this may well have been the case in the context of bookselling several years ago, it is now less applicable to the book trade. For the vast majority of people, internet access means that they enter a bookshop armed with the most up to date information possible. Therefore, the buyer uncertainty is decreased and the kind of information sought is more likely to be focused
upon the location of the book in question, or whether it is stock. In short, the kind of information that an assistant with the most elementary knowledge of in-house systems could manage. It is notable however, that knowledge of books by booksellers, while being promoted by their managers as a vital ingredient of bookshop identity, seems to be rather less important to the consumers, according to research findings, discussed in the following section. It seems that knowledge of systems, and of how to order books is a more important bookseller quality – for customers - than inherent book knowledge. As one focus group participant pointed out:

I’ve only ever... spoken to a bookseller when I’ve tried to order a book for me or something. And I’ve always found with that yes people have always been really willing to do that and helpful with that, but I’ve never... asked a bookseller questions about… books in general or what I should read.

Therefore, although Satterthwaite makes the point that online shopping has the potential to ‘undermine traditional civil and civic life in real communities dependent on face-to-face encounters’ (2001, p.2) it is not clear that the immediate impact of this lack of interaction would be missed by the majority of book shoppers. The role of the bookseller now seems to be less vital, given the easy access to information which most book buyers have.

5.10 Interaction with others

5.10.1 Interaction with other customers

Given the emphasis which the managers – both traditional and online – place on the traditional bookshop as a place of interaction, and of its potential to be a third place and a place of community relevance, a surprisingly large majority of bookshop users – 92% - said they had never spoken to others in bookshops. Furthermore, of the 8% who said they had spoken to others, this had happened only occasionally or just once. Respondents seem to differentiate very clearly between the bookshop and the coffee shop in this respect. Research revealed that the presence of a coffee shop has the power to make bookshop visitors behave in a more sociable manner, whereas in the bookshop itself, much more solitary behaviour seems to be usual, even when consumers visit in groups. It seems that the promotion of the bookshop as a place to meet and mix with like-minded people has some way to go, in order to become a third place. Exploring interaction with others to a greater degree in the focus groups, this was found to be confirmed, with a definite preference for book buying and browsing to
be a solitary experience. This is not to say that one would not go into a bookshop with family or friends, or meet them in the coffee shop. However, the actual shopping – unlike clothes or grocery shopping for example, did not seem to be an activity for more than one person:

I don’t like it when there’s anybody there. I like it to be quite an isolated thing where you go in and you get lost and you look at books and it’s a personal thing. When it’s busy it just puts me off. I’d rather just walk out ‘cos you want to go in, you seek an experience where it’s quiet and you want to enjoy that, you maybe go for a coffee or a sit down if there’s people there, - and I certainly wouldn’t even consider speaking to anybody, at all.

Another focus group participant commented: ‘There’s no question of it being a social experience for me – it’s a very anti-social experience.’ Rowley (2002, p.370) concurs that this is a quality which some consumers want from shopping, saying that some shopping trips are undertaken ‘to have time with oneself’. Looking at the online setting, where a direct interaction with others is obviously not possible as far as bookselling is concerned, nevertheless, attempts were made to examine how online consumers viewed this concept online. 85% of online book shoppers did not think that online book shopping could be a social experience. Of the remaining 15% who did, there was a qualification of this, with some saying that the exchanging of views about books (via customer reviews) could be viewed as a social experience. Some participants also commented that the continuing technological development of the internet could make this more common in the future, particularly if direct online chats were able to take place. Drew (2002, p.150) comments on the potential for this to take place since online it might be possible to create a bond ‘not only between the consumer and the brand, but also between consumer themselves. With the community approach companies will be able to increase brand loyalty, as the consumer will become more aware of other users who share their brand interest’. Therefore, by developing the technology to allow online book shoppers to interact with each other, bookshops might also reap the benefits of community brand interest.

Much has been written in recent years about virtual and online communities. Farquhar and Rowley (2006) acknowledge McDonough when they suggest that a virtual community can be, ‘(A)ny group of people who share a common bond, yet who are not dependent on physical interaction and a common geographic location’ (p.163). This all-encompassing definition could certainly be applied to online book shoppers. Hagel and
Armstrong (in Farquhar and Rowley, 2006) however define virtual communities as ‘computer-mediated space where there is an integration of content and communication with an emphasis on member generated content’ (p.163). While online book shoppers usually have access to the technical capabilities allowing them to add reviews, nevertheless, the degree of communication is limited to that of consumer to vendor (and vice versa, if one includes ‘personalised’ recommendations). While other consumers have access to consumer reviews, nevertheless, consumers at this stage have not been allowed the technology to communicate directly with each other on particular books for example; it is all through the conduit of book reviews. While the online managers consulted felt that their customers would respond positively to this kind of facility, they expressed reservations about giving consumers a free hand to write what they want in what would be a bookseller’s website. Indeed, Szmigin, Canning and Reppel (2005) note that ‘a supplier must also recognise the risks involved in a mechanism which it can not entirely control’ (p.484). However, ‘The idea of conversation is particularly important to this enabling aspect of community and is something that a marketer might wish to encourage in order to develop bonds between participants’ (ibid). This kind of initiative might be the one that could give the relatively small online sites (those studied) a significant competitive advantage over the current market leader online, Amazon.

5.10.2 Bookseller - consumer relationships online
It is significant to note that of the online booksellers examined, each of them emphasised the personal service which they felt they were offering their customers. One of the most surprising results emerging from the study of online bookshops was that it almost seemed as if some consumers found it easier to contact and interact with booksellers via the conduit of an online bookshop, rather than going in to a bookshop and talking to someone face to face. Each of the online bookshops studied – including two chains – were aware of individual ‘regular’ customers, often because of the small numbers of online bookshop personnel allocated to dealing with online enquiries. Nevertheless, a key quality of online bookselling from the managers’ point of view was the importance of being easily contactable for customers. Many of those interviewed stressed this as a quality which differentiated them from Amazon; one of the few competitive advantages which smaller online bookshops can have over such a huge online presence. Of course, it is important to be aware that no-one from Amazon was available for interview, therefore this research finding can only be said to apply to other online bookshops. The development of personal relationships with regular online
customers was a frequent occurrence and was emphasised by the online managers as a key element of their customer service. There are obvious parallels here between online and traditional bookshops with regard to the kind of interaction which they have with their customers. However, it almost seems as if in some chains it is easier to develop relationships with customers via online bookshops rather than in-store, particularly if that store happens to be particularly sizeable. Indeed, in the context of online bookselling, the online chains almost seem to take on an ‘independent’ air, nurturing relationships with customers and fostering the kind of direct interaction which somehow seems rather more difficult in traditional bookshops. This seems to be an important distinction between online bookselling (for chains and independents) and Amazon, which seems to maintain a much more indirect relationship with its customers, despite the ‘personal’ recommendations and easy availability of customer book reviews.

This aspect of personal relationships between online bookshop customer service personnel and their customers also served to point out the often limited resources that these online bookshops have: clearly it is more likely that you will build up a relationship with customers if there are only two or three people working in that department (as was the case) as opposed to a myriad of personnel, dealing largely with e-mailed enquiries. It is also perhaps ironic to note that the online bookshops examined each reported a kind of familiarity with their customers, and mentioned the element of loyalty which was evident, even via online bookselling. It seems that the presence of an offline store allows customers to develop a relationship and a sense of ownership with their bookshop, which then gets extended to the equivalent online store. However, when looking at chain bookshops online, in some cases it seems as if rather than being an anonymous experience, the online book buying experience can be with staff with whom one is familiar. This would certainly seem to be a quality which defines the online bookshops studied – some of them with a significant chain bookshop presence – from Amazon. This kind of direct ‘online’ relationship would seem to be a distinct competitive advantage which these stores have over Amazon and is something which they seem to capitalise upon, with named bookshop experts on some sites e.g. www.blackwells.co.uk

Satterthwaite makes the interesting point that ‘online shopping offers significant social and cultural benefits for the individual and society, of which the most important is the powerful democratization involved’ (2001, p.209). The ‘democratization’ referred to is the ease of access to online shopping, making aspects of mobility and disability
irrelevant, and also the fact that one is essentially anonymous online, so age, gender and ethnicity are irrelevant also. Of course, without fellow customers and booksellers around, one can be more honest about book choices and not influenced either consciously or unconsciously by those around you. Therefore, the 'social discrimination of shopping in real stores, whether real or perceived, is eliminated in the virtual world' (ibid). This particular point however did not emerge as being significant in the current research; only 12.5% said that the 'absence of others' was a favourite quality and it was a subject which did not emerge at all in the focus groups or qualitative elements of the questionnaires.

5.11 Brand distinction online

5.11.1 Distinction in identity between online and traditional stores
It is noteworthy that the online stores studied with a traditional as well as an online presence were at pains to retain a consistent brand image in both bookselling environments. (This included both independent and chain stores). Interestingly, this is primarily because they felt they were catering for the same customer profile in both bookselling environments. Indeed, in some cases, they were catering for the same individual customers. This would seem to distinguish the approach to branding carried out by online bookshops that have an existing offline presence, with that of Amazon for instance, where customers are obviously solely online. In some cases, it was stated openly that an online presence was not used to expand the market; simply to offer another option for existing consumers who found difficulty getting to high street branches, or those who had developed loyalty to a particular chain and moved abroad. However, ‘(c)ompletely replicating an offline brochure online completely ignores the Internet’s unique applications’ according to O’Shields (in Drew, 2002, p.8). Nevertheless, this is broadly what online booksellers choose to do.

In this case, the online presence allowed those consumers to maintain their relationship with particular bookshops. This similarity of approach and similarity of projected brand identity was also clear in the significant degree of crossover of promotions undertaken by traditional stores and their online equivalents. As Manager X said,

We have to reflect the offers in the shops; we have to support the shops and be there when they’re shut.
In this kind of instance, an online presence seems to be used as a support system; a back up mechanism for existing traditional stores, rather than being used in any way innovatively, or to expand a potentially new market online. One also has to bear in mind the vital point that existing customers are financially much more viable than efforts to gather new - potentially unprofitable - customers (Gilbert, 2003; De Kare-Silver, 1998; Schiffman and Kanuk, 2004). Nevertheless, one might have expected a more innovative approach from the ‘clicks and mortar’ bookshops; a more developed consciousness of a differentiation in the brand.

5.11.2 Advantages and disadvantages of online bookselling

5.11.2.1 Price, range and convenience
It is clear that online shopping has distinct advantages which it can offer to many people who are looking for books. Price, range and convenience were key qualities which emerged time and again from online book shoppers. The focus group participants were clear that round the clock access to online shops and the convenience of the experience were key advantages for this kind of book shopping. McGoldrick comments that ‘convenience outranks price as a factor for many consumers in stimulating on-line behaviour’ (2002, p.602). While this is not the case in this study (price is cited as more important than convenience by 79.5% rather than 71.6% - see fig. 4.6.15) nevertheless, one can easily see that both of these qualities are very important for online consumers of books.

The proliferation of ‘time poor’ consumers has meant that a shopping environment which offers 24 hour access and which is self-directed will inevitably be successful as it automatically overcomes many of the problems associated with extremely busy consumers: the stores are never closed, there is no parking to consider and there are never too many other people around, queuing to pay. Szymanski and Hise (2000) found in their research that convenience, site design, and financial security were the dominant factors in consumer e-satisfaction. In the current research, convenience was a quality which emerged as vitally important time and again from online bookshop users (see fig. 4.6.14). Recent research carried out by Key Note (Publishing News, 2007) also found that convenience and greater choice were the key reasons cited for book shopping online. Some of these qualities seem to be very powerful attractions for those consumers book shopping online, as illustrated by some of their comments, below.
It is the sheer range of choice that swings my vote in favour of online bookshops, so they are excellent if you know what you want.

In reality I tend to purchase books online due to the increased convenience and speed. I also find the online reviews very helpful along with the facilities to easily trace other books by the same author or find other authors / books you may be interested in based on what you are currently looking up.

It is also notable that while many online buyers check books online then go to a traditional shop for ‘physical checking’ and subsequent purchase, a larger percentage – 69% - do the very opposite, checking a book in a traditional bookshop, then proceeding to buy it online. The reason for doing this, given by almost 75% of respondents, was to get a better price online.

5.11.2.2 The tactile element
Reasons given by those online survey participants about the reasons why they still preferred traditional bookshop included some surprising comments. Many referred to the tactile element of shopping in traditional bookshops and how they missed this online. The opportunity to pick up and touch books; leaf through them and turn them over all seemed to be very important qualities, missing from the online book buying experience. This was also supported by later questioning which specifically asked online book shoppers whether they missed the tactile element of shopping online. Almost 89% said that the tactile quality of book shopping was a quality which they missed when shopping online. The tactile experience in particular seems to have a direct impact on behaviour in online bookshops; in particular, it seems to encourage online searchers to locate their book online, then go and check it, in a traditional bookshop. Almost 57% of online bookshop users said that they do this. Again, the most common reason given for this was a desire to check the book physically – to pick it up, leaf through, and check the contents. In addition to this lack of tactile experience, many online book shoppers also said that they missed the atmosphere of traditional book shopping and simply spending time in the bookshop setting. This spending of time seemed to be closely tied up with the time which traditional bookshop shoppers spend browsing. The importance of the tactile quality of traditional bookshops was clearly acknowledged both by traditional and online managers. Manager X said:
It’s two completely different…ways of buying. The high street, the
advantage for me, as a book buyer…is being able to browse. You can walk
in, you can pick up the book, you can feel the weight of the book, you can
flick through it. Many of our shops you know they’re very welcoming, there’s
seats to sit down in… So I think that’s a distinct advantage there, is actually
being able to pick up the books and flick through and also to be able to
speak to the staff and ask questions and recommendations and I think that,
the first part obviously we can’t replicate online.

Again, the tactile element and the ability to have a direct relationship with booksellers
seem to be the managers’ perceived advantage of the traditional bookshop. This is
supported by research findings from Phau and Poon (in Fenech and O’Cass, 2001)
who point out the lack of sensuousness in online shopping. Underhill notes the myriad
of sensuous experience which traditional shopping can provide, allowing immediate
gratification as well as social interaction (1999, p.217). This was also supported by
online research participants, one of whom commented that,

Online book shopping will never match the full experience you get walking
into a traditional bookshop. It is not just the books but the whole experience
of sight, sound and smell of the shop and interacting with other browsers.

5.11.3 The dominance of Amazon
The survey with online bookshop users revealed very clearly the dominance which
Amazon has in the online bookselling market. Of those questioned, over 80% habitually
use Amazon. This of course has important implications for the concept of branding
online since, given the almost total dominance of Amazon, the element of brand choice
is one which is much less important for online bookselling. Solomon (2002, p.4) notes
that; ‘The choice of a favourite web site is very much a lifestyle statement: It says a lot
about what a person is interested in, as well as something about the type of person she
would like to be’. Given the comparative lack of choice in online bookselling, the choice
of Amazon perhaps says more about other online booksellers than it does about
Amazon itself. However, Brynjolfsson and Smith found that online brands in many ways
seem to be even more important to consumers than offline brands. Therefore, the
internet, ‘far from being a great equaliser of retailers and eliminating the need for
branding… may heighten the importance of differences among retailers in dimensions
such as trust and branding’ (2000, p.579). In the context of the findings by Brynjolfsson
and Smith it is interesting to note that Amazon has created a fresh new brand, with no existing bookshop presence, while other booksellers with an online presence were moving from an existing offline presence to develop one online. Even those with a strong offline identity, such as Waterstone’s had their own online site only for a brief period, before handing over the running of it to Amazon (as did Borders). It is only recently that Waterstone’s have taken over the running of their own online site again. Ottakar’s has since been subject to a takeover by HMV Media (owners of Waterstone’s) although even its site was not one from which one could purchase books. Blackwell’s has a successful online site, but given the fact that it was the first transactional bookselling online site in the UK, it must be said that it has failed to capitalise on that ground-breaking achievement and like so many other ‘clicks and mortar’ sites has its own loyal customers while never really capturing the imagination of the wider book buying community. The approach taken by Jeff Bezos of Amazon, was that he wanted to start an online business and that books were a suitable product to be sold online (Spector, 2000). Perhaps this allowed him a clearer more focused approach than that of booksellers with a long history in the traditional trade.

This is a point which Jeff Bezos of Amazon is well aware of, saying,

We’re not going to replace the bookstore...One of the things that’s interesting about books as a product is that people go to bookstores in part because they want books, and in part because they want a nice place to go. It’s a challenge for all interactive bookstores to make their site as engaging as possible (Spector, 2000, p.80).

It is interesting that in consumers’ minds there seems to be a distinction between brand recognition of traditional bookselling brands – there was particularly high recognition and familiarity with booksellers like Waterstone’s, Ottakar’s, WHSmith, Books etc. and Borders in the bookshop surveys. Yet, online, Amazon was by far the most familiar brand. This could perhaps be explained by the previous failure of the established traditional brands such as Waterstone’s to run a successful online site. Nevertheless, one might have expected a little more awareness of the presence of these well known brands online. As Bury and Kean commented in the trade: ‘The premier league of high street booksellers has failed to compete online, leaving the field open’ (2005, p.26). This failure to compete has been capitalised upon by Amazon, making them the premier online bookseller in the UK, as well as being tremendously successful globally. It is also worth noting further comments by Brynjolfsson and Smith who note that
‘Amazon.com is the undisputed leader in online book sales, and yet is far from the leader in having lower prices’ (p.577). Their research was carried out in 2000, so whether Amazon is now cheaper is unclear, nevertheless, there is certainly the perception by consumers that a key reason for shopping online is the good prices. Degeratu, Alexandru, Rangaswamy and Wu (in Brynjolfsson and Smith, 2000, p.564) found that consumer sensitivity to pricing can sometimes be lower online than in the high street. There was certainly no awareness of any higher prices in the online bookshops referred to by research respondents (primarily referring to Amazon).

5.11.4 The personalisation of online book shopping
Other very powerfully attractive qualities of online book shopping sites include the personalisation of the sites for consumers, as well as the technological capabilities of the sites, which enable online booksellers to offer many more facilities than traditional booksellers. Individualised recommendations, such as ‘other customers who bought that, bought this’ offer online book sites a clear advantage, and these kinds of facilities also seem to be very popular with online buyers. Linked recommendations were felt to give online bookshops a distinct advantage over traditional bookshops. This ‘personalisation’ by many online booksellers – offering tailored recommendations for example - seems to provide a key advantage for them. As Childers, Carr, Peck and Carson point out:

A technology oriented perspective that attempts to treat shopping media as cold information systems, rather than immersive, hedonic environments, is likely to be fundamentally misguided, especially for products with strong hedonic attributes (2001, p.527).

Given that books arguably have strong hedonic, indulgent attributes, it would seem that a personalised approach is the correct one for online booksellers to take. Liang and Lai (2002, p.431) note that ‘there are neither guidelines nor theories to show how electronic store features affect consumer purchases’. However, in this research, consumers responded very positively to the plethora of recommendations and the customers reviews available online. While these are of course a very well known feature of traditional bookstores, nevertheless, traditional bookselling cannot compete with the scope and sheer number of these recommendation and reviews online. The presence of these is a feature which consumers respond to very positively. As Reynolds comments, ‘worryingly for established retailers, new entrants have also been
seeking to create the possibilities of new kinds of relationships with customers, which are dependent upon technology for mediation’ (2000, p.421). Gilbert (2003, p.426) describes the advantages of internet retailing over traditional retailing; referring to, ‘the greater degree of interactivity, allowing a dialogue to be established directly with individual customers’. This has proven to be the case, with online consumers responding very positively to personalised recommendations and customer reviews. Royle and Stockdale (2000) also made the point that electronic commerce facilitates direct interaction with the consumer as well as the development of more productive relationships. Spector (2000, p.87) notes that ‘Amazon ‘promoted the idea of creating a community of customers. The company fostered this clubby feeling by encouraging readers to write and submit book reviews’. However, while few respondents to the research felt that book reviews had the potential to make online shopping a ‘community’ experience, the general consensus was that this would probably happen as technology improved and as online book shoppers could communicate directly with each other (as they already can do in online book group forums). As the situation is at the moment, consumers certainly enjoy and appreciate reviews and ‘personalised’ recommendations, but to suggest it engenders a sense of online community when there is no direct communication, does not seem to be the case. It is worth noting that some online shoppers however, are aware that these kind of recommendations, because they are electronically generated, are not always intelligent. For example, as one participant said:

The recommendations are never intelligent, e.g. If you've purchased a compilation, they always recommend the individual text.

Some online users also felt overloaded by recommendations. These are clearly aspects of recommendations which online booksellers need to be mindful of.

Another key advantage which online bookshops can offer and which again is arguably linked to the personalisation of online shopping, is that of customer reviews of books. This proved to be a particularly popular facility with online shoppers, and was commented upon in the focus groups. The sheer widespread availability of book reviews, available because of the technological capabilities of online bookshops, means that this is another advantage which online bookshops have over traditional bookshops. However, as was pointed out in the focus groups which were carried out, some book shoppers felt that bookshops do not make enough use of newspaper reviews. While these are obviously different from customer reviews, nevertheless, it
gives a point of reference to the consumer and allows them to make a judgement about a particular book, with the added advantage of having someone else’s opinion there too. Some bookshops already do this to an extent with staff recommends section, but it is difficult, if not impossible for traditional bookshops to match the sheer scope of reviews available online, simply because available online technology makes it easy for readers to post a review, if they so wish. As yet, bookshops do not seem to have adopted this facility for their own consumers, but if the administrative procedures could be put in place, perhaps it is worth considering.

5.12 The future of bookselling

It would seem that both traditional and online bookselling have a healthy future, since each bookselling environment offers distinctive qualities to the consumer. It was felt that while traditional bookshops have the advantage when it comes to atmosphere, browsability and the possibility of visiting a coffee shop, online sites are convenient, offer a vast range of books and give access to recommendations and customer reviews. Consumers are very enthusiastic about each of these qualities and select the environment of their choice according to their circumstances at any particular time. Furthermore, one cannot distinguish absolutely between consumers in online and traditional bookselling environments, since research findings show significant overlap in the use of each of these bookselling settings.

The experience of book buying in each environment is so distinct that it seems that bookshops, both traditional as well as online have a healthy, if challenging future. The conclusions drawn from this discussion section are set out in the following chapter, drawing the main findings from the discussion and setting out relevant recommendations.
Chapter 6 – Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction
The overall aim of this research project was:

To evaluate the effectiveness of applied marketing in bookshops and to develop an understanding of consumer responses to that marketing.

The study gathered data from bookshop experts in order to set the research in context, but primarily gathered information from consumers regarding their responses to the marketing used in online and chain bookshops. This section sets out the conclusions from the research, informed with reference to relevant literature, important theories and published data as well as comparing and contrasting the findings with these data in order to set the study in context and to show where it fits with other current studies. The research can therefore be said to have satisfied its aim. The following section also demonstrates the key findings, contextualising them with important literature, theories and industry data in order to support the conclusions, as well as demonstrating how the research compares, contrasts and extends current studies, demonstrating the original contribution to knowledge.

6.2 Discounting and homogeneity
The chain bookshops focused upon within the research, fail to maintain a strong brand identity and the research concludes that consumers perceive no meaningful differentiation between the chains. A key, original finding emerging both from bookshop personnel as well as consumers, was the similarity of marketing techniques used across chain bookshops; in particular, the use of tables at the front of stores, focusing upon ‘3 for 2’ offers and bestsellers. As one might expect, this has led to the blurring of identity of chain bookshops, with consumers unaware of distinctions of identity. One might speculate that a discount-oriented approach would have continued to work in chain bookshops, had it not been for the growing success of online bookselling which, rather than concentrating upon a limited range of discounted titles, has been able to provide access to a vast range of books, as well as easily accessed customer reviews of these titles and linked recommendations. However, wider societal changes must also be taken into account, as consumer groups become more and more splintered, demonstrating disparate interests and a more individualised approach to identity. This results in an infinite, constantly shifting variety of groups of consumers with which online retailing is ideally suited to deal, whereas high street retailing, using traditional
approaches, finds this variety of consumer more difficult to satisfy. Ferrell (2008, p.163) notes that,

By offering a standard product to all customers, the organization becomes vulnerable to competitors that offer specialized products that better match customers’ needs.

This comment underlines the vulnerability of chain bookshops given the choice and specialisation that online can offer. Ferrell notes the above in the context of segmentation, and specifically with regard to the pitfalls of adopting a mass market approach to segmentation, targeting and positioning. The research found that chain bookshops lack differentiation in their approaches to marketing. As well as ‘competing’ with each other (in the broadest sense of the word, since the research has demonstrated that most consumers do not distinguish between chain bookshops), chain bookshops en masse are now exposed to competition from online bookshops and the extra range, and filtering (choice) mechanisms which they can offer consumers. Technological innovation and investment has ensured that online bookshops are capable of the ultimate in niche marketing – one-to-one marketing. Clearly traditional bookshops cannot compete in this way; rather, they need to increase value for their consumers by adopting more appropriate marketing techniques (see the recommendations section).

The research indicates that most chain bookshops take a multisegment approach to dealing with consumers. The reason why a traditional STP approach may not always be appropriate is because it concentrates upon identifying groups of consumers who will buy a product in quantity, or will buy a high value product, albeit in smaller quantities. Anderson (2006) proposes a newer approach to marketing which concentrates upon a wider choice, but enables consumers to buy more easily from a wide range of products. Nevertheless, a multisegmented approach is the most widely used segmentation strategy in medium to large firms (Ferrell, 2008) and one can see how it is appropriate in bookselling. The research found that chain bookshops adopt a fairly ‘broad-brush’ approach to segmentation and overall, they seem to promote different product types across different groups. For example one can often see promotions such as holiday reading, or staff recommends or, more recently, readers’ top 100 titles might appeal across a wide range of target groups. However, reflecting upon the interviews with bookshop managers, what emerged was a lack of clarity regarding target markets. Even though bookshops claim that they adopt an approach
which tailors stock for individuals and locations (‘micromarketing’ - Kotler, 2006, p.212) nevertheless, if this tailoring is not perceived by the consumer, it is not effective. That is not to say that this application of micromarketing is useless – rather, it needs to be undertaken with more vigour and conviction, thus satisfying the consumer desire for variety which the research clearly established, as well as satisfying traditional bookshop aims to be locally distinctive – an ‘independent within a chain’. Given the wealth of feedback from consumers stating they want improved range in high street bookshops and their general dissatisfaction with the usual approaches to display methods and discounting, the research concludes that chain bookshops need to strategically rethink their approach to consumer segmentation and targeting.

In effect, the focus should be on breadth and variety, yet the impact of the book selections which are promoted so strongly at the entrance of chain bookshops is to project a mass, undifferentiated approach. Therefore, there is a tension between the stated strategy of chain bookshops and the applied marketing: the chains are aiming for differentiation yet their very approaches are so similar to each other and undifferentiated in application that they project the very opposite of what they are aiming to do. This is an original finding which has important implications for chain bookshop approaches to marketing.

With the overriding aim of market expansion, each chain bookshop studied has adopted a predominantly discount-oriented approach to bookselling, with a heavy concentration on ‘3 for 2’ promotions and similar multi-buy offers. While the initial adoption of discounted titles might be regarded as the strategic use of loss leaders in order to tempt new customers into bookshops (Miller, 2006, p.144), there now seems to be an uncritical nationwide, certainly chain-wide, use of discounted titles noted both by managers and consumers in the research. Commentary in the trade on this subject tends to range from acceptance that this is a book trade phenomenon, to calls for a more strategic, long term approach. A leader article in The Bookseller commented that ‘both retailers and publishers have become dangerously over-reliant on what is a tactic, not a long-term strategy’ (Bookseller, 2006c, p.21). Key Note (2008) say that the value of retail book sales will rise 13.8% between 2008 and 2012 and research by Mintel (2007a) points out that while sales and turnover are predicted to increase, if bookshops continue to give away margin through the widespread use of discounting then it is hard to see how they can operate profitably. The results of a strategic review held by Waterstone’s in 2007 (ibid) led to them working on ‘refocusing of the product range on more populist books’ while simultaneously aiming to develop stock range on their
online site in order to increase consumer choice via that conduit. In particular, Waterstone’s strategists believe that children’s books are less likely to be bought online, therefore children’s books are to have an increased presence in their terrestrial stores. However, their strategy of focusing on populist titles contradicts current research findings, which point very clearly at consumer desire for increased, specialist choices. Even more pointedly, this strategy directly contradicts what Mintel (ibid) reports about Waterstone’s consumers, stating that;

According to Waterstone’s, over 50% of its book sales are of titles ranked 5000 and below on the bestseller list, indicating a preference among its customers for a wide range of less populist books.

While Waterstone’s might argue that they intend to provide choice via the development of their online site, this directly contradicts what the current research found: while there is overlap between consumers visiting online and traditional sites, it is nevertheless important to realise that people visit online and traditional settings expecting very different experiences – they are not interchangeable. As is detailed in the recommendations which follow, this research would suggest that a different approach would be wise.

Ironically, the heaviest emphasis upon discounting is often on those titles which would have sold extremely well in any case. The well known ‘Harry Potter’ titles by J.K. Rowling are a good example, with both Tesco and Amazon selling the latest book in the series at half price, and many chain bookshops selling it at a significant discount. However, this also applies to other well known authors with strong sales records. This bewildering approach to blanket discounting by chain bookshops has most certainly led to a significant loss of margin over the years. Whether the loss of margin has been offset by an increase in sales is a question to which the book trade is unable to provide a definitive answer. Retail experts outwith the book trade have also commented on the phenomenon of widespread discounting. Strategic consultant Stephan Butscher commented that ‘(t)his self destruction has got to stop…The book industry is the only industry in which the best and most sought after products are offered for the cheapest prices’. He also went on to point out that loss of volume sales following cessation of discounting would most probably be compensated for by increased margin on each sale (Bookseller, 2006e, p.11).
The current research demonstrates that while responses to price offers like ‘3 for 2’ are largely positive, the more experienced consumers are weary of the domination of discounting in bookshops, as well as the way that these books are displayed. This is an original finding which adds to current knowledge of consumer responses to bookshop marketing. More importantly, when consumer responses such as impressions of homogeneity across chain bookshops and the blurring of brand identity are experienced, they tend to be associated with discounting. These responses should most certainly sound a note of caution for traditional booksellers adopting a discount-dominated approach. While overall consumers responded positively to discounted titles there were nevertheless reservations about the impression of homogeneity given of titles promoted in this way. It was found that the similarity of presentation of these offers; piled on tables and always at the front of the bookshops, created the impression of low quality stock, often regardless of the actual books in the offers. This standardisation of display style leads many people to assume this inferior quality, usually because in the past, the kinds of books in these offers have been perceived to be of a lower quality, such as ‘chick-lit’.

Established marketing writers such as Dibb are in accordance with the trade commentators quoted above, as well as supporting the findings of the current research, regarding the dubious wisdom of adopting a discount-heavy approach over the longer term:

\[(T)he\ shrewd\ marketer\ should\ endeavour\ to\ minimise\ price\ cutting\ and\ discounting.\ In\ most\ cases\ the\ only\ short\ term\ beneficiary\ of\ a\ price\ war\ is\ the\ consumer.\ Indeed\ the\ business,\ its\ distributors,\ the\ brand\ or\ the\ long-term\ flexibility\ of\ the\ marketing\ mix\ may\ suffer\ as\ a\ consequence\ (P.666).\]

This is supported and extended by the research findings: while a discount-heavy approach can certainly be said to benefit the consumer, as evidenced by the broadly positive responses to discounting both from experienced and newer bookshop users, nevertheless, this discount-heavy approach can also be said to disadvantage the consumer, given the clear perception, especially from experienced bookshop users, of a lack of distinction across UK chain bookshops. The similarity of marketing approaches seems to have blended their brand identities. The danger of this blending is that it negates the inherent advantages of strong branding. While this blurring of identity of bookshops due to their indistinct brand identities has been an unhappy by-product of the marketing approaches adopted by chain bookshops, nevertheless,
established writing on branding and the key role it plays in aiding both buyer and seller (as noted in the literature review) underlines the importance of a strong brand identity. As Dibb notes, without branding, differentiation becomes difficult for the consumer, and shoppers’ choices can become arbitrary (2006, p.316). This supports the current research which found that consumer opinion about chain bookshops is that they are essentially ‘all the same’, as repeated by a focus group participant.

The research found that some customers felt they were not being catered for, such is the concentration upon discounted titles and the perception that favourite subjects outwith the scope of ‘3 for 2’ promotions, such as art, crafts, poetry and militaria for example, were ignored. Focus group participants referred to having to go past these offers to get to the books they were interested in. It seems clear that chain bookshops should revise their approach to book promotion and in particular the use of ‘3 for 2’ and discount offers. While it is important to note that most customers respond positively to discounted offers, nevertheless, the research findings show that many consumers have strong reservations about this approach. Indeed, research by BML showed that sometimes, discounting serves to confuse rather than illuminate, with one consumer surmising that if a book is going to sell well, the bookshops will probably discount it anyway, ‘whereas the books I might be more interested in remain at full price’ (BML, 2005b, p.8). The BML research also found that ‘price cutting also appears to engender a feeling that books sold at full price are overpriced’ (ibid). There is clearly a need for bookshops to rethink their strategy of discounting both in terms of commercial sense, and making sense for the consumer.

Despite the managers in chain bookshops emphasising the importance of range – an element deemed of prime importance by both traditional and online shoppers – the research found that there was, ironically, little perception of range or depth by consumers of traditional bookshops. This can be accounted for both by the predominance of ‘3 for 2’ offers, often containing the same books from store to store, and also by the style of visual promotion undertaken in chain bookshops with the emphasis on current high profile titles at the front, top ten displays and tables of discounted titles. This formulaic style of highly branded front of shop display adopted by many chain bookshops was something which most bookshop users, especially the more experienced ones, were very aware of, and they generally felt this style of display lent a feeling of sameness to the bookshops adopting this technique. While the choice of titles beyond these promoted areas may be wide – a moot point – the fact remains that range and depth are not perceived by consumers. Both traditional and online
shoppers emphasised range and the availability of favourite authors and subject areas as the elements which most tempted them to buy books. This is clearly more difficult to cater for than relying on discounted titles, but it seems that these qualities are what consumers want.

Given that the research concludes that there is a lack of differentiation across chain bookshops, this in turn leads to the conclusion, stated above, that chain bookshops are not segmenting their markets intelligently and that a revised strategic approach to market segmentation and appropriate targeting of consumers needs to be adopted. It is useful to appreciate how thoughtful positioning can make a more effective contribution to bookselling. The current research has established that there is a gap between the consumer perception of bookshop image and the image which bookshops are trying to promote. This is a point which positioning needs to address:

Positioning involves implanting the brand’s unique benefits and differentiation in customers’ minds (Kotler, 2006, p.216).

Kotler makes this point in the wider context of segmentation. It is also vital to remember that positioning should create a distinct identity in consumers’ minds. The product or brand in question must have distinct differences and advantages over that of its competitors if it is to be marketed effectively. It is clear that the research identifies a clear problem here with the perceived blurring of identity, or rather the lack of distinction perceived across traditional bookshops. While this has been alluded to in trade literature and in the wider media, the current empirical research establishes the truth of this situation. In order to implement positioning effectively it is necessary to ensure that ‘customer motivations and expectation in a particular market [are] fully understood’ (Dibb, 2006, p.248). Therefore, in order to implement a suitable mix of marketing which would effectively position any given chain bookshop, an understanding of consumer wants and needs is first necessary. Reflecting upon the opinions expressed by the bookshop managers and their overall aims, i.e. catering for the widest market possible and expanding the market, this supports the conclusions stated above, i.e. that traditional bookshops are not segmenting their market intelligently. While they seem to adopt a multisegment approach, promoting various genres of books to various groups of consumers, the segmentation is not clear and there is a lack of clarity regarding target markets. If, as stated, bookshops are aiming at the widest possible market, this mass market approach holds many inherent difficulties, since catering for the widest range of consumers means it is very difficult to satisfy
them all. This is supported by the fact that the findings from this research clearly demonstrate that consumers are dissatisfied with traditional approaches to bookselling and would appreciate more depth of choice.

A further key finding from the research is that traditional bookshops are not addressing ‘what target consumers expect and believe to be the most important considerations’ (Dibb, p.249). There is a lack of genuine industry-wide knowledge regarding what bookshop customers are actually looking for. The current research found that consumers value genuine choice and variety ahead of most other qualities, although price, coffee shops and convenience are also important qualities. Dibb outlines consumer knowledge as being vital when approaching positioning, but the research has demonstrated that bookshops are not responding to what consumers want. For example, the desire for greater book range from consumers, and the growing weariness of multi-buy offers. Neither do bookshops seem to be clear about how consumers respond to what they are already doing. This thesis goes some way to addressing this problem, by establishing how consumers respond to the marketing already in place. Nevertheless, the current research demonstrates that trade wide knowledge of consumers is poor. Dibb (and others supporting a traditional approach of positioning such as Kotler and Ferrell) emphasise the importance of consumer knowledge, in the context of segmentation, and in order to position intelligently. This failure to segment and position intelligently is closely related to traditional bookshops’ adoption of discount-led approaches and of their tendency all to follow the same undifferentiated kinds of marketing. The approach suggested by Dibb and others seems an intelligent one, and more in-depth knowledge of the consumer is provided by the research findings. For example, the research found that consumers were inclined to find the image of bookshops homogenous, and that discounting needed to be used sparingly and intelligently, along with integrating the kind of variety and choice which consumers want. The present research therefore supports what Dibb et al are saying regarding segmentation, targeting and positioning – finding out what the consumers want (and how they respond to what you have) and acting upon this information is vitally important.

One of the difficulties for chain bookshops in providing range is that the book trade and bookshops in particular have difficulty predicting what customers actually want and will buy. While publishers support writing from established authors as well as tackling the challenge of finding new, quality, saleable authors, the challenge of predicting what will sell is nevertheless a perennial problem for the trade and could be dealt with to a
degree by investing in research and finding out more about consumer behaviour. Repeated calls for research into consumer behaviour in the book trade abound (Watson, 2002; Holman, 2007; Bookseller, 2007; Horner, 2007a) – and indeed was one of the reasons that this particular area of research was undertaken - but in-depth, widely disseminated research is scarce. Certainly a degree of balance is called for between the ‘3 for 2’ types of promotion and individuality of stock, if the breadth of range, so popular with online consumers, is to be provided by traditional bookshops. Indeed the fact that the research revealed that there is a ‘duality’ of experience available in bookshops demonstrates that this approach is wise. This ‘duality’ refers to the fact that while some consumers in traditional bookshops are seeking a leisurely browsing experience, sometimes what others require is a functional swift visit. The very number of books published and the incredible choice means that bookshops will never have every book in stock that people want. However, given that the research findings demonstrate so clearly the importance of browsing in traditional bookshops, as well as how much more likely consumers are to impulse buy in traditional rather than online stores, traditional bookshops must capitalise on this by providing breadth of range, and the opportunity for the serendipitous find. The research has demonstrated that qualities closely allied to the browsing experience, such as atmosphere, spending time browsing, and the tactile experience of being in a traditional bookshops are also important to consumers. These qualities are unique to traditional bookshops and traditional bookshops must acknowledge these issues and provide consumers with the opportunities to satisfy these needs.

The current research findings clearly demonstrate a move away from consultation with booksellers and ‘expert advice’ and more self-reliance when it comes to the selection of books. While this research does not concentrate particularly upon the independent sector, there is clearly scope in independent bookshops to focus upon welcoming personal service. Mintel (2007b) found that while the book market is a challenging one, particularly for terrestrial booksellers, there is still scope to grow volume sales of books, despite the market being mature. They suggest that booksellers can still increase purchase frequency from established markets such as ABC1 groups, ‘third age’ groups and women. Indeed one of a series of recent marketing initiatives undertaken by the Booksellers Association specifically targeted the women’s book buying market (Booksellers Association, 2007a). However, it is vital to note that ‘they need to offer real added value, whether through expert advice, a specialised list [or] welcoming personal service’. While the current research is partially in accordance with this suggestion from Mintel, it indicates that their advice is actually more appropriate for
independent booksellers, rather than the chains. The current research strongly suggests that the era of specialist service and expert advice from chain booksellers has passed. Nevertheless, the current research does suggest, in accordance with Mintel, that a more specialised stock list (one could reasonably interpret this as a stock of books unique to each branch of a chain of bookshops) would be successful. Chain bookshops cannot realistically compete with the choice and filtering mechanisms offered by Amazon in particular, but there is considerable scope for them to offer more specialised stock in their branches. This approach would also support another research finding – the desire of the bookshop managers, to become more ‘independent’, as well as being the beginning of a move away from the homogenised approach to bookselling. It is ironic to note that this seems to be largely in opposition to the strategic direction recently adopted by Waterstone’s, as noted above.

6.3 The bookshop as a third place
The research demonstrates that the presence of a coffee shop in a bookshop has the effect of promoting that environment as a socialising space, something which the bookshop in isolation does not do. The research findings also demonstrate that the inclination to socialise increases with the presence of a coffee shop. The research therefore concludes that the presence of a coffee shop within a bookshop is a signal of accessibility. The widespread adoption of coffee shops and the promotion of bookshops as a lifestyle choice, or destination store (Kreitzman, 1999a, 1999b; Oldenburg, 1997) was an aspect of traditional bookselling which each of the chain stores studied had adopted, and of which each of the managers were very aware. Manager observation suggested that coffee shops in store increased the likelihood of attracting new clientele into bookshops, although whether this has a direct impact upon book sales is something which has not been analysed within the trade. Mintel research in this area (2007c) also points out that coffee shops have the advantage for bookshops of mainly attracting socioeconomic group ABC1s and as these groups are a growing proportion of the wider population – i.e. there is a general societal move towards wealthier more socially advantaged social groups - the adoption of coffee shops could prove a wise move for bookshops, although one would have to suggest that this is more by chance than strategic planning. As one manager participating in the research commented, the inclusion of a coffee shop can enhance the experiential quality of book shopping. Indeed, Waxman’s research into coffee shops (2006) found that they can inspire strong emotions and feelings of community. While the current research found that, overall, consumers responded positively to the presence of coffee
shops, there was broad agreement that coffee shops should be in a clearly demarcated area within the bookshop and that books should not be squashed into unsuitable areas in order to make room for a coffee shop. There were further caveats added, which bookshops should take heed of. For example, a small percentage of consumers were actually put off entering by the presence of a coffee shop, and this often seemed linked to the overlap in space between the two; therefore a separate demarcated area would seem to be vital. However, there was also some resistance to the ‘lifestyle’ element of the coffee shop in the bookshops; an idea that the coffee shop was becoming more important than the books and that the book buyers were being squeezed out. Again, these comments were made by a minority, but demonstrate an important point about the growth of coffee shops, nevertheless.

The research findings indicate that the presence of a coffee shop enhances the use of the bookshop as a social venue. This finding extends current knowledge about coffee shops, particularly in the context of the bookshop. While Waxman’s research (below) indicates the important role which coffee shops can play in the community, this has not been applied in the context of the bookshop before. Consumers were very positive about the potential use of bookshops as social venues, particularly in the evenings. A key advantage which traditional bookshops have over online bookshops is that they can offer a venue – a third place – for people to come to, even if bookshop consumers are not convinced by the terminology. Suggestions such as poetry readings and jazz recitals were met with very positive responses. Waxman’s research found that coffee shops play an important role in the lives of many of the people who use them, such as providing a ‘sense of belonging’ as well as allowing opportunities for ‘support and networking, and sense of community’ (p.35). Kreitzman (1999b, p.36) also suggests that the bookshop can be a ‘social club’, a venue which customers can come to in the evening, ‘as though it were an event, an entertainment, rather than just buying a book’. Miller (1999; 2006) also writes about the development of the bookshop and its changing role in society as well as the potential that bookshops have for providing social benefits for customers. The current research is supported by these writings from academics and trade commentators – consumers generally respond positively to the presence of a coffee shop and the research found that it does have a socialising quality – people are more inclined to meet and converse in a coffee shop rather than in a bookshop. The focus groups also found that consumers were interested in exploring the bookshop further as a social venue, particularly in the evenings, as a venue for music or poetry for example, again supporting the literature above.
6.4 Expanding the market

The research found that newer bookshop users were more inclined to be attracted into bookshops than experienced book buyers, if special offers were present. Nevertheless, special offers seem to be largely attractive to a broad cross section of bookshop users. This would seem to be a quandary of sorts for chain bookshops; special offers are effective at attracting people into bookshops, but some experienced bookshop users are extremely weary of their dominance in displays. Furthermore, one would have to carry out research into the long term value of consumers who are attracted into bookshops by special offers to determine the overall effectiveness of the strategy. This research would need to focus upon their future buying habits and whether they continued to represent value – high margin - to the bookshop, or merely purchased highly discounted – and therefore low margin – books. A more measured approach to discounted books would seem to be part of the solution to this, rather than the complete domination it has had in chain bookselling for the past few years. Looking at the effect of the coffee shop, while rather more experienced buyers agreed with the statement ‘I like the coffee shop’ than newer visitors, nevertheless, rather more newer users than experienced users agreed that the presence of a coffee shop would make them more likely to go into a bookshop. The research concludes therefore, that newer facilities such as discounting and coffee shops are more effective at attracting newer users into bookshops than more experienced bookshop users.

The research found that there were more similarities between newer and long term bookshop users, than differences. While the most commonly cited reason for not visiting traditional bookshops was that buyers prefer to buy online, this was also cited by a similar number of long-term book users, so cannot be judged to be unique to new bookshop users. As noted in the Discussion chapter, many people visit traditional bookshops in order simply to browse and this in itself is a very common reason for not spending money in bookshops. One notable difference between newer and more established bookshop users was that a rather larger percentage of new bookshop users said they were ‘too embarrassed to ask for help’. Given the unwillingness of bookshop users to speak to booksellers in the first instance, this might be remedied by the provision of in-store PCs, enabling consumers to check the availability and location of books for themselves. While this may not engender any kind of relationship between consumer and booksellers, if it encourages book purchasing it may be worth considering.
The research indicates that the presence of a coffee shop projects a signal of accessibility. This is an important finding for bookshops, particularly if their long term strategy is to do with accessibility and broadening the market. However, given the concerns about customer value and the desires of long term consumers regarding discounted books, then chain bookshops need to be clear about their long term strategies regarding their consumers before they adopt these facilities. Certainly coffee shops and discounted book offers change the way in which chain bookshops are perceived by the public and this is a vital message which chain bookshops need to acknowledge. Clearer bookshop strategy regarding segmentation and targeting, as indicated above, would make strategic planning in this area easier for bookshops.

The research found that traditional bookshops concentrate upon drawing in new consumers, rather than catering for experienced, long term bookshop consumers. While there has been important research carried out on expanding the book buying market in recent years (BML, 2005a, 2005b), long-established academic research (Gilbert, 2003; Schiffman and Kanuk, 2004; de Kare-Silver, 1998) overwhelmingly suggests that loyal customers are the mainstay of retailing and are financially a much more rewarding market than pursuing new consumers. Furthermore, very recent research from Key Note (2008) finds that ‘book buying is dominated by two important groups – those who are in the AB social grade and those who buy ten or more books a year’. It is also vital to note that not only are socioeconomic groups AB and C1 growing, but also that there will be continued growth of the ‘third age’ (those aged 45-54) over the next few years (Mintel, 2007a). This can arguably be interpreted as an opportunity for specialist book retailers, given that they compete for ABC1s, ‘especially ABC1 third age consumers’ (ibid). However, it also supports the findings from this research – that instead of concentrating upon new consumers which bookshops know little about, especially with regard to long term value – they should be spending more time concentrating on the heavy book buyers and the AB consumers, i.e. the long term buyers, rather than those who buy solely at the discount tables. Maintaining the relationship between long term, experienced book buyers is obviously a complex undertaking and is arguably much more difficult to achieve than developing strategies to attract new bookshop users, given the findings of this research, which show that bookshop users want depth of range and genuine choice in traditional bookshops. Nevertheless, the research findings clearly demonstrate that chain bookshops are not doing enough to engage with high value customers. While these customers respond largely positively to coffee shops and discounted books (with important caveats) this appears to be a fortuitous accident rather than by strategically targeting loyal
consumers with these in-store facilities. Rather, coffee shops and discounting are aimed firmly at attracting new users and broadening the market. The solution to enhancing the bookshop experience for loyal users may come from some of the bookshop managers themselves who stated their desire to have store-generated promotions concentrating upon small publishers, books in translation and books supporting local theatre performances. Mintel Book Retailing (2007a) looks at segmentation by bookshops, and while each of the bookshops studied had a stated aim of trying to cater for a local market it is important to note that this was not perceived by customers.

Therefore, the research concludes that bookshops need clarification of their strategy regarding their market. This will dictate whether they continue to pursue an approach dominated by discounted books in order to concentrate on newer book buyers, or to encompass a wider marketing approach by adopting a more specialised, individual approach to marketing tailored to each store. This is closely related to the earlier conclusion stating that chain bookshops need to clarify their segmentation and targeting of the book market.

6.5 The role of the bookseller
An important conclusion clearly demonstrated by the research findings is that the role of the bookseller as a source of knowledge in chain bookshops has diminished in importance. This was a rather unexpected finding and contradicts much of the current literature on the role of the salesperson, as pointed out below. This diminution in importance seemed to be at least partly accounted for by the growth in readily available information about books online. However, this finding also emerged from questionnaires and focus groups examining how consumers interact with booksellers. While consumers certainly have expectations, even preconceptions about booksellers, the majority do not directly interact with booksellers, beyond asking about the availability and location of books. This is not to diminish the importance of the presence of booksellers in traditional bookshops. Research has shown the important role which staff can play in the brand of an organisation and in the mind of the consumer (Babin et al, 1999; Knee, 2002). It therefore seems that booksellers can play an important role in bookshops as a ‘bookshop brand representative’. Taking into account the marketing mix, and extending it from the traditional 4ps to 7ps in order to incorporate the newer element of ‘people,’ gives further context to the role which the bookseller can be seen to take in traditional bookselling settings. Kotler and others such as Ferrell, Dibb, and
Jobber emphasise the importance which people can play in any customer-facing business, as they not only encapsulate the brand identity for the consumer in many cases, but they also have the power to develop relationships with consumers and develop marketing success. Judd (2002) refers to this as the ‘5th p’ and emphasises the potential for people to influence consumer behaviour. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the current research contradicts this expectation in the traditional bookselling setting, while extending knowledge of it in the context of online bookselling. Looking first at the research findings from traditional bookselling settings, despite the emphasis upon ‘hand-sell’ and customer service and bookseller knowledge promoted by the traditional bookselling managers (and indeed stated as part of the brand image and a key advantages of many large chains) the research found that consumers tend not to rely particularly on booksellers for book choice; they are certainly used for routine services such as locating books and ordering books, but in-depth knowledge is not called on. Even the oft-noted advantages of social contact seem not to matter in the traditional setting. This tends to contradict traditional emphases upon the role of the salesperson in retailing and in customer-facing industries. It is ironic to note that it is the growth of the competing environment - online bookselling - and the associated growth in easy access to information which has contributed to this lessening in importance of the bookseller in traditional settings. As Horner says, it is less impressive for a bookseller to recommend a good read or to give their opinion about a book when it is easy to access countless customer reviews on Amazon, or to see bestsellers displayed in front of us, in every bookshop (Horner, 2005, p.24).

Despite the emphasis by traditional bookshop managers upon recommendation and ‘hand selling’, as well as some very detailed explanations from managers about their experiences with customers who expect a very personalised service, it seems that overall, consumers are able - and indeed prefer - to carry out their own decision making and browsing in bookshops,
This gradual change in the role of the bookseller in chain bookshops, as illustrated in figure 6.1, has important implications for the future of bookselling as well as being closely linked to other research findings, in particular the fact that the vast majority of bookshop visitors have no meaningful interaction with booksellers. It is notable that consumers tended to have very clear preconceptions about booksellers regarding their politeness (high) and helpfulness (high). However, it is also notable that they were less likely to assume that booksellers were very knowledgeable about books. Online consumers were asked whether they missed the presence of a ‘real’ bookseller online - 43% said ‘yes’ and 56% ‘no’. While this is a small majority, it is nevertheless the fact that if one provides book buyers with the facilities to find things themselves, the majority are happy to do this. This gives credence to the provision of in-store computers in order to aid consumers searching for particular books or authors. While this further diminishes the personal interactive role of the bookseller, nevertheless it would help those consumers unwilling to ask for advice, or unable to locate booksellers, to find and purchase what they want. Willie Anderson wrote of the ‘dedicated, knowledgeable and utterly enthusiastic’ staff which Waterstone’s started with in 1982 (2002, p.147). While many booksellers still have these qualities, it would seem they are regarded as less vital, given the greater access to information about books now freely available to consumers on the internet.
In traditional bookshops, there are different filters which the consumer can use to select books, such as author, cover, blurb, price, even bookseller advice. However, the complexity and sophistication of the filters available online mean that consumers can make well-informed choices about the books they buy. As Anderson (2006) notes, it is not only choice, but the mechanism for choosing which seems to be important for consumers. Kotler too, notes that in e-marketing, consumers ‘actively select which websites they will visit and what marketing information they will receive’ (2006, p.559).

It is this process of self-direction in online bookselling which makes traditional bookselling approaches, and booksellers seem a little out of date. This diminution in the importance of the bookseller is an original finding emerging from the research and can be largely attributed to the increase in information which is now available to consumers, so that they are no longer reliant upon bookseller help. The research certainly accords with Dibb’s statement about e-marketing, when she says that ‘one of the most important benefits of e-marketing is the ability of marketers and customer to share information’ (2006, p.102).

The irony of Amazon’s approach to one-to-one marketing is that the more active one is as a buyer, the more effective the one-to-one selling becomes, in that the recommendations become more focused and appropriate. One can see parallels between this very focused individual approach, and that of the knowledgeable bookseller. Therefore, while the research found that the traditional bookseller role is diminished, the role of the virtual bookseller takes over and offers a bespoke service to the book buyer.

6.6 Cultural obligation and manager autonomy
The research concludes that there is currently a commercial/cultural dichotomy in chain bookselling, demonstrated by the difficulty that chain bookshop managers have in squaring what they and their booksellers wish to promote, with the stock they are instructed to promote, by their respective head offices. A key finding emerging both from the managers and consumers in chain bookshops was an inherent tension in bookselling; expanding the market in order to be more inclusive is felt to have led to a diminution of choice, and too much focus upon less literary, specialised or challenging titles. This perception of homogeneity has been mentioned above in relation to the focus upon discounted titles, but it is also an issue emerging from the interviews with store managers. Indeed many factors emerged which seem to have led to store managers having difficulty simply adhering to brand strategy. For example, the ‘strict
guidelines’ (Manager B) which are set with regard to front of store display; the adoption of ‘3 for 2’ offers; the need for titles to achieve a certain level of turnover, rather than simply being stocked on literary merit or quality alone. Manager C acknowledged that the nature of large organisations is that they limit choice and this limitation of choice is an issue with which the traditional bookshop managers interviewed seemed uneasy. They all of spoke of their desire to concentrate more on backlist, or to have locally focused promotions, involving the local community, in order to do something that is ‘nice about bookselling’. This comment reveals that bookselling is perceived as having some kind of cultural role to play, defining it from other retailing environments. It seems as if the managers interviewed concur with this view of having a cultural obligation, an aspect of bookselling which has been written about at length by Miller (1999, 2006).

This cultural and commercial dichotomy is closely linked to many of the research findings. The compulsion to adhere to listed titles to be promoted, the prevalence of ‘3 for 2’ offers and the replicated display methods which are used; each of these business requirements erode autonomy and allow less scope for each of the branches of chain bookshops to be genuinely local or community relevant. Given that each of the managers interviewed expressed these views (although some had more freedom to implement their own shop-generated promotions than others) and given that the feedback from consumers, is that they would welcome more variety of display style and of range, it would seem that it is the strategic decision makers and marketing planners who need to be convinced of the wisdom of allowing individual stores more autonomy to plan their own promotions and to stock a genuinely diverse range of titles. This emasculation of managers has taken place gradually over several years and has been exacerbated by the implementation of various changes in publishing and bookselling. For example the reduction in numbers of publishers’ representatives and the deterioration in relationship between many representatives and some larger book chains has meant that many new titles from publishers are simply no longer exposed to bookshop managers and buyers. The move away from manager and bookseller powers to buy of their own accord, towards centralised buying has also changed the kind of autonomy, even ownership which managers and booksellers have in their stores (Tonkin, 2002, Rushton, 2005, Hoyle and Clark, 2007). Perhaps most important of all, they need to be seen to be doing this by consumers, so a variety of display methods and a variety of promoted titles needs to be evident for consumers. Customers in traditional bookshops were very much aware of the formulaic approach to displaying titles as well as the apparent lack of variety of titles. It is therefore evident
that long term bookshop consumers need to be convinced that depth of range and genuine variety is being provided.

The research revealed that there were no clear aims or objectives on the part of the chain bookshops’ management regarding differentiation. The managers were reasonably clear about the qualities and facilities which they wished to promote. However, looking at these qualities, they were very similar across each of the bookshops studied, leading to lack of differentiation and meaning that their wish for local relevance was virtually impossible. It would seem that brand differentiation and increased clarity of brand identity is necessary for those stores analysed in the research. This is clearly a complex recommendation, since brand integrity does not dwindle over the space of a few weeks; rather, this takes place over a long period of time. Chain bookshops seem to wish to be all things to all people. Formerly, while they opened up bookshops to many people in the early 1980s, the focus was still on quality literature in many chains – a clear focus and a clear target market. The research demonstrates that in their efforts to become more welcoming to a broader section of the public brand identity had become blurred, there is broad similarity of marketing strategies across many chains and there is no clear distinction, either for the managers or more crucially for the consumers regarding brand differentiation across bookshops. It is clearly a complex process to try to gain redress in this difficult situation. However, a sensible place to start would be to examine what it is that consumers want from traditional bookshops, and the qualities which they feel traditional bookshops have, which gives them an advantage over their competitors.

6.7 The impact and role of online bookselling
The research found that range, convenience and price are vital elements of the online shopping experience, according with current research in the field of online bookselling. Endeavouring to offer direct comparisons between traditional and online bookselling as a result of findings from this research is challenging, since the research has shown that consumer experiences in these settings are very different. Nevertheless, while the research demonstrates that book range is a quality which is of vital importance to both traditional and online consumers, atmosphere is important to traditional bookshop visitors, while convenience and price are among the qualities which online book shoppers value most. This is supported by research into online bookselling carried out by Mintel (2007a, 2007b) which underlines the key advantages which online bookselling can offer consumers: range, convenience, and easier access to obscure
titles. However, while Mintel found that ‘only a small proportion [of traditional bookshop users] purchase online’, this contradicts findings from the current research which found that 53% of traditional store shoppers also buy online. The current research therefore suggests that online bookselling has a larger following from ‘traditional’ consumers than might otherwise have been supposed. The Mintel research also found that consumers are more likely to browse in traditional settings rather than online, which is indeed supported by the current research which also found that traditional browsing has a more leisurely, serendipitous quality to it, as opposed to ‘browsing’ online, which tends to be more linear, and directed. The current research found that there is a significant overlap between traditional and online consumers. As stated above, 53% of traditional store shoppers also shop online and the vast majority, 97%, of online consumers shop at traditional stores as well. The research findings clearly demonstrate that online bookshops are appealing to existing bookshop users, but it is more notable that a huge majority of online shoppers are still shopping in traditional settings. However, the qualities of experience which consumers judge to be important differ depending upon the book shopping environment. Furthermore, discussion of the importance of book range revealed very different views on the subject according to whether consumers were shopping online, or in traditional bookshops. Diminution of range was a topic which emerged time and again in discussion of traditional bookshops, whereas the impressive breadth of range online was a key feature attracting consumers to this setting. Therefore, while range is important to traditional bookshop consumers, they are rarely satisfied with the range provided.

It is at this juncture that one can see the relevance of the Long Tail (Anderson, 2004, 2006). Anderson suggests that the increasingly disparate identities of consumers and consumer groups (in terms of segmentation) and their growing demand for obscure items, paired with an escalating interest in niche markets has resulted in consumers searching for increasingly individualistic items. As he says, ‘increasingly the mass market is turning into a mass of niches’ (Anderson, 2006, p.5). Anderson’s theory is supported by recent research by Key Note (2008), which informs us that few books will sell in excess of 2000 copies, and bestsellers (those selling in the region of 75,000 copies) are the exception rather than the rule. Nielsen BookData calculated that 115,522 books were published in the UK in 2006, and if one examines The Guardian list of bestselling UK books in 2007, it is evident that at no. 100, sales are at around 145,000 (Guardian, 2007). One can see how the Long Tail must account for sales of the remaining 115,422 titles. This can be represented visually by the Long Tail. This theory goes some way to explaining consumers increasing dissatisfaction with
traditional approaches to bookselling (formulaic and homogenous, ergo Waterstone’s recent strategic decision to concentrate upon populist items) paired with the ability which online bookselling has to satisfy consumer desire for obscure, or difficult to find items, which traditional bookshops are less well equipped to deal with. The phenomenon of the Long Tail has emerged as online sites have enabled consumers to find obscure items much more easily than through traditional bookshops, and this has led to increased sales across a very wide range of unusual titles.

It is interesting to note that the relatively recently identified phenomenon of the Long Tail in some ways complements more traditional approaches to marketing which have suggested that current approaches to the subject need to be much more individualised, niche-oriented, even - the ultimate in niche marketing – one-to-one marketing (Ferrell, 2008, p.163; Kotler, 2006, p.213; Dibb, 2006, p.227). However, it is also worth noting that while Dibb says that ‘one-to-one segmentation involves a substantial injection of resources, raising concerns about whether the returns are sufficiently high to justify the required investment’, we know that many online booksellers, most notably Amazon, have already invested in the kinds of technology which enables individualised, personalised marketing, albeit electronically operated, to take place.

It is crucial to note that Anderson says that ‘long tail businesses treat consumers as individuals, offering mass customisation as an alternative to mass market fare’ (ibid, p.218). This is a vital point and serves to illustrate not only the successes of online bookselling, especially Amazon, but also the increasing difficulty which traditional retailers have. Their formulaic approach to book marketing – which one might describe at best as multisegment, and at worst as broad-brush – can be seen as out of date, given the current move towards customisation, and the recognition of the move towards niche marketing by the most established writers in the field (see Kotler, Dibb, Ferrell above) as well as the proposal of a new theory by Anderson. Anderson’s theory in turn has the concomitant effect of turning traditional approaches to marketing on their heads, since it follows that if there is a concentration upon a mass of niches, then there will be a resultant move away from bookshops which endeavour to shift piles of books in quantity and a simultaneous shift in focus towards selling what the consumer wants, regardless of quantity. This might be described as a kind of micro-segmentation of the market and might be understood by comparing it to what chain bookshops have done in the past. Prior to the current focus upon bestsellers, genre bookselling and discounted selling, documented in some detail in the thesis, chain bookshops used to have the freedom to pursue a more individualised approach, often driven by shop
managers and booksellers promoting their own interests and supporting local consumers’ interests. However, again it needs to be recognised that this approach to selling is inherently better suited to online retailing since it does not require books to be in stock, taking up shelf space, and awaiting payment to the publisher. They merely need to be identifiable online. The online vendor can then purchase from the publisher thus cutting out storage costs. It is clearly very difficult for traditional retailers to compete on the grounds of choice alone. This does not however mean that the answer is a move towards an even more concentrated, populist approach. Rather, based upon consumer feedback from the current research, specialisation, with a genuine responsiveness to local need, and stock representing links to the local community would be a sensible approach with which to proceed. Rather than individual sections in chain bookshops being lost behind the heavily promoted tables of discounted books, the concept of specialist sections or departments needs to be strengthened as a concept and promoted as part of each store’s individualised approach. This is detailed further in the recommendations section below.

Anderson notes that an important point about online selling is that ‘simply offering more variety…does not shift demand by itself. Consumers must be given ways to find niches that suit their particular needs and interests’ (p.53). While the research found that online consumers were more inclined to ‘browse’ in a linear, directed way it is clear that this is only possible if the online site allows consumers to do this, and directs them to appropriate, connected material which may be of interest. Anderson’s observations about the Long Tail support the research findings although it is clear that this particular research extends Anderson’s theory by looking at the context of online bookselling in more detail. Rather than being seen as an inconvenience for traditional bookshops, this theory might be viewed as a challenging opportunity to create new areas of interest and to concentrate upon the serendipitous find. Certainly the current approach to traditional bookselling seems to be untenable as a long term strategy and the research findings show that many consumers are weary of bookshops’ predictable approach.

A comparison of marketing strategies in online and traditional bookshops is not straightforward. The online bookshops studied did not have the commercial imperative to expand their markets. Therefore, while many did provide discounted titles, the focus of consumers on a more linear pre-planned purchase online means that these kinds of marketing tools seemed to be afforded much less importance regarding their dominance of the online setting. Consumers often shop online for specific titles because they are found to be cheaper online, nevertheless, there is not an issue with online cut-price books somehow leading to homogeneity, as there is in traditional
bookshops. It was also found that, of those online stores studied, some were focusing on providing an alternative shopping venue for existing consumers; offering books at out of store hours, or to customers who were overseas, or whose customers were loyal to a particular bookshop. Furthermore, while consumers responded mostly positively to discounted titles in traditional stores, this was seen as having the resulting effect of diminishing choice across traditional stores, whereas keen pricing online was seen as a key benefit in the online setting and was not perceived to impact upon the range at all. Obviously issues of space in traditional stores, means that discounted titles taking up physical space have an inevitable impact on what can be stocked, whereas online, this problem does not occur. While it might be said that the emphasis upon ‘front of store’ marketing and promotion is evident in some online stores with a focus on cut price titles, consumers can more easily click past these pages in a few seconds, reaching their subjects/authors of choice more easily. The discounted titles are then completely out of sight and one can reach the subject or author areas which one requires.

The ease with which obscure titles can be sourced, and the fact that online bookshops are constantly accessible, were found to be important qualities for online shoppers. It is notable that almost 56% of online shoppers did not miss having a ‘real’ bookseller around, giving further support to the earlier conclusion that the role of the bookseller has diminished in importance. While it is arguable that this is due to the high quality of information available online, further research might reveal whether this is the case. One of the most important and influential advantages which online bookshops have over traditional bookshops is the ability to link recommendations and to provide customer reviews for potential customers. These were found to be very popular facilities and the recommendations are probably the closest experience to browsing which is available online. However, these facilities, in particular customer reviews, could easily be provided by traditional bookshops, albeit less numerously. Indeed, it is surprising that traditional bookshops have not picked up on this with more conviction. While these kinds of facilities are clearly more easily managed in an electronic setting, their popularity would suggest that traditional bookshops should explore recommendation and reviews with more vigour.

6.8 Relationships online
A research finding emerging from the study of online bookselling is the use of online bookselling as a conduit to the development of direct relationships between consumers and booksellers. It should be noted that this finding applies to online bookseller, but not
Amazon. There seemed to be at least as much familiarity with regular customers amongst online managers and their booksellers as there was with traditional managers and their booksellers. This tended to come about as a result of consumers placing online orders, then chasing the order with customer service staff, or being frequent participants in online competitions and quizzes run by particular online bookshop sites. Obviously, this could only ever apply to smaller online operations where the numbers of customer service staff are such that it is possible to be familiar with regular customers. However, these smaller online operations do seem willing to be easily contactable for their customers; indeed this is a stated policy of the online managers interviewed, as it is seen as giving a competitive advantage over Amazon, which offers e-mail addresses as well as lists of frequently asked questions, but contacting an actual member of customer service staff is difficult. Obviously a direct relationship with their customer service department would probably be much more difficult to achieve for customers of Amazon, understandably given the size and scale of their operation.

This interactive relationship between online personnel and online consumers seems on the surface to contrast with the fact that online sites are essentially remote. However, as noted in the Discussion chapter it is perhaps easier for consumers to make contact with and discuss via the comparative safety of the telephone, rather than initiate face to face relationships. Indeed, discussion or conversation between customers or even between customers and staff in traditional bookshops seemed to be rather limited. As discussed above, the presence of a coffee shop seemed to make this easier, overcoming the desire for book shopping to be a solitary experience, and making it a more sociable one.

For online bookshops, the further development of technical facilities in order to allow direct chat between customers could push forward the current restrictions of online bookselling. Furthermore, given that Amazon does not offer this facility, it could allow some of the UK chain and independent booksellers a distinct competitive advantage. There seemed to be no real sense of an online community emerging from online bookshop users, even though some consumers felt that the sharing of reviews encapsulated some ‘socialising’ qualities. The development of direct online communication between book buyers could enable this, and strengthen community links, as well as underpinning brand loyalty (Szmigin, Canning and Reppel, 2005). The development of a network of book buying consumers online could be a powerful brand tool for the online bookshop developing such a facility.
6.9 The bookshop experience
The research found that there are important differences when contrasting the experience of the consumer online with that of the consumer in a traditional bookshop. Whereas the online experience tends to be linear, and more directed, the traditional experience is often more serendipitous and more conducive to browsing. The research also found that the chain bookshop experience is often a therapeutic one, with 45% of traditional bookshop visitors feeling ‘more relaxed’ in bookshops. Qualitative evidence from focus groups supports this finding and there were comments such as ‘losing’ oneself while browsing for books and how spending long periods of time in bookshops could make one feel better. Even in the online setting, 32% of respondents said they felt more relaxed when book shopping online.

Browsing emerged as the most common activity in bookshops and was a key quality defining the traditional bookshop from online bookshops. Consumers tend to spend longer periods of time in traditional bookshops and also to be more inclined to buy on impulse. Conversely, research findings show that online shoppers, while visiting more frequently, spent shorter amounts of time online and tended to have a more focused approach to buying books. Even those who followed the recommendations for books online, were clear that the online browsing experience was a much more linear, guided experience and much less prone to the serendipity which a traditional browser might experience.

The research found that consumers are aware of the lack of any sort of tactile experience while shopping online, and that they miss this aspect of the traditional experience. This is an important distinction between online and traditional book shopping about which consumers are very clear. The tactile, physical experience which the traditional bookshop can offer is seen as a key advantage by consumers, even those who are more inclined to buy online. Indeed almost 89% of those questioned said they missed the tactile experience when they shopped online. As one research participant noted, ‘it is not just the books but the whole experience of sight, sound and smell of the shop’. This finding is supported by earlier writing on this topic by Phau and Poon (in Fenech and O’Cass, 2001) and Rowley (2001, p.369) who point out the sensuousness that some traditional retailing experiences can offer. Nevertheless, the current research also extends our knowledge of consumer responses to the sensuousness shopping experience, by examining its application to book shopping.
Research from Mintel (2007b) found that people are more inclined to browse in traditional bookshops rather than online. This supports similar findings from the current research. This browsing behaviour and the tendency to spend time in bookshops – particularly traditional bookshops - might in part be explained by looking at the decision process model, as discussed in the literature review. The initial stage of this model is the problem recognition stage, describing a gap between the ‘actual state of affairs’ and the ‘desired state of affairs’. Giving a simple example, this might describe a situation where one realises that there is a book which one might like, and the desire to change that situation, and buy the book. The stage of the information search is one that one can easily see being applied to sourcing information about books. One can also appreciate how this process has changed radically in recent years, being much less reliant upon booksellers (consequently contributing to the diminution of the role of the bookseller as above) and much more dependent upon easily accessible online information. Therefore, we can see how this stage has changed for book consumers in recent years. It is quicker, more efficient and, probably, more accurate. It is interesting to note however, that traditional views of this information gathering prior to purchase, have tended to assume that personal recommendations from family and friends are necessarily much more effective at persuading us to buy. Consumers are generally assumed to be more easily persuaded to buy if a known advocate recommends the goods/services in question. This raises the interesting question in the context of this research – given the popularity of ‘personalised’ recommendations from online bookshops, especially Amazon, do we as consumers trust these as much as genuinely ‘personal recommendations’? The research found that the majority of consumers said they trusted online and traditional reviews and recommendations equally. There was found to be a marginal difference in trust between those who expressed a preference, with some saying they trusted online settings more, and marginally more saying they trusted traditional settings more. Nevertheless, there is certainly scope for further research into the subject of trust online, given that the majority of book consumers trusted traditional and online settings equally.

The third stage in this sequence, evaluation of alternatives is a particularly interesting one in the context of the current research as it may begin to explain the length of time spent in traditional bookshops. The research has already established that consumers tend to spend more time in traditional bookshops, are more inclined to browse, and are more inclined to buy upon impulse, since there is more chance of a serendipitous find in a traditional bookshop. However, one must ask what is really meant by the term ‘browsing’. Evaluating alternatives is not full enough or complex enough as an
explanation of what browsing really is. Looking at each of the three ‘choosing’ stages together however, one can see how they begin to approach some explanation of what browsing can be. Together, they can begin to explain the time which many consumers spend, particularly in traditional bookshops, browsing books. Looking at each of these terms in turn: Problem Recognition, Information search then Evaluation of Alternatives, one can see how they might each describe part of the browsing experience. However, what they do not encapsulate is the experience as described by the consumers taking part in the current research. For example:

In a traditional bookshop I may find myself in an unfamiliar place and examine books that I would not even think about.

For unfocussed perusing a bricks and mortar shop is nicer.

In a traditional bookshop you can mooch and see what catches your eye.

These descriptions of traditional browsing describe the unfocussed, almost random, serendipitous quality of browsing (albeit online ‘browsing’ is different) and while the decision process model outlined above and examined in the literature review goes some way to describing this, future research needs to find a better way of describing this process and its motivations. As Solomon says, ‘the traditional approach [decision process model] is hard-pressed to explain a person’s choice of art, music or even a spouse’ (1999, p.209). Therefore, when a choice is at all subjective, the decision process model is only helpful to a degree and can be said to have its limitations. Rather, a more complex model, taking into account the subjectivity of choices and the complexity of browsing, might be helpful. In this case, the research supports Solomon’s analysis of the situation, rather than being able to apply the decision process model to the browsing process. As Campbell (in Rowley, 2002, p.370) says, it is important to realise that browsing is not just a ‘choosing mechanism’ (which the decision process model seems to reduce it to) but a valid activity in itself which affords the browser pleasure.

However, where the decision process model is helpful, and where the research finds that it can explain consumer behaviour, is when looking at online buying procedures. One of the distinctions made clear by the research is the different approaches to and experiences of browsing which consumers have online, as opposed to those in traditional bookshops. The online approach to browsing was found to be a much more
focused, linear approach. It is more likely to be directed by recommendation, a process more likely to focus the consumer within particular genres, rather than looking along shelves or tables in a traditional bookshop. Online ‘browsing’ can be explained by looking at the first few stages of the decision process model. It is a much more linear process with fewer physical distractions of place, people and environment; the online setting gives the choices on screen following the information search, which the consumer then evaluates and then either purchases or does not. As Rowley notes, ‘it is difficult to replicate the richness of this real-world shopping experience in an on-line shop (2002, p.371).

A further model which seems to offer some explanation for consumer behaviour in bookshops, particularly with regard to browsing, is Fishbein and Ajzen’s model of reasoned action (Jobber, 2007, p.123). They suggest that purchases can be divided into those that conform to a limited choice model and those that can be explained by looking at an extended choice model. As explained in the literature review, a purchase adhering to the model of limited choice involves the consumer only on a superficial level – perhaps the choice of a sandwich at lunchtime because of hunger pangs. However, an extended choice model purchase required deeper involvement from the consumer, and usually involves some sort of assessment of the opinions of others – the subjective norms – which may influence whether or not a purchase takes place. One can see how the extended choice model might explain consumer involvement in the browsing process. If we accept that browsing is a complex choosing mechanism, which may be influenced by important others, for example who have recommended a particular author, or said to avoid another, Fishbein and Ajzen’s model may apply. At a more complex level, consumers may judge books while in their mind assessing whether important others may or may not approve of their purchases. Further research would be necessary in order to establish the influence of others upon book choice, and specifically, upon browsing behaviour, both online and offline. Nevertheless, one can see the applicability of the model proposed by Fishbein and Ajzen, to explain long browsing periods. Of course a more limited choice model would be sufficient in explaining quick purchases in bookshops. (This was referred to earlier in the thesis as the duality of the bookshop experience and describes how consumers may sometimes require a quick, functional purchase, while at other times are able to spend more time browsing).
6.10 The original contribution to knowledge

6.10.1 Introduction
In order to establish a clear contribution to knowledge, it is necessary to be clear about the interaction between this research, and the research of others; to clarify where this research sits in respect to other important theories, models and literature. The literature review covers a wide range of relevant writing, yet some of the literature has, naturally, emerged as more important, helping to contextualise the current research. This is not only because the research supports or extends that literature, but because it is also important to demonstrate the important literature which is contradicted, at least partially, by the research findings, in order to demonstrate the relationship which the current research has with other literature. This helps to explain where it sits in the context of other research, where it contradicts, where it extends, thus demonstrating the contribution to knowledge. The Conclusions chapter above sets out the conclusions emanating from the research findings in the context of existing literature. It also demonstrates how the current research findings interact with existing literature, models and published data, either concurring with or contradicting them. The following section outlines this further and underlines the most significant original contributions to knowledge which the research makes.

The aim of the current research was;

*To evaluate the effectiveness of applied marketing in bookshops and to develop an understanding of consumer responses to that marketing.*

To be clear, the context of the study is bookselling, and how consumers respond to that bookselling. Various bodies of literature have been examined in order to contextualise the study, although literature from the fields of marketing and consumer behaviour has proved very useful. The research has certainly extended understanding of consumer behaviour in bookshops. In order to demonstrate this, it is necessary to look in more detail at the research findings in the context of existing literature.

6.10.2 Bookshop identity
One of the most important conclusions drawn from the research is that the chain bookshops studied, fail to maintain a strong brand identity, and therefore, consumers perceive no meaningful distinction between the chains. Despite some efforts to
segment and target (Mintel, 2007a, 2007b, Key Note, 2008, BML, 2007) the research found that consumers are largely unaware of distinctions of identity across chain bookshops. Indeed, they are much more aware of the similarities, attributable to the commonality of marketing approaches, covered in depth in the thesis. While the similarity of marketing approaches is a topic often raised in trade commentary, as well as that of the wider press, it is not a topic that has been addressed in an academic context to date. Therefore, this finding is an original contribution to our knowledge of the book trade. It is useful to understand the implications of this conclusion by examining traditional writers such as Kotler, Jobber, Dibb and Ferrell on the related topics of segmentation, targeting and positioning and to understand how these traditional approaches to marketing have not been fully addressed by traditional chain bookshops (as discussed earlier). The research therefore finds that chain bookshops need to strategically rethink their approaches to consumer segmentation, marketing and positioning in order to address the lack of differentiation. While the stated aim of bookshops is to differentiate, the very similarity of their approaches makes it difficult for consumers to perceive any differentiation.

6.10.3 The Bookseller
One of the most striking aspects of the research, which contradicts accepted knowledge in the trade, was that of diminution in the role of the bookseller. Therefore, while both trade writers (Spillane, 2000; Campbell, in Rickett, 1999) and academics (Babin et al, 1999; Travis, 2001; Knee, 2002) emphasise the central role of the salesperson, this knowledge is extended by the current research: it has been found that the role of the salesperson has been diminished as the knowledge of the consumer has increased. While booksellers in traditional bookshops still contribute to the overall ambience, or brand identity of a bookshop, their role as advisor to the consumer has diminished as consumers have become more knowledgeable, given easy access to online information about books and that they no longer have the same need for information from booksellers. This finding clearly moves forward current knowledge in the field of bookselling.

Whereas the existing body of scholarly literature emphasises the vital role which customer service plays in the retail sector, much of the evidence emerging from the current research revealed the decreasing importance of the bookseller as a service conduit in bookselling. Clearly, the bookseller has been completely excised from online bookselling, since the online process eases the way for even the most cautious online
consumer, making the decision making, choosing and buying as easy and appealing as possible. However, it emerged even in traditional stores that the bookselling role has changed. Whereas consumers seem still to like the idea of a knowledgeable expert to help with finding books (as reported in the Results chapter), the actual process of choosing was usually a more individual affair. Furthermore, due in no small part to the easily accessible information about books available from online sources, the booksellers’ knowledge is no longer unassailable. It seems that this finding might be applied outwith the boundaries of bookselling to other ‘clicks and mortar’ industries, in order to establish whether the diminution in importance of the advisor in traditional stores is also applicable in comparable industries.

Therefore, while evidence from the research found that the bookseller plays an important role in chain bookshops as a contributor to the overall brand image of the store, and a source of non-expert information such as whether something is in stock, locating books and ordering books (all of which could be carried out by someone with knowledge of the system rather than book knowledge) the current research demonstrates that the role of the bookseller as expert advisor has diminished. Vitally, regarding the originality of the contribution of this research to the wider field, this seems to contradict accepted knowledge in this area, as noted above. The growth of internet bookselling and the dissemination of knowledge about books online has empowered the consumer, diminishing the former strong reliance on booksellers for advice and guidance. This may have implications for the wider retail industry and there is scope for further research to investigate the current role of the salesperson in retailing. Online bookselling of course, does extremely well without booksellers of any kind. However, there is an important caveat to this point. The finding about the changing role of the bookseller applies to chain bookshops. However, for the independent bookshop, unable to compete on price with the chains, individual customer service and an emphasis upon their unique selling points might well be a wise direction to take.

6.10.4 The coffee shop
The research finds that a bookshop with a coffee shop can claim to be social space in a way which a bookshop in isolation cannot do, thus extending current academic knowledge of coffee shops. Trade writing by Kreitzman (1999) and Pennington (1997) has promoted the social role of the bookshop, and others writing on the role of the coffee shop such as Waxman (2006) and Oldenburg (1997) have identified the benefits it can offer consumers and communities. However, while the current research found
that coffee shops do indeed promote a socialising aspect in bookshops, it also found, crucially, that this is distinct from the lack of socialising which takes place in the bookshop space itself. This is distinct from the potential which bookshops have to be social spaces in the evening, hosting events. The research also found that the presence of a coffee shop within a bookshop acts as a signal of accessibility. This original contribution to knowledge identifies the important role which the coffee shop within bookshops can play. Current knowledge in this area is limited, and there is little material of academic note which looks specifically at the coffee shop within bookshops. The current research therefore adds to the research carried out by Waxman (2006) in particular. It was also found that a coffee shop within a bookshop space should be sited in a clearly demarcated area, not infringing upon established bookshop space. Further research in the field of coffee shops within bookshops, would be necessary in order to establish the fuller benefits which coffee shops may be able to offer. This might include the effect of coffee shops on the perceived ambience of a retail setting, potentially adding to our understanding of the benefits of coffee shops in a wider context, or fuller research might be carried out into the effect of coffee shops upon buying behaviour in bookshops, thus extending the current research findings and building wider knowledge within the bookselling setting. There are potential challenges to the whole notion of a social space, inherent in the current research, which need to be examined more fully.

6.10.5 Online marketing
Amazon uses one-to-one marketing to great effect, but while Dibb describes the traditional approach to one-to-one marketing thus,

One-to-one marketing involves developing long-term relationships with individual customers in order to understand and satisfy their needs (Dibb, 2006, p.227).

It is important to be clear that online bookselling takes a different approach. Looking at the ‘role of the bookseller’ online is obviously a misnomer when examining Amazon, since clearly no booksellers are present online and the current research finds that consumers are not affected by their absence. A key advantage of online technologies is the increased accessibility of information and the research finds that this essentially excises the role of the bookseller. Automated technology makes recommendations simpler and quicker, and customer reviews make intelligent choices simpler for the
consumer. This finding from the research clearly extends the knowledge of online industries and of traditional views of marketing, since Amazon can certainly be said to use a version of one-to-one marketing, as documented by Kotler, Jobber, Dibb and Ferrell. However, there is an important qualification to be made – in the online setting, there is no personal (one-to-one) knowledge of the consumer; the recommendations are automated and this online application of one-to-one marketing therefore extends our understanding of this kind of marketing. The research demonstrated that consumers respond very positively to ‘personal’ recommendations from Amazon, but none of the consumers were under any illusions that the response was genuinely personal. This challenges our understanding of what ‘personal’ means, in an automated context. It seems that in order to implement one-to-one marketing, direct knowledge of the consumer by salespeople is not necessary. Technology facilitates the implementation of this marketing and it seems that it can be just as effective as when it occurs as a result of direct knowledge of consumers by salespeople. This clearly extends previous statements about one-to-one marketing and sets them within the context of online bookselling. It is arguable that new terminology needs to be developed in order to more accurately describe the automated one-to-one marketing which online retailers such as Amazon, provide. This adds to our understanding of the marketing approaches taken in the wider online setting, underlining the fact that while a one-to-one approach may be facilitated by technological facility, it is important to remember that the salesperson or advisor is excised from this aspect of marketing, a point which only applies in online settings.

Amazon have been identified as being particularly good at one-to-one marketing, primarily through their use of ‘personalised’ recommendations. However, can we really refer to an automated response from Amazon, based upon electronically monitored online buying patterns as a ‘relationship’? It is important to make the distinction between traditional niche, or one-to-one marketing and that undertaken online. Certainly the satisfaction demonstrated by those consumers responding to the online questionnaires about online bookselling, and those talking about online bookselling in focus groups, demonstrated that they responded very favourably to ‘personal’ recommendations from Amazon, but none of the consumers were under any illusions that the response was genuinely personal.

The research in the area of online bookselling also contradicts findings by Mintel (2007a), specifically with regard to the degree of use of online bookshops by traditional bookshop consumers. Mintel say that ‘only a small proportion [of traditional bookshop
users] purchase online'. This statement is contradicted by findings from the current research which found that 53% of traditional bookshop users also purchase online. This needs further research, since it is probable that the crossover is increasing all the time. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that this particular part of the data collection was carried out approximately two years prior to the appearance of the Mintel report, in which case one might have expected the crossover to be smaller than that found by Mintel. This has important implications for bookselling, since the trade needs further clarification in this area. A clearer knowledge of the degree of crossover between traditional and online consumers, or whether there still exists such a distinction, is important in order to inform bookselling approaches to marketing.

6.11 Recommendations
There are several recommendations emanating from this research, many directed at the book trade, others for further research.

Some of the marketing theories and approaches examined in the literature review and outlined in this Conclusions chapter, have proven to be particularly appropriate and potentially very helpful for booksellers, when applied to the bookshop context. For example, as noted above, a re-appraisal of segmentation, targeting and positioning by chain bookshops might refresh current approaches and help to refocus the overall strategic aims which they have. STP is particularly appropriate for the book trade, given the research findings which demonstrate so clearly that identity is blurred and differentiation among bookshops is lacking. The purchase decision model is helpful in so far as it explains in an elementary way why consumers behave as they do, but this model should be seen as a starting point upon which booksellers can build their knowledge of consumers in the longer term. The theory of the Long Tail is an efficient way to explain the success of online retailing and also clearly illustrates the changing competition with which traditional bookselling must contend. However, the Long Tail also demonstrates how genuine choice is what many consumers desire and while traditional approaches are constricted by opening hours, stock costs, staffing costs and so on, the current research demonstrates that there are ways in which these challenges might be overcome, as well as remembering the fact that traditional bookshops are able to offer facilities such as coffee shops, and qualities such as atmosphere, environment and a tactile experience which cannot be experienced online.
As noted above, the broad-brush approach to discounting has proven problematic for many consumers. Mintel (2007a) underlines how it will be difficult for bookshops to operate profitably given this approach. Other industry commentators have also noted this point (Bookseller, 2006c, 2006e). As well as being of doubtful commercial advantage, the research findings also demonstrate that consumers are weary of the onslaught of discounting that confronts them upon entering traditional bookshops. As a result, it is recommended that an approach specialising in select areas of interest, contributed to by booksellers, managers and most importantly, consumers, would be a more appropriate method of dealing with current trading challenges. While traditional bookshops cannot compete with online booksellers on range per se, nevertheless they do have the advantages that a traditional bookshop environment can offer: tangible, browsable books and sometimes, a coffee shop.

Specific recommendations for traditional bookshops include a more proactive use of newspaper reviews, given their potential to have an impact upon consumers' choice of books. This was a point made in focus groups, about the difficulty of accessing reviewed books. The proliferation of easily accessed consumer reviews online and their popularity with consumers suggests that this would be popular in traditional bookshops also. Given the positive consumer response to online customer reviews, this is an area which could be investigated by traditional bookshops, inviting customers to write and post reviews in store. Clearly numbers would probably be more limited than those online, but given the positive response to this facility online and the fact that it is something which traditional bookshops can compete with, it would seem that a concerted attempt to do this would be sensible. There is a real opportunity to add value for traditional bookshops simply by being more proactive with the supply of up to date newspaper reviews and also by giving the opportunity to customers to supply their own book reviews. The provision of a PC, aimed at helping consumers to locate the books which they are looking for is a recommendation emerging from the research findings. These showed that consumers in traditional bookshops tend not to talk to each other and tend not to talk to booksellers. The research also found that new bookshop users in particular are sometimes embarrassed to ask for help. An in-store PC, while incurring initial expense, might encourage consumers to locate the book they are searching for and as well as increasing ease of access to information about the store, might also have the effect of increasing sales. While seating provided in bookshops did not provide any strong results regarding its power to attract people into bookshops, nevertheless, it was found to increase the time that customers spend in store. Installing
seating therefore would seem to be a simple relatively cheap way to encourage customers to spend more time in store.

Although many consumers do respond positively to discounting, it is the perception that there is little else going on that needs to be addressed by traditional bookshops. A degree of balance is required regarding approaches to marketing and the focus needs to be shifted away from formulaic approaches to windows and tables, top tens, discounted promotions at the front of shop, to integrate rather more idiosyncratic material. One way of doing this would be, as suggested above, to give genuine autonomy back to the managers and booksellers to operate their own, financially sensible, promotions. As mentioned earlier, stronger promotion of specialist departments, even individual bookseller specialist knowledge would address some of the consumer needs identified by the current research. Bringing these departments out from behind the discounted tables to the front of the store would also be a novel idea. This would have the added benefit of being genuinely locally relevant and promoting the idea of an ‘independent within a chain’. It would of course be absolutely vital that feedback and contributions on future promotions be sought from consumers. Inviting consumers to give some demographic information would also help bookshops find out a little about their local markets.

Given the strong evidence from the research that consumers in traditional bookshops respond so positively to the ambience, browsing, tactile experience and the serendipitous find in traditional bookshops, these bookshops must capitalise upon this. Again, while breadth of choice cannot be as extensive as online, specialist departments might be developed, even experimented with where odd, esoteric books might be stocked and promoted in order to give the consumer the chance of that ‘serendipitous’ find. This would have to be undertaken within bookshops niche areas of specialisation and with supportive information, such as consumer reviews and linked recommendations.

Evidence from Mintel (2007b) suggests that there is scope for increasing sales from ABC1 and ‘third age’ consumers. This supports the recommendations made above, given that the research found that more experienced book buyers are more inclined to be weary of formulaic approaches to book marketing, and are more inclined to delve beyond the tables and promotions to look for ‘interesting’ books. Were bookshops to adopt a more individualised, local, esoteric approach, it would seem to offer scope to develop the scope for more sales from these demographic groups.
There is scope for chain bookshops to capitalise upon the atmosphere of their stores as evening venues. Focus group feedback suggested that the bookshop could fill a gap for people in the evening, offering a setting for entertainment, as well as potentially a ‘third place’. Obviously some bookshops, particularly in London and some other larger UK cities already use bookshops in this way, but it is clear that there is much more potential for bookshops to be utilised as social venues. This would obviously extend the bookshop beyond its traditional uses and opening hours, but vitally, would offer consumers another quality which online bookshops cannot match. For many consumers, a particular attraction of online bookshops is their constant availability. It would clearly be financially prohibitive for traditional bookshops to open 24 hours every day, but consumers responded very positively to the idea of the bookshop as an evening destination; either as a performance-related venue for poetry or music performances for example, or even just for customer convenience as a place to go for coffee and to relax. The research findings show that it is the presence of a coffee shop rather than just the bookshop alone which encourages mixing with others. Late night opening of coffee shops might encourage the perception of bookshops as an evening venue. This might gradually lead to increased sales, both of coffee and books. Bearing in mind the research findings about homogeneity, consumer responses to coffee shops, discounting and the bookshop as a third place, it seems that traditional bookshops have great potential to develop.

For online bookshops, although the recommendations are fewer, there is scope for development, especially regarding those online bookshops who compete with Amazon. For example, there is scope for the development of direct online communication between consumers. This is a facility that Amazon does not offer and might offer other online bookshops a strong competitive advantage. Szmigin, Canning and Reppel (2005) point out that this can strengthen community links as well as offering brand advantage.

A clear advantage which traditional bookshops have over online bookshops is their ability to capitalise upon the serendipity of the traditional experience and to encourage impulse buying. However, this would suggest that there is more potential for online sites to explore and develop the possibility of serendipitous browsing online rather than the current focus on ‘guided’ browsing which is led by links to recommendations and other readers’ preferences. If online bookshops can synthesise the serendipity of the traditional browsing experience which relies on something catching one’s eye on the next table, or the next shelf along, or even a book which has been incorrectly shelved,
then there is further scope for online bookshops to rival the serendipity of browsing in traditional bookshops and the inclination to impulse buy.

These kinds of promotions - generated through real interest and culture rather than commercially driven - are the kinds of promotions which managers wish to carry out. This might well have the effect of generating genuine community relevance and differentiation; both important qualities which the research findings show both the managers and the consumers are searching for. While chain bookshop strategy seems to aim for community relevance, the research findings show that they are not achieving this. The above recommendations may go some way towards developing local, community relevance for bookshops.

The research findings demonstrate that bookshop consumers – in particular the more experienced, long term consumers – would appreciate a variety of marketing styles and the development of genuine range in bookshops. This would have the resultant effect of developing manager and bookseller autonomy as well as giving bookshops the opportunity to be community responsive and have local relevance. One way to approach this would be to address consumer reservations about discounted books and display methods and to have real autonomy in stores, rather than adherence to a nationwide marketing plan with the same offers and piles of books displayed on tables across the UK, regardless of the chain bookshop in question. Clearly, this kind of approach would require a deep seated change in approach to marketing from chain bookshops and would oblige head office marketing strategists to allow stores much more leeway with regards to recommended titles, window displays and in-store displays as well as rethinking the use of ‘3 for 2’ promotions. Managers might be allowed more discretion regarding which titles they promoted ‘3 for 2’, depending on what their local market required. Success could be target based, with each store setting their own targets for sales. While this would still allow some ‘3 for 2’ promotion to be carried out, self-selection of titles would allow booksellers to engage with these promotions and to market relevant titles, as well as allowing these promotions to be as locally tailored as possible.

The pull between commercial imperative and cultural obligation is also closely linked to this kind of action, and this kind of freedom with regards to promotion could also have the effect of allowing managers and their booksellers to recommend the titles which they genuinely feel are worthy of promotion, rather than being led by a commercial imperative. There are obviously serious financial implications with such suggestions.
and it would be naïve to expect ‘3 for 2’ promotions to disappear. Besides which, many people respond positively to such promotions. What is suggested is a reduction of the dominance of such promotions and a revision of the approach to marketing, giving more power to individual stores, and reducing the dominance of shop-wide marketing plans in order to allow autonomy of choice and store individuality – genuine local relevance – to flourish. This moving away from adherence to head office initiated marketing plan and allowing individual branch-initiated promotions might lead to a sense of ownership and creativity within stores. Indeed it is some of the smaller suggestions and comments from research participants which might lead to the thriving of chain bookshops and development of genuine specialism and brand identity: for example, a focus upon quality, not necessarily allied to new publications. Promotions based upon quality rather than paid for by publishers; more emphasis upon newspaper reviews and stocking the reviewed books. Installing PCs with in-store maps and book locations so that the more reticent of consumers – of which there are some – can locate books themselves. Readily available staff to help consumers, rather than those stuck behind a till or focused upon shelving books. In summary, a real move towards finding out what consumers want, as well as allowing individual stores autonomy in order that differentiation between chains, even between stores, exists.

6.11.1 Further research
An interesting finding emanating from the research was how online bookshops (not Amazon) can offer scope for the development of ‘relationships’ between consumers and online booksellers. There seems to be something about the remoteness of the online service that eases the way for consumers and service providers to interact (if they offer e-mail and telephone contact), more so than in a traditional bookshop. Further research might explore this phenomenon in further detail, and establish whether this is a widespread feature of online retailing/services or if it is unique to online bookshops.

A further question raised by the research which warrants further investigation is the question of trust online. Accepted knowledge of consumer behaviour tells us that the most powerful influence on purchase is advocacy – recommendation from a trusted friend or family member. Given that the research found a very small percentage difference in the degree of trust which consumers said they had for online or in-store recommendations, further research might seek to establish whether online recommendations and reviews are treated in the same way as genuine advocates of products and services. One can see how this mirrors the removal of the bookseller
from book buying – it seems that genuinely personal recommendations from friends and family may no longer be as important either.

While research has certainly been carried out into the complexities of shopping (Miller, D., 1998) and how it can be experienced as a treat (Gregson et al, 2002), satisfy sophisticated needs, such as self-actualisation (Maslow, 1943) as well as meeting aspirational desires (Solomon, 2002) there seems to be little in the way of research into the therapeutic qualities of shopping, and there is certainly none that looks specifically at the therapeutic qualities of book shopping, whether in traditional or online settings. This could certainly form the basis for further research in the field, looking in more detail at the affective aspect of book shopping: what the goods mean and the experiences which consumers have when purchasing, as well as any brand associations which consumers may have with particular authors or publishers.

The research found that many bookshop users questioned, both online and traditional, also bought books in supermarkets; 61% of online consumers and 41% of traditional bookshop consumers. Trade opinion about supermarket book selling is mixed in that supermarkets tend to ‘cherry pick’ bestsellers thus undercutting traditional bookshops. Nevertheless, many in the book trade are also of the opinion that the supermarket foray into bookselling has broadened the market. However it has yet to be established whether supermarkets have expanded the market for all booksellers. Further research would be necessary in order to establish the broader implications and effects of supermarket bookselling and whether the presence of books in supermarkets has encouraged those consumers to go and buy books in bookshops.

6.11.2 Implications for industry
It is useful to look at the implications for the wider industry – publishing and especially bookselling - as a result of the research findings. Many recommendations have been made (above) most of which can be implemented reasonably easily, even on an experimental basis. It was found that booksellers both traditional and online tended not to monitor the effectiveness of their own marketing initiatives. An important aspect of the segmentation process identified by key writers in the field is the identification of consumer wants, needs and behaviour, which this research addresses. It would therefore seem advisable for bookshops to invest in this area. From the effect of coffee shops in store, to discounting, or even the use of linked recommendations online, there was a distinct lack of evaluation in place to see how consumers respond to these kinds
of facilities. More crucially, there was therefore a lack of evidence showing the impact of these facilities upon sales. While this research proffers evidence based findings on these marketing tools, nevertheless, it would seem that were the book trade to work more collaboratively together in order to produce large scale assessments of the effects of these kinds of marketing initiatives, it would be strongly placed to move forward in this very competitive trading environment. Many bookshops, most notably the chains, do not really seem to know what their customers want; far less how they feel about the bookshops and how they respond to the marketing and branding strategies adopted. Repeated calls for research into consumer behaviour in the book trade abound (Watson, 2002; Holman, 2007; Bookseller, 2007; Horner, 2007a), but in-depth research is scarce.

It is nevertheless important to emphasise the lack of competitive marketing which the research found and also, to ask why traditional bookshops seem so unwilling to strike out and be genuinely different. The research found that a fundamental sameness was perceived by consumers across each of the bookshops studied, despite stated aims to have strong local identities. The Mintel report (2007a) on Book Retailing has a section focusing upon segmentation in bookshops, underlining Waterstone’s ‘full range’, and ‘specialist with highbrow reputation’. Nevertheless, these messages about identity and stock are irrelevant if, as the current research has demonstrated, the experiences of consumers are in direct contradiction to these. Similarly, Mintel also points out that while 50% of Borders stock is centrally supplied, each store has control over the remaining stock, allowing it to be ‘tailored’ for the local market. Again, this local tailoring was not conveyed to consumers. One therefore has to ask, if there is a real will in traditional bookshops to be locally relevant; to be an ‘independent within a chain’, why this is patently not working. It might be suggested that chain bookshops are fearful of making more radical changes to their stock. Discounting has been such a mainstay of traditional bookshops for so long now, it would be very difficult to break away from this in any meaningful way. Nevertheless, it is imperative that despite labelling themselves locally relevant with tailored stock, having a ‘full range’ or a ‘highbrow reputation’, the current research has demonstrated that these points are simply not conveyed to the majority of consumers. What is perceived is a group of interchangeable chain bookshops selling the same limited range of stock, in the same way.

The interviews carried out at the commencement of the research with bookshop managers and indeed those carried out at a later stage with the online managers, served to communicate the bookshop approaches to and applications of marketing.
Whether one could go so far as to call this ‘strategy’ is not clear. However, having reviewed marketing and consumer behaviour models (STP processes and the decision process model for example) it would seem that there are elements of these models which it would be helpful for industry to revisit.

6.12 Future strategy

This model illustrates key suggested strategies which chain bookshops should adopt in the light of the research findings. The strategies are laid out across a continuum from new consumers to established consumers, but many of the suggestions would be helpful for most consumers. The most important point is to adopt an appropriate overall approach which should be directed by the key market of the bookshop in question. In particular this would determine the bookshop approach to the prominence of discounted titles. However, having in-store PCs and newspaper reviews would be advantageous in all bookshop settings. Allowing stores more autonomy regarding their promotions would encourage a genuine local community relevance to develop, as well as allowing managers to satisfy the cultural contribution which they feel bookshops can make. While coffee shops are to be considered with caution, overall, they are viewed
positively and do send a message to consumers about accessibility of a given bookshop. It is important that they are installed in a clearly demarcated area of any bookshop and that they are not seen to intrude on bookshop space. The research found that the bookshop as a potential social space is enhanced by the inclusion of a coffee shop. However, there is further scope for bookshops to develop so that they are genuine social spaces in the community. While many bookshops in larger cities already open late into the evening and operate as social venues for cultural events, there is genuine scope for this to be developed outwith these cities. There are obvious considerations to do with staffing, security and related costs which need to be addressed. Nevertheless, the potential for bookshops to develop into genuine social spaces operating as alternative evening venues that people want to visit, is considerable.

6.13 Final points
This research has analysed comprehensively chain and online bookshops’ approaches to marketing and branding, as well as consumer responses to those approaches, as laid out in the objectives (see Introduction). Important research findings have emerged and these are useful both in a scholarly context as well as for booksellers. The research has examined a hitherto unexplored retail setting, and places important findings in the context of existing literature on retailing, consumer behaviour and marketing as well as other scholarly areas. The empirical research carried out has served to expand knowledge of the retail setting of bookselling; retail approaches to marketing and branding in this area as well as analysing consumer behaviour in this environment. There is significant scope for more research in this area, as outlined above, in order to further the findings outlined in this thesis. The area of bookselling is still relatively unexplored and the continued evolution of online bookselling and consumer responses to supermarket bookselling all offer further scope for important research.

Consumers respond positively to the marketing techniques which are widely adopted by chain bookshops; in particular, discounting and coffee shops. This approval comes with important caveats however, and these should be noted by chain bookshops. In particular the perception of homogeneity and lack of choice is a point which should be noted. The presence of a coffee shop enhances the concept of the bookshop as a third place, and adds a social dimension to the bookshops which is not otherwise present. The research found that bookshop consumers tend to have a positive emotional
response to traditional bookshops and to experience therapeutic qualities therein. There is scope for further research into these responses. There would seem to be room for genuinely local promotions, which would also allow store managers some autonomy as well as a chance to develop backlist, according to consumer demand. The development of autonomy would also allow genuine brand identity to be developed across different branches of chains as well as satisfying the wishes of the managers interviewed, to have less focus upon special offers, and more focus upon quality backlist and satisfying consumer need.

Online bookshops offer an attractive alternative to traditional bookshops, providing different facilities, and an entirely different book shopping experience. The ease of access at a time convenient to the consumer, ease of tracking down obscure titles and the personalised recommendations and breadth of customer reviews available are all attractive qualities to which traditional bookshops are not, at the moment, providing an adequate alternative. However, there is certainly scope for traditional bookshops to learn from online bookshops, and apply some of their approaches within the traditional setting. Consumers are keenly aware of the difference in experience between online and traditional shopping venues and can choose their shopping venue according to their needs and wants at any given moment.

The focus group participants expressed quite eloquently the difference in quality between traditional and online shopping:

Online:

In reality I tend to purchase books online due to the increased convenience and speed. I also find the online reviews very helpful along with the facilities to easily trace other books by the same author or find other authors / books you may be interested in based on what you are currently looking up.

Traditional:

I think the idea of just coming in for half an hour on a wet Sunday afternoon just seeing what there is, you’re not going to get on the internet...What I’m looking for is the promise that you might this time, as you sometimes do, pick up a book...then get home and find you can’t put it down. Sometimes you don’t get that and you don’t see anything that you haven’t already got,
but every now and again you pick up a book and you get it home and you think 'what a brilliant idea it was to go shopping!'
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Abstract References


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Chapter 2 – Methodological Approach References

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Chapter 3 - Review of the Literature References


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Marketing, 2002b. WHSmith is putting £1.5m into a community programme. *Marketing*, 21st Feb., p.4.


Chapter 4 - Results References


Kreitzman, L., 1999a. Shop around the Clock. The Bookseller, 4865, pp.36-38.


Chapter 5 - Discussion References


Fraser, F., 2005. Ottakar’s hires Mustoes to boost brand. The Bookseller, 5174, p.12.


Chapter 6 - Conclusions and Recommendations

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Marketing, 2002b. WHSmith is putting £1.5m into a community programme. Marketing, 21st Feb. p.4.


Appendix I – Publications

Journal articles


This article emerged from desk-based research and a review of literature in preparation for the thesis, before any empirical research had taken place.


This article was based upon the findings from the interviews with managers and sets their views about marketing and branding in the context of current literature.


This article was developed from a conference paper presented at the International Conference of the Book, 2005 and draws upon research findings from the interviews, questionnaires and focus groups.

Book Chapters


This invited book chapter is based upon the article for the *International Journal of the Book*, above.
Appendix II – Interviews with book trade experts

Introductory Information for Participants

What is the Study about?

Entitled Bookselling Culture and Consumer Behaviour: Marketing Strategies and Responses in Traditional and Online Environments, the research overall aims to focus upon the marketing and branding strategies used by the book trade in general high street bookshops, looking initially at traditional bookshops then at a later stage in the research, examining online bookshops. The research aims to assess the effect of marketing and branding strategies upon the people who use bookshops.

Who is conducting the research?

The research is being conducted by Audrey Laing, a PhD research student at The Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen. Audrey has 12 years experience of working in the book trade and many of the questions raised in the research have evolved from experiences in various bookshop environments over the years.

Who is the sponsor?

The research has not been sponsored by any commercial organisation, nor has it any commercial affiliation. It is fully funded by The Robert Gordon University.

Why is the study important?

The study aims to answer questions about the book trade which have not been addressed before. Focusing on individual experiences and responses to the trade, the research aims to provide useful information for book trade personnel, particularly those working within the realms of marketing and branding. This may apply to head office strategists and decision makers as well as booksellers on the shop floor designing windows or table displays.

What will be done with the study results?

The study results will be published as a PhD once all research and analysis has been completed. The PhD will then be available to anyone who wishes to read it. It is important to note that all information given to the researcher at any stage of the research will be treated in confidence and all those who contribute to the research whether in interviews, focus groups or questionnaires will remain anonymous, if they so wish.
Opening Remarks

- Approximate interview time.
- Permission to tape/take notes.

BRANDING

INTRODUCTORY THOUGHTS

There are many references to branding and the power of the brand in the media, whether it is “Posh & Becks”, Marks & Spencer or Coca Cola.

1. What do you understand by the term ‘brand’, thinking first in general terms, and then thinking about the brand identity of your bookshop?
   - When you think about the brand identity of your bookshop, how would you describe the qualities of the brand which you are trying to convey?
   - If your bookshop came to life, what kind of person would it be?

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BRAND

2. How has the brand identity of this bookshop evolved? In particular think about the following contributing factors to the brand and whether or not they are recent developments –
   - Which elements of your bookshop most effectively constitute the brand? (e.g. look/feel of the store, ‘typical’ customer, style of display, kind of books stocked, even colour of shelves?)
   - Is the brand a groundbreaking or more traditional one? – has it picked up the branding ideas of other bookshops or is the identity very original?
   - Identify key marketing promotions undertaken by your store/chain – (how) do they reinforce the brand? E.g. -
     1. strategies at Xmas
     2. B.T.U.
     3. new book promotions
     4. Author visits etc.
   - What about rules of display in-store? To what degree may booksellers deviate from this guidance?
   - General presentation etc. – is there brand consistency from store to store? I.e. shelving, lighting signage etc.)

3. More recently, do you think the brand identity of this shop/chain has changed? (Perhaps over the past few years?)
• If so, why do you think this is? - Natural evolution, or in response to strategic changes in marketing?
• What sort of influence has internet bookselling had on the brand or the sort of marketing that is now undertaken? – thinking about your own chain’s internet site as well as other sites.
• Have there been operational changes – maybe different day to day procedures, opening hours, staffing levels etc?
• If there have been specific brand identity changes re layout, design and more especially customer comfort and customer facilities -has this caused the identity of the shop to evolve from how it was before these changes took place?
• Regarding customer comfort and facilities – what sort of impact have these elements of the store had on the bookshop visitors? What sort of feedback, if any do you get?

BRANDING AND MARKETING
THE HO STRATEGY

4. Thinking about the corporate concept of the brand and the strategies that head Office use to promote this;

• Do you think the head office concept of the brand identity of this bookshop is the same as the shop floor concept? Does everyone share the same concept of the brand?
• Was there a formalised decision-making process that led to particular marketing strategies being adopted to promote the brand? (E.g. focus groups, image consultants, marketing consultants?)
• How do you/ your company decide which books to promote? -To what degree is any consultation done on this - either professionally or with booksellers on the shop floor?
• Are you aware of key markets having been identified? –Are these new markets?
• Do you think H.O. is happy with the current brand image of the store that is being portrayed, or is the brand and the marketing constantly reviewed?
• Discounting strategies – are any discounts offered? How does this discounting contribute to brand image? Does it?
LOCAL INPUT
STAFF AND THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

5. Thinking more specifically about the customers –

- How would you describe a typical (Bookshop Name) customer?
- Do you think a new clientele has been attracted into your shop because of any recent changes? If so, have you any evidence to back up your opinion about this? How would you describe the new clientele if there is one?
- Have you experienced any customer feedback about what they think of the marketing or image of the shop? What do they like or dislike?

Thinking about the less tangible qualities which may be present in bookshops, like the atmosphere, or ‘feel’ of the place;

- Do you have customers who regularly visit your shop, spending long periods of time in-store?
- If so, why do you think this is? What qualities are they experiencing which keep them in the shop?
- Can you think of any other environment where they might experience these qualities?
- Have the staff developed any relationships with the customers e.g. discussing books, general chat etc. – To what degree is this encouraged as part of the store strategy?
- Have you ever noticed customers developing relationships with each other? Perhaps recommending or discussing books, general chit chat etc.? Do the sofas and chairs or the coffee shop (if applicable) play any part in this?
STORE IDENTITY

6. How would you differentiate the identity of this store/chain from other bookshops with whom you are directly competing?

- Is it possible to do so? Are there any real differences?
- Does this differentiation of identity (if there is any) mean that some customers choose your shop over others? Do you believe this shop has a distinctive brand identity, comparing it with other bookshops?
- Does the store identity differ between locations – do you believe there are regional or consumer differences between areas re what customers want from the shop?
- When your H.O. instigates nationwide promotions do you believe they are always relevant for this shop/all shops?
- How do you think the staff contribute to the identity of the store, or do they? Again are you aware of regional differences between staffing profiles from region to region
- To what extent may individual stores carry out local marketing re posters, advertising etc - must they abide by particular design/brand rules? e.g. are staff encouraged to attract local authors for signings etc.?

PUBLISHER INFLUENCE

7. How would you evaluate the contribution of publishers to the marketing agenda? For example –

- Do publishers have any influence either locally or at H.O. re the books which are selected for promotion?
- How important are financial incentives from publishers - can this change the choice of book for promotion?
- If so, do you believe a financially motivated book choice ever has an impact on the shop brand?

SUMMING UP

8. How would you assess the depth of impact which the brand of your shop has on customers?

- Do you believe sales are changed by the brand identity of the shop – have you evidence to support your opinion?
- Similarly with the marketing strategies employed – do you believe customers respond in a positive manner (E.g. commenting on posters, events, attractive windows?)
- Finally what changes do you believe your shop should make to improve brand and marketing effectiveness?

ANY OTHER COMMENTS?
Appendix III – Coding of initial interviews with bookshop experts

Projected brand identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Br-Pro/comms</td>
<td>Community spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br-Pro/loc</td>
<td>Local Relevance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br-Pro/ran</td>
<td>Range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br-Pro/scot</td>
<td>Scottishness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br-Pro/indep</td>
<td>Independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br-pro/welc</td>
<td>Welcoming Store ‘easy to shop’ (has to be tidy, ordered)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br-pro/broad</td>
<td>A place of broad appeal – welcoming to all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br-pro/3rd</td>
<td>3rd place/lifestyle choice/place of relaxation/encouraged to browse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br-pro/vfm</td>
<td>Value for money is vital</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Projected brand qualities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Br-proq/svce</td>
<td>Good customer service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br-Proq/know</td>
<td>Knowledge of staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Marketing Strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marstrat – extend</td>
<td>Bookshops want to expand the book buying market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marstrat – consistm</td>
<td>Consistency of <em>merchandising style</em> across the chain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marstrat – consistst</td>
<td>Consistency of <em>stock</em> across the chain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marstrat – marginsac</td>
<td>Sacrifice of margin with discounted offers, in order to increase market and gross sales.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marstrat – comm</td>
<td>More commercial approach is now taken</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Cultural elements of bookshop brand identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Br-id/evol(ving)</th>
<th>Has evolved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Br-id/diff</td>
<td>Differentiation across stores within same chain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br-id/cachet</td>
<td>Book shopping has a cachet to it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br-id/intellect</td>
<td>Book shop is a place of intellect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br-id/custper</td>
<td>The brand <em>is</em> the customer perception/experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br-id/‘lifestyle’</td>
<td>Can be viewed as a lifestyle store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br-id/refuge</td>
<td>Can provide a refuge for customers (esp. from work)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br-id/bksl/cust/rel</td>
<td>Can provide the backdrop for relationships between booksellers and customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br-id/social</td>
<td>There is a social element to bookshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br-id/feeling</td>
<td>The brand (identity/culture) can impact upon how people are feeling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br-id/lesslit</td>
<td>Less literary than it used to be</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Internal ‘impacters’ upon brand identity/culture of bookshops

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Br-id/plentybksl</th>
<th>Number of booksellers (enabling chat/interaction with customers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Br-id/bkslpers</td>
<td>Booksellers’ personalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br-id/bkselserv</td>
<td>Booksellers’ service/knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br/id/cafeimpact</td>
<td>Presence of coffee shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br/id/seats impact</td>
<td>Presence of seating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bksl –own(1)</td>
<td>Ownership of <em>their</em> store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bksl –own(2)</td>
<td>Ownership of <em>their</em> customers (coteries)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## External/physical ‘impacters’ on brand identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Br-id/geo</th>
<th>Characteristics of the local customers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Br-id/site</td>
<td>Site of the store (footfall, busy area etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br-id/region/diff</td>
<td>Geographical site of the store (e.g. London, East Kilbride, Liverpool)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br-id/layout</td>
<td>Physical layout of the store (no. of floors, size, stairs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br-id/light</td>
<td>Lightness/darkness of the store (Bookshops have been lightened and brightened)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br-id/colour</td>
<td>Colours used in-store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br-id/signage</td>
<td>Signage used</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Marketing/selling techniques

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mar/recomm</th>
<th>Staff recommends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mar/bom</td>
<td>Book of the month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar/tt</td>
<td>Top ten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar/disc</td>
<td>Discounted promotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar/staffin</td>
<td>Promotions initiated by staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar/handsel</td>
<td>Use of knowledge, recommendation and personal relationship between cust and bookseller, to sell.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar/fs</td>
<td>Heavy promotion of front of shop, ‘branded’ area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar/target</td>
<td>Targeted to specific groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar/outreach</td>
<td>Going out to the community to promote books/reading etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar/push</td>
<td>More aggressive marketing techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar/tailor</td>
<td>Tailoring of promotions to make them relevant to that particular shop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar/cyclic</td>
<td>Manager observation that techniques used are cyclic (not new)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## External Marketing Force

| Mar/pubdisc       | Special offers initiated by publishers (financial inducements/large discounts given) |
**Observations about the customers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cons</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>–sepclien/coff</td>
<td>Coffee shop customers often a separate clientele</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–diff/clien</td>
<td>Different kinds of customers in each store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>king</td>
<td>Customer is now ‘king’ due to choice re prices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–regs</td>
<td>There are regular customers, with habitual behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–fiends</td>
<td>There are still some ‘book fiends’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nochat</td>
<td>There is very little chat between customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lesslit</td>
<td>Bookshop customers are generally less literary now.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Observed consumer responses to the store**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cons</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>expects</td>
<td>Customer expectations esp. seats, coffee, discounting etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phys</td>
<td>Tend to remark upon physical factors/changes in-store (lighting, layout, carpet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>atmos</td>
<td>Tend to remark on the atmosphere (mostly positively)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reco+</td>
<td>Respond particularly well to ‘staff recommends’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>locpromo+</td>
<td>Respond particularly well to locally initiated promotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disc+</td>
<td>Respond well to the discounting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>onlineneg</td>
<td>Consumers are aware of the disadvantages of online book buying</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Organisational Relationships & Strategic Differences**  
(HO = Head Office)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OR</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>–HO/script</td>
<td>HO can tend towards prescriptiveness - store feels powerless/lacks autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–HO/markstronger</td>
<td>HO think the brand is stronger than do the booksellers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–HO/inappromo</td>
<td>HO at times provide inappropriate pos – lack of localised relevance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–HO/gendivide</td>
<td>Cultural divide between HO and the store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brstrat/homog</td>
<td>Similarity of promotions observed across all chain bookshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultob/alt</td>
<td>Managers feel they have a cultural obligation to their customers – want a more altruistic approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–Brstrat/doubts</td>
<td>Managers express doubts about wisdom of some promotional strategies (esp. re loss of margin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar/regrets</td>
<td>Intimation that the books promoted are not what the managers might choose to promote</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Online Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>online – custsvce+</th>
<th>Has improved customer service provided, as it is generally used as a research tool</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>online – custknow+</td>
<td>Has improved customer knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>online – staffknow+</td>
<td>Has improved staff knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>online – nocomp</td>
<td>Not perceived as commercial threat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix IV – Interviews with online managers

Introductory Thoughts on Branding

Much focus is placed on brands and brand image in our media. For example, ‘Posh & Becks’ are frequently referred to as a ‘brand’ in the media and seem to have a particularly powerful brand image. One can also consider the mixed fortunes of the Marks & Spencer brand and the strong associations that brands such as Nike and Adidas have with youth culture.

- When you think about the brand identity of your online bookshop, how would you describe the qualities of the brand which you are trying to convey?
  - i. How is this achieved?
  - ii. Is there a distinctive ‘look’ to the brand?
  - iii. Does this distinguish it from other online stores?

- Does this projected brand differ from your high street stores? (*If relevant*) If so, why?

- If your online bookshop came to life, what kind of person would it be?

- Again, does this differ from the high street branches? (*If relevant*)

Development of the Online Store

- How did this online store develop?
  - Because of a specific gap in the market? (Or simply in response to other online bookshops appearing?)

- Which customers (or markets) are you going for?
  - Is this distinct from your high street customers? (*If relevant*) Or do you perceive an overlap in identity between your high street and online customers? (*if relevant*). Has the development of the online store had any impact on high street sales? (*if relevant*).
The Online Brand

- Is the online brand a groundbreaking or more traditional one?

- How important is the visual impact or design aspect of the online store?
  - Does this have an impact on the kind of books you promote?
  - What sort of process do you go through before changing or updating what is on your site? E.g. managers, consultants etc.
  - What changes have you made over the time your site has been up and running – what’s worked best and what hasn’t worked?

BRANDING AND MARKETING
THE HO STRATEGY

- Are the books which you promote online, automatically the same as the terrestrial stores?
  - If not, what sort of consultation or decision making process is gone through?

- Do you think the current brand image of the online bookshop has changed since it started or has it remained quite static?
  - Is there a conscious effort made to review this, or is it left to evolve naturally?

Online CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

- Do you receive any sort of interaction or feedback from your customers?
  - If so, how would you describe a typical customer?
  - Do you think this differs from the customers at your high street stores?

- Can you tell if you have ‘regular’ customers who regularly visit your online store, spending long periods of time in-store?
  - If so, why do you think this is? What qualities are they experiencing which keep them in the shop? Is this specific to online bookshops, or do you think it is an online shopping phenomenon?

- Have any of the site staff developed any relationships with the online customers?
  - e.g. discussing books, general chat etc. – To what degree is this encouraged as part of the store strategy?
  - Does your online store allow customers to develop relationships with each other? Perhaps recommending or discussing books, general chit chat etc.?
**Online Advantages**

- How would you differentiate the online book shopping experience with the high street book shopping experience?
- Is there anything about the experience which customers have online that they cannot get in a high street branch? What additional facilities are available online?
- Similarly, on what level can you **not** compete with the high street stores?
- E.g. it is often suggested that online shopping cannot offer the same social interaction, or browsing opportunities as real shopping. What do you think about this?

**SUMMING UP**

- Do you think online bookselling has a healthy future? Why?
- If budget was no object, what changes if any would you make to your online site? What promotions would you undertake?

**ANY OTHER COMMENTS?**
Appendix V: Coding of interviews with online experts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strat – deslittle</td>
<td>Very little strategy in place re site design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strat – deslocal</td>
<td>Some external web design input but largely locally designed and managed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strat – specialise</td>
<td>Cannot compete with Amazon on range, so specialist choice, done well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strat - simpromo</td>
<td>Online/offline promotions largely the same, due to labour-intensity of reviews etc. (Applies to stores with online and offline presence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strat - altamazon</td>
<td>Providing an alternative to Amazon (Effort to stop their offline customers going there)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strat - notrack</td>
<td>Marketing changes implemented, but not always tracked to check effectiveness. (Sometimes because of technical limitations).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strat - support</td>
<td>Primarily providing a service for those unable to come to the store in person rather than expanding the market: a support tool.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strat - antiamazon</td>
<td>Former relationship between online/offline one of suspicion, but much more intra-supportive now. (United against Amazon)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand Projection</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand – simoffon</td>
<td>Tendency to share the same promotions online as offline. Seen as brand consistency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand – rebrand</td>
<td>Much ‘rebranding’ taking place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand – physfocus</td>
<td>Brand focus is upon the physical: colours etc. rather than a more holistic or customer oriented approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand – mobile</td>
<td>Projected brand identity dependent on ideas of current management. Mobile, dynamic attitude to brand, rather than seeing it as being outwith your direct control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand – smoothdiff</td>
<td>Aim to redefine, consolidate, smooth out the differences across some very different stores. i.e. rebrand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand – prestigeinf</td>
<td>Prestige of brand image influences loyalty and sales</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Customers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cust – personal</th>
<th>Emphasis on personal service, despite electronic bookselling (seen as distinctive from Amazon).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cust – electotele</td>
<td>Habit of online customers becoming telephone customers, when they phone for advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cust – facilpersonal</td>
<td>Online conduit seems to facilitate/enable a higher degree of customer contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cust – regulars</td>
<td>Awareness of regular customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cust – antiprofit</td>
<td>Aware of customers who resent the profit-making aspect of bookselling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cust – loyalty</td>
<td>High degree of loyalty, due to strong brand image, good service, and ease of reaching someone when things go wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cust - onlinesameoff</td>
<td>Online customers tend to be existing shop customers. i.e. ‘extracted’ from offline site. (Hence same customer profile online as offline).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cust - tradsep</td>
<td>However - most offline customers unaware of existence of online site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cust - expvalue</td>
<td>Customers expect value online, (but don’t always get it)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Online personnel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Onlstaff – notech</th>
<th>Not always the most technically able (by their own admission).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Onlstaff – smlscale</td>
<td>Operated on a small scale (even chains). Just one or two-man jobs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Online advantages and benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Onl+ - spreadifno</th>
<th>Has facilitated the spread of backlist, range, sales and information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Onl+ - instock</td>
<td>‘Not in stock’ largely irrelevant online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onl+ - conven</td>
<td>Convenience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onl+ - solitary</td>
<td>Don’t have to talk to others, which suits some.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onl+ - relat/irrel</td>
<td>Demonstrates that emphasis placed on personal relationship between customer and bookseller by traditional bookshops is overplayed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Online disadvantages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Onl- - notouch</th>
<th>Tactile element – flick through, see typeset, feel weight.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Onl- - diffbrowse</td>
<td>When browsing, can site yourself in the correct area, in a store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onl- - trust</td>
<td>Trust re reviews felt to be an issue. Honest reviews crucial.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onl- - smlbudget</td>
<td>Budget in book trade impacts upon technical implementation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix VI – In-store questionnaires with bookshop customers

Bookselling Culture and Consumer Behaviour Questionnaire

Section 1 – Visiting bookshops

1. How often do you visit this bookshop?
   - Every day
   - Monthly
   - More than twice a week
   - Weekly
   - Less frequently
   - This is the first time

2. On average, how much time do you spend here on each visit?
   - 10 minutes
   - half an hour
   - one hour
   - more than an hour

3. How often do you visit other bookshops?
   - Every day
   - Monthly
   - More than twice a week
   - Weekly
   - Less frequently

4. Do you ever visit online bookshops?
   - No – Go to Question 6
   - Yes – Which one(s)?

5. Do you ever purchase books online?
   - Yes
   - No

6. Do you ever buy books in supermarkets?
   - Yes
   - No
7. Do you have a favourite bookshop?

No ☐
Yes ☐ Which one? Why?
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................

8. Do you think the bookshop we are in has a good reputation?

Yes ☐
No ☐
Don’t know ☐

9. Do you know whether it is part of a chain of bookshops, or an independent bookshop?

Chain ☐
Independent ☐
Don’t know ☐

Section 2 – Marketing Strategies - What the Customer thinks

10. If you had to describe the image of this shop, would you use any of these words? (tick any that apply)

Bright ☐ Good atmosphere ☐
Dingy ☐ Welcoming ☐
Intimidating ☐ Bad atmosphere ☐

Which other words would you use?
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................

11. What do you usually do when you are in this shop? (Tick all that apply)

Just browse ☐ Visit the coffee shop ☐
Browse then purchase ☐ Meet friends ☐
Do work, write letters or read newspapers ☐ Look for a specific book ☐
Something else ☐ Please Explain ☐
12. How important is the price when you are buying books?

Most important ☐ Not very important ☐
Quite important ☐ Not important at all ☐
 Doesn’t make any difference ☐

13. How much do you like the following, in this bookshop?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Dislike intensely</th>
<th>Dislike</th>
<th>Don’t mind</th>
<th>Quite like</th>
<th>Like this very much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Displays in windows and on tables</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special offers like 3 for 2, or 2 for £10</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer service</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The range of books</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofas</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atmosphere – please explain</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something Else – please Explain</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. Is there anything you dislike about this bookshop?

15. Do you think it is important that bookshops have author events and signings?

Yes ☐
No ☐
Don’t know ☐

16. Have you ever attended an author event or signing?

Yes ☐
No ☐
17. What usually influences your choice of book?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very off-putting</th>
<th>Slightly off-putting</th>
<th>No difference</th>
<th>Quite tempting</th>
<th>Very tempting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the bestsellers section</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like the cover</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting blurb on the back</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like the author</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation by staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special offers like 3 for 2 or 2 for £10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper reviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interested in the subject</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV/Radio advertising</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is in a window or table display</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something Else (More details)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18. Out of the following options only, which one do you find most effective for making you buy a book? (Tick one option only)

- Staff recommends section
- 3 for 2 or special offers
- Bestseller section
- None of these would tempt me

Section 3 – The newer strategies

19. Do you like the seating in this bookshop?
- Yes
- No
- I didn’t notice the seats
- No strong feelings either way

20. Do you ever use the seats?
- Yes
- No - Go to question 23.
21. Do you think you spend a longer time in the bookshop because of the seating?

Yes ☐  No ☐

22. Do you think you end up buying more because of the seating?

Yes ☐  No ☐

23. Do you ever visit the coffee shop?

Yes ☐  No - Go to question 28 ☐

24. What do you like about it?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dislike Intensely</th>
<th>Dislike</th>
<th>Don’t Mind</th>
<th>Quite Like</th>
<th>Like This Very Much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The coffee</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can meet friends</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People watching</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The food</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can read and drink</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coffee at the same</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The atmosphere –</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>please explain</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The fact that it is in</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a bookshop</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something else - Please explain</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

……………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………

25. Do you think you spend more time in this bookshop because of the coffee shop?

Yes ☐  No ☐

26. Have you ever bought a book on impulse before or after visiting the coffee shop?

Yes ☐  No ☐

27. Do you think you buy more books because of the coffee shop?

Yes ☐  No ☐
Section 4 – Other people in bookshops

28. How old do you think most customers in this bookshop are?

- 20 or less  □
- 21 - 40  □
- 41 – 60  □
- 61 or older  □
- Don’t know  □

29. Do you ever speak to other customers when you are in this bookshop?

- Yes  □
- No - Go to question 33  □

30. Do you speak to other customers

- Most times you visit  □
- regularly  □
- Occasionally  □
- Only once  □

31. Is the conversation about

- Books  □
- Something else  □
- Please explain

...........................................................................................................................................

32. Have you ever developed an acquaintance, a friendship or a relationship with someone in a bookshop?

- Yes  □
- No  □

33. In your experience, do you think the staff are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mostly</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helpful</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polite</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledgeable</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very helpful</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very polite</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very knowledgeable</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
34. Have you ever spoken to any of the booksellers (apart from when you are at the counter buying a book?)
   Yes ☐
   No go to question 37 ☐

35. Do you speak to the bookseller(s)
   On every visit ☐
   Most visits ☐
   sometimes ☐
   occasionally ☐

36. Have you ever bought a book because a bookseller has personally recommended it to you?
   Yes ☐
   No ☐

37. Do you ever arrange to meet friends or colleagues inside this bookshop?
   Yes ☐
   No ☐

38. When you are in this bookshop do you feel (circle any that apply)
   Happier ☐
   Isolated ☐
   Intimidated ☐
   More relaxed ☐
   Just the same ☐
   Other – Explain ☐

39. Can you think of anything which would make this bookshop better?
   ……………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………
   ……………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

40. Finally, which age group do you belong to?
   20 or less ☐
   21 -30 ☐
   31 – 40 ☐
   41 – 50 ☐
   51 – 60 ☐
   61 or older ☐

NOTE GENDER…………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

WILLING TO TAKE PART IN FOCUS GROUPS?……………………………………………………………………

CONTACT DETAILS………………………………………………………………………………………………………………..
Appendix VII – Online survey with new bookshop users

Thank you for visiting this survey site. The survey that follows asks a few simple questions about bookshops, and what you think of them. It will take just a few minutes to answer the questions. I hope you enjoy completing this survey!

Thank you.

1. **Do you like bookshops?**
   - Yes
   - No

2. **Do you ever go into bookshops?**
   - No
   - Just for Christmas or birthdays
   - Every few months
   - About every month
   - More often than monthly

3. **Do you agree with any of the following statements?**
   Please tick all the answers with which you agree.
   - Bookshops are not easy for me to get to
   - I am not interested in bookshops
   - I don’t read books/ I find them boring
   - I’m more interested in other hobbies
   - I don’t feel comfortable in bookshops
   - Bookshops are for other people
   - I don’t have the time to go to bookshops
   - I prefer to buy books in supermarkets
   - I prefer to buy books online
   - I prefer to get books from the library
   - I read other things (magazines, newspapers)
4a. What do you think might make you visit bookshops more often?

Again, tick all the answers which apply.

- Cheaper books
- If bookshops were more welcoming
- If I knew where to find what I wanted
- More staff to help me choose
- Plenty of seats
- If there were more people like me in the bookshop
- If I saw a book I liked advertised on television, e.g. on ‘Richard & Judy’
- If bookshops had cafes in them
- If there was a bookshop nearer to where I live
- If bookshops had the kind of books I like

4b. Can you think of anything else which might make you visit bookshops more often?

If so, please type it below.

5a. Can you think of any bookshops you know?

If so, please type the names below.

5b. How would you describe the bookshop(s) you named above?

If you said that you never go into bookshops (Question 2) please go straight to Question 13 which asks you about your age group and continue from there. Otherwise, please continue with the next question.

6. Over what period of time have you been going to bookshops?

- One year or less
- Between one and five years
- Between five and ten years
- Over ten years
7. Do you agree with any of the following statements?

Please tick all the answers with which you agree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bookshops are more welcoming places now than they used to be</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bookshops now seem to have more of the things that I am interested in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bookshops are more fashionable places to go to than they used to be</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are more people like me in bookshops these days</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like it that some bookshops now have coffee shops</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like it that some bookshops now have sofas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like the special offers like ‘3 for 2’ and the half price deals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The customer service is better in bookshops these days</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. Are you more inclined to go into bookshops if they have coffee shops in them?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Yes, definitely</th>
<th>Probably</th>
<th>It makes no difference</th>
<th>No – cafes put me off</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

9. Are you more inclined to go into bookshops if they have special offers in store? (For example, ‘3 for 2’ offers, or two paperbacks for £10?)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Yes, definitely</th>
<th>Probably</th>
<th>It makes no difference</th>
<th>No – these offers put me off</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

10. Are you more inclined to go into bookshops which have plenty of seats and sofas?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Yes, definitely</th>
<th>Probably</th>
<th>It makes no difference</th>
<th>No – this would put me off</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

11. When you are in a bookshop, do you spend money?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Usually</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
12. Do you agree with any of the following statements?

Tick all the answers with which you agree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I can never see anything I like in bookshops</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I just go in to browse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can’t afford to buy books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There’s too much to choose from in bookshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are never and assistants around to ask for advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m too embarrassed to ask anybody for advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bookshops don’t have the books I’m interested in</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. Which age group do you belong to?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. Are you

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. Is there anything else you would like to add, regarding this survey?

If so, please type it below.

---

Audrey Laing
Aberdeen Business School
The Robert Gordon University
Garthdee Road
Aberdeen AB10 7QE
Tel 01224 263962
e-mail prs.laing-a@rgu.ac.uk
Appendix VIII – Online surveys

I am a research student at The Robert Gordon University and I am carrying out research into consumer behaviour in bookshops. I am currently interested in finding out how consumers respond to the various marketing strategies used by online bookshops, and the kinds of experiences they have online. I am also interested in any discernible ‘culture’ or ‘community’ online.

The aim of this questionnaire is to find out how people respond to these elements, in online bookshops.

It includes questions which investigate:

- how people respond to marketing by online bookshops
- the behaviour patterns of customers online
- how people interact with others online – if at all!

If you use online bookshops, you can make a valuable contribution to this research, by completing the following survey. It should take between 5 and 10 minutes, depending on the length of your answers. Thank you for participating, and I hope you find the survey interesting.

Please note that throughout this survey, the term ‘traditional bookshops’ refers to any bookshop which is not online - i.e. chain, high street and independent bookshops.

### Bookselling Culture and Consumer Behaviour Questionnaire

#### Section 1 – Using online bookshops

1. How often do you visit online bookshops?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every day</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than twice a week</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. On average, how much time do you spend in online bookshops on each occasion?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>half an hour</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>one hour</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than an hour</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. How often do you purchase from online bookshops?

Every time I visit ☐
Usually ☐
Sometimes ☐
Occasionally ☐
Never ☐

If you answered ‘Never’, please go to question 5.

4. Would you say most of your purchases are:

Planned ☐
Unplanned ☐

5. Which online bookshop(s) do you *usually* visit?
Please tick one box only.

Amazon ☐
Other - Please write the details below ☐

6. Do you ever buy books in traditional bookshops?

Yes ☐
No ☐

7. Do you ever buy books in supermarkets?

Yes ☐
No ☐

8. Where do you spend most *time*?

Traditional bookshops ☐
Online bookshops ☐
About the same ☐
9. Where do you spend most money?

- Traditional bookshops
- Online bookshops
- About the same

10. Which of the following descriptions most accurately sums up how you feel about online bookshops?

- I have always preferred online bookshops, and I don’t really like traditional bookshops
- I prefer online bookshops, but I still like traditional bookshops
- I don’t really have a preference
- I will always prefer traditional bookshops
- I have been ‘converted’ from preferring traditional bookshops, and I now prefer online bookshops

If you stated a preference, please explain your reasons below
...................................................................................................................................................
...................................................................................................................................................
...................................................................................................................................................
...................................................................................................................................................

11. Do you ever browse online for ideas, then purchase in a traditional bookshop?

- Yes
- No

12. Similarly, do you ever browse in traditional bookshops to get ideas for purchases and then buy online for better discount?

- Yes
- No
13. If you had to describe the image/appearance of the online bookshop you usually use (at Question 5) would you use any of these words or phrases? Please tick all the boxes you agree with.

- User friendly  
- Confusing  
- Intimidating
- Well designed  
- Welcoming  
- Badly designed

Would you use any other words or descriptions?
……………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………

14. What do you usually do when you are in an online bookshop? Again, tick all the boxes that apply.

- I go online to browse, with a view to buying something which I fancy  
- I just browse  
- I look for bargains  
- I look for specific books  
- I get ideas for books which I then look at in a traditional bookshop  
- I read the reviews  
- Something else? Please explain below

……………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………

15. Out of the following options, what would you say is your prime consideration when you buy books from an online bookseller? Please rank your answers 1 – 6, where number 1 is of prime consideration and number 6 is of least consideration.

- Good range of books  
- Secure payment procedures  
- Cheaper books  
- Easy to use site  
- A familiar bookshop brand name  
- Good reputation
16. What do you like most about online book shopping?
Tick all the answers that you agree with.

- Speed of delivery
- Special offers like ‘3 for 2’ and other discounts
- Appearance of the site
- The range of books
- Good prices
- I can add my own comments and reviews very easily
- Recommendations, such as: “Other people who bought that, bought this”
- I don’t have to deal directly with other people
- Reviews by other customers
- Hassle free & convenient process

17. Is there anything else about online book sites which you particularly like? (particularly in comparison to traditional bookshops)
…………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………

18. Is there anything you dislike about online book shopping? (again, particularly when compared to traditional bookshops)
…………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………

19. Do you think you are more inclined to make impulse buys when you are in an online bookshop, or a traditional bookshop?

- Online
- Traditional
- No difference

20. How does browsing online compare to browsing in a traditional bookshop?
…………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………
21. What usually tempts you to buy a book on impulse online?

I like the author □ If I have seen a newspaper review of it □
I like the book cover □ Interested in the subject □
The blurb about the book is appealing □ If I have seen it on TV or heard about it on the radio □
If I see it prominently displayed □ If it is in the bestsellers section □
There is an online review or recommendation on the site □ Special price offers like ‘3 for 2’ and other discounts □
I don’t make unplanned purchases online □ Other - Please give more details below □

……………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………

Section 3 – Interaction online

22. Have you ever added reviews or book ratings to an online bookshop site?

Yes □
No □

23. Have you ever communicated with anyone about books online?
(e.g. chatting online about books, recommending books to others in chat rooms, websites etc.) If so, please give details below.

Yes □
No □

……………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………

24. Do you think online book shopping can ever be a social experience?

Yes □
No □

25. If you said ‘yes’, in what way? Please explain below

……………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………
26. Do you miss not having a ‘real’ bookseller around in online bookshops, to ask for advice or recommendations?

Yes □
No □

27. Do you trust online reviews and recommendations more or less than recommendations in a traditional bookshop?

Trust online more □
Trust traditional more □
Don’t trust one more than the other □

28. Do you miss not being able to pick up, touch and leaf through the books you are interested in, when shopping online?

Yes □
No □

29. When you are in an online bookshop do you feel (tick all that apply)

Happier □
Overwhelmed □
Just the same □
Part of an online bookshop community □
Isolated □
More relaxed □
Excited □
Other – Please explain below □

30. Which age group do you belong to?

20 or less □
21 -30 □
31 – 40 □
41 – 50 □
51 – 60 □
61 or older □
31. Are you:

Male ☐
Female ☐

CONTACT DETAILS (Optional)

..............................................................................................................................................
..............................................................................................................................................
..............................................................................................................................................
................................................................................................................................................

Thank you for completing this survey. If you would like any further information about this research, please contact Audrey Laing at:

prs.laing-a@rgu.ac.uk
Appendix IX - Focus group question schedule

- **Do discounts work?**

  Many chain bookshops are concentrating on special offers as part of their strategy for attracting more customers. However, according to my questionnaires, many people completely ignore any special offers and just go to their usual sections and their favourite departments. Do these offers work for you? How effective do you think these special offers are at getting people into bookshops? (E.g. 3 for 2, 2 for £10). Do you think these offers attract people who don’t usually go into bookshops? What kind of bookshop visitor can’t be swayed by special offers? Can you think of anything that would make you buy more books?

- **Range of books**

  Many people said that what they liked best about ‘their’ bookshop was the range and choice available in the respective stores. However other customers were quick to point out that when they visit a few branches of the same chain, the special offers and stock range is virtually the same. Has the focus of large publishers and chain booksellers on ‘lead’ titles meant a greater choice or a diminished choice for book buyers? What do you think? I.e. do you think large chains offer a wide range and choice? Does it matter?

- **The Customers**

  Do you think bookshops attract a representative cross section of society? Does this change depending on which bookshop you are in? Are bookshop customers the same as they ever were or are bookshops more or less welcoming for new customers? Have your own buying patterns changed over the months/years (e.g. different bookshops, spending more?) Is the range of customers, in your opinion, wider or narrower than, for example, ten years ago? (Depending on age of participants) Why is this? Do you think everyone feels comfortable in bookshops? Do you ever think about or engage with the other customers? Do you belong, feel out of place, feel comfortable or do you not pay any attention to other customers in bookshops? How do bookshop customers compare to customers in other shops? When you visit bookshops, do you prefer them to be busy with people or with few other people around? What impact – if any – do the other customers have on the atmosphere of the bookshop?
• **The booksellers**

Respondents to the questionnaire were almost unanimous in their positive comments about booksellers. However, very few respondents said they had ever spoken to a bookseller! What is it about assistants in bookshops (booksellers) that make people think they are 'helpful, polite and knowledgeable'? Are they different from other shop assistants? How important is personal attention and recommendations from staff? Do we have different expectations of the staff in bookshops compared to staff in other kinds of shops? Are they comparable?

• **How important is the brand identity?**

A topic we touched on briefly in the questionnaires was the brand identity of bookshops and the image they try to project. Can you describe the brand identity of a bookshop that you are familiar with? How important do you think brand identity is? What are the differences between (name bookshops) these stores? (If participants are familiar with all these stores).

• **Community Responsiveness**

Many chain bookshops try to make their individual branches fit into the area that they serve, by stocking local books and trying to respond to local needs. I.e. an ‘independent within a chain’. Is it possible for individual branches of chain bookshops to have a local identity? Can individual branches of a chain really be distinct from each other? How can they achieve this? Does it matter to you?

• **Coffee Shop**

Many people were very positive about the coffee shop in each of the stores studied, with the ‘atmosphere’ seeming to be the most important quality. Furthermore, some respondents acknowledged that the presence of a coffee shop in store makes them stay longer and sometimes spend more money, occasionally on impulse. What is it about the partnership between coffee shops and bookshops that is so evocative? For example, does a bookshop without a coffee shop have the same ‘browsability’? Is there ever a voyeuristic aspect to the coffee shop? Conversely, do we ever visit the coffee shop in order to be seen?

• **Shopping for books**

How does shopping in bookshops compare to other kinds of shopping? Do you feel different? Is there a ‘cachet’ involved in browsing in a bookshop? (Or even in particular departments?) What is special about the atmosphere of a bookshop? How does it make you feel? Is the bookshop a ‘comfort zone’? (One manager said it was “a unique retail experience. The freedom to do what you want, not just shop select and purchase. Like a hobby”.)
• **Atmosphere of the bookshop.**

Almost everyone said they thought the bookshop they were in had a good atmosphere. Every respondent felt either just the same or better when they come in to a bookshop. Why is this? Can we say this about other shops? If it is just a place to buy books, why is atmosphere important, or is it? ‘I get peace to browse’, ‘nobody bothers you’, were both quite frequent responses. Is ‘losing yourself’ important in bookshops? If so, is it important that bookshops are large? (E.g. Borders Glasgow, Waterstone’s Glasgow) Is there anywhere else that you feel like that? (not necessarily just shops)

• **Lifestyle store**

Many bookshops in this country are now promoting themselves as ‘lifestyle’ stores or destination bookshops. This implies that they do more than just sell books: they also provide a place of relaxation and enjoyment and suggest that you might visit the bookshop for the sake of it, rather than necessarily be looking for a book. (Third place) Do you think that is what bookshops have become? Is going to a bookshop sometimes a cultural choice/experience? Is there a feeling of belonging or community when you enter a bookshop or one bookshop in particular? Do you think there is any kind of status or ‘cachet’ involved in being in (or being seen in) a bookshop? (Compared to being in any other kind of shop).

• **Online bookshops**

Most respondents to the questionnaire also use online bookshops. What use do you make of online bookshops – just browsing; specific purchases or a mixture of both? What qualities do you find in high street bookshops that you wouldn’t find online and vice versa? I.e. how do the experiences compare? Do you read the pop-ups and recommends online?
Appendix X - Coding of focus groups

**Bookshop brand identity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cob – homog</td>
<td>Homogeneity of stock observed across all the chains “faceless, sterile”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cob – homchain</td>
<td>Chains may have quirks of layout/colours but apart from that they are the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cpref – brand</td>
<td>Customer preferences of brands because of familiarity/ what they grew up with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cper-conf</td>
<td>Confusion re buyouts and what bookshops are now called (Dillons now Waterstone’s, Thins now Ottakar’s etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cbehav-browse2</td>
<td>More choice when browsing 2nd hand and charity bookshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cper – siteclien</td>
<td>Site can impact on the kind of clientele who go there (surrounding shops/businesses impact also)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COB – aytoimp</td>
<td>Manager autonomy impacts on stock quality, local relevance etc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discount offers: positive responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CB – exploit discount</td>
<td>Customers feel they are ‘getting the benefit’ of the discounted offers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cb – offstempt</td>
<td>Find the ‘3 for 2’ offers tempting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cb – facilexp</td>
<td>These offers facilitate experimentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cobs – diff3for2s</td>
<td>Different quality to books in ‘3 for 2’ offers, depending on chain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cb- ought to</td>
<td>Feeling of ‘ought to read’ some books in offers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB – 3for takeadv</td>
<td>Feel compelled to buy, to ‘take advantage’ of the offer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discount offers: negative responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COBS – notint</td>
<td>Books in these offers do not cater for all interests – irrelevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COBS – offsbland</td>
<td>These offers give a bland choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cb- toobusy</td>
<td>Put off browsing offer tables as too many people around</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copin-not for ‘us’</td>
<td>Not really relevant if you are genuinely interested in books</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Display Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cper - limiting</th>
<th>Perception that display methods are limiting choice – too many tables, too many books</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cper-fos</td>
<td>Awareness (and resentment) of marketing push at the front of shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cb-anti-promo</td>
<td>Feeling of antipathy to being directed to buy particular titles. (Objection to a financially motivated agenda rather than the promotion of titles worth reading)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-perdiffbr</td>
<td>Perception of homogeneity of titles and how that makes browsing more difficult</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Bookshop as destination/third place

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cb –cynlife</th>
<th>Cynical when ‘lifestyle’ choice is openly couched</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Copn-space life</td>
<td>‘Lifestyle’ bookshop needs space if people are to spend time there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copin-bsasvenue</td>
<td>Favourable reaction to bookshop as alternative evening venue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copin-lifestyle</td>
<td>Not everyone wants their bookshop to conform to a ‘lifestyle’ format.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cb- nomeet</td>
<td>Would not meet people in a bookshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cb-hangout</td>
<td>Spare time spent in bookshops is similar experience to spending time in art galleries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cb- browhobb</td>
<td>Some awareness and acceptance that browsing is or can be a hobby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copin-latenight</td>
<td>Late opening helps bookshop to feel like a venue; a destination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cb – comfywaitenv</td>
<td>Comfortable environment to spend time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Coffee Shops: positive responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Copin-likesmell</th>
<th>Coffee aroma enhances experience instore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Copin-cofffacilthink</td>
<td>Presence of a coffee shop facilitates thinking, mulling time of titles one has seen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cpref-separate</td>
<td>Preference for a clearly separate and demarcated area for the coffee shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cpref-choose coff</td>
<td>More likely to choose a bookshop that has a coffee shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copin-meetfrends</td>
<td>Coffee shop allows book shopping to become a social experience-meet friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copin-cofallowsit</td>
<td>Presence of coffee shop facilitates ‘legitimately’ sitting down with a book and a coffee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Coffee shops: negative responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Copin- needspace</th>
<th>Should be custom designed rather than crammed in – need space!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Copin- anticoffe</td>
<td>Feels like the book shoppers are being pushed out by new breed of coffee drinkers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cexp-badexpvital</td>
<td>A single bad experience can ensure no return to coffee shop or bookshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c-noshop</td>
<td>Given a choice, will avoid bookshops with coffee shops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cb-nocoff</td>
<td>Sees book buying and coffee shop experiences as separate. Would not do both in this environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Local Relevance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cper – nolocal commit</th>
<th>No commitment to local authors perceived</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CNoper – diff</td>
<td>No perception of local differences across any single chain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cper-localdiff</td>
<td>Local differences are expected, i.e. catering for schools/college lists, but this is not perceived as a real difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clik – locsupport</td>
<td>Any support of local books/authors applauded</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Consumer opinions about changes in bookshops

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Copin – lessauto</th>
<th>Belief that bookshop managers have less autonomy re their stock</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Copin – lessodd</td>
<td>Less odd, quirky choices on the shelves – unfortunately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copin-chainendindie</td>
<td>Growth of chains has effectively killed the independents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cper-con/hobbooks</td>
<td>Perception of increase in consumer related books-books as hobby/lifestyle and tv tie-ins also</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c-superiority</td>
<td>Implication of cultural superiority to the ‘newer’ bookshop customer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Opinions about others

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COPIN-CUSTS</th>
<th>Custs in book shops a cut above other customers – ‘arty’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clik – notoo bus</td>
<td>Doesn’t want too busy an environment – is off putting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cb – nospeak</td>
<td>Doesn’t want to speak to others in bookshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cb – chat/events</td>
<td>Interaction with other customers is promoted by author events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cb – chat/moan</td>
<td>Interaction with other customers is promoted by mutual dissatisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cexp-lonevenfam</td>
<td>Even if shopping in a group, the actual book shopping is done alone, although you may set a time to meet (at the coffee shop)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cpref – refined</td>
<td>Prefers a quiet ‘refined’ kind of atmosphere in a bookshop</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Layout/Personal Space

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLICK – nooks</th>
<th>Like nooks and crannies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clik – hiding</td>
<td>Like to hide or be ‘lost’ in bookshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clik-space</td>
<td>Like bookshops with plenty of space ‘room to move’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cnolike-physcont</td>
<td>Extreme antipathy to physical contact with other customers. Need personal space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cwant-rightspace</td>
<td>Balance of space. Like nooks crannies but also space although not to feel exposed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clik-disorder</td>
<td>Likes disorder so one can ‘discover’ a gem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copin-quiethelpbrow</td>
<td>Quiet facilitates browsing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cdisl-bright</td>
<td>Dislike of bright lights – does not facilitate a welcoming feel or make want to spend time there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copin-seatlegit</td>
<td>Seating legitimises staying for a long time in bookshops – feel allowed to do that now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cb- time imp</td>
<td>Spending long time in bookshops is all very well, but contemporary lifestyles do not encourage this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copin-bsttime</td>
<td>Proper browsing experience takes time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Consumer experiences of book shopping

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cb – personal</th>
<th>Book shopping is a personal, intimate process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Copin –display pers</td>
<td>What you buy is a display of your personality and ‘what you are about’ – personality affirming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copin-booktreat</td>
<td>Book shopping (buying) is a treat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copin-bsrelax</td>
<td>Book buying is a relaxing experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copin-bsleisure</td>
<td>Book shopping is a leisure activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copin-therapy</td>
<td>Book shopping a kind of retail therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cpref-tactile</td>
<td>Prefers tactile aspect of in-store shopping in comparison to online book shopping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cb- evolving</td>
<td>Book shopping involves the evolving and processing of thought while browsing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cexp – rewards</td>
<td>Rewards of book shopping (and resulting good read) incomparable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cb-justify</td>
<td>Book buying justified as it is linked to self-improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cper-refl</td>
<td>Bookshop a reflective place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cwant – bbspec</td>
<td>Book buying to be a special experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cb – duality</td>
<td>Duality of book shopping experience depending on need: browsable and also speed buying</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Consumer Behaviour – cultural aspect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>c-buylots</th>
<th>Book buying as compulsion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cb – buy not read</td>
<td>Habit of buying but not reading the purchases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cult - kudos</td>
<td>Need for participants to tell/share how much they love/ buy/ read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copin-bfashio</td>
<td>Fashion of reading nowadays – everyone is reading this, or that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cper – bookcomm</td>
<td>Perception (and disapproval) of bookshops as commercially (rather than culturally) driven</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Consumer perception of book as an object of desire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>c-bookob</th>
<th>Book as object of desire-club of books at home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cper – bookid</td>
<td>Each book has an identity of its own, thus differentiating book buying from purchasing clothes, e.g.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cb-bookasob</td>
<td>Book buying influenced by the book as object – how they look</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copin-wbooksvvalue</td>
<td>Books bought in proper bookshop have more value than those in supermarkets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Booksellers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cnolike-intrus</td>
<td>Dislikes intrusive bookseller knowledge or ‘help’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cexp-switched on</td>
<td>Expect a more ‘switched on’ assistant in bookshops, compared to other shops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cexp-enthus</td>
<td>Expects booksellers to be book enthusiasts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copin-bkslnotapproach</td>
<td>Don’t see booksellers as approachable – seem too busy, focused on shelving, till. (This has an effect upon whether or not the cust. will approach them)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copin-bookatt</td>
<td>Good knowledge and service has huge impact on consumer opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copin-porrconds</td>
<td>Poor pay and conditions linked to depletion of good booksellers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cper –lessknow</td>
<td>Perception of reduction in knowledge of booksellers (although service can be good)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cper – fewerstaff imp</td>
<td>Impression of fewer staff. Staff that are there are very busy, which makes it difficult to ask for advice. (i.e. impact upon consumer behaviour)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cb – disinteraction</td>
<td>Disinclination to interact or ask for advice due to personal element of book choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cwant-speciknow</td>
<td>Want and need specialist knowledge for help with gifts for others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cper – noknowextmnark</td>
<td>Staff have little knowledge of press reviews – not taking advantage of the free marketing that is going on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clik-reco</td>
<td>Likes ‘staff recommends’. Encourages exploration of new titles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cbel-cynrreco</td>
<td>Cynical re recommendations and staff choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer Behaviour Online</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CBonl-acadcheap</strong></td>
<td>Buys academic books online as they’re cheaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cbonl-spec</strong></td>
<td>Specialist/obscure books easier to source online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cbonl – freeship</strong></td>
<td>Free delivery can encourage purchase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cbonl- browse</strong></td>
<td>Browsing online (weblogs etc) gives wider choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cbonl-speedydeliv</strong></td>
<td>Speedy delivery is good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cbonl-choice</strong></td>
<td>Choice and range online is good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cbonl-likesuggs</strong></td>
<td>Likes ‘other people who bought that, bought this’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cbonl- conv</strong></td>
<td>Convenience and economy of time is popular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cbonl-reviewthen buy</strong></td>
<td>Likes simplicity of reading the reviews then buying straightaway, rather than then having to go to a bookshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cbonl- rangerev</strong></td>
<td>Likes range of reviews readily available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cbonl- feedbcak</strong></td>
<td>Much more consumer feedback readily available online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cbonl-shared</strong></td>
<td>Feels it is a much more shared experience online – more of a community feel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cbonl-likespref</strong></td>
<td>Likes prefaces and book info. Available online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cbonl-nowbrowse</strong></td>
<td>Changed experience—now hooked on online browsing although initially resistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cbonl-innov</strong></td>
<td>Can point you in a new and exciting direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cbonl-trust</strong></td>
<td>Trust of real bookseller and online is comparable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CBonl- singexp</strong></td>
<td>A single given experience has a strong influence on the consumer’s perception of the service of that site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cexponl – compare</strong></td>
<td>Cannot compare online and offline bookshop experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cbonl-browse</strong></td>
<td>Can browse and do, online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cb-speconl</strong></td>
<td>Only book shop online for specific titles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix XI - The Approach to the review of literature

The commencement of literature searching
At the commencement of PhD study, the research questions were not yet fully focused but it was proposed that initially, a literature review related to the proposed title (below) would be a useful starting point.

*Bookselling Culture and Consumer Behaviour: Marketing Strategies & Responses, in Traditional and Online Environments.*

Given that the overall focus of the project was to be *bookselling*, this term was used as a starting point in the initial literature searches undertaken. Various databases (see below) were searched, and while a sizeable amount of material was sourced, the results were mostly limited to trade sources. The lack of research into bookselling has been discussed in the Introduction; indeed it was a motivating factor in the choice of subject for research, given the dearth of material in this field. Therefore, the breadth of trade writing on bookselling was consulted in order to place the research in current context and to ensure currency of the topics to be investigated. It is vital nevertheless to bear in mind the limitations of trade writing: while it provides useful background contextual information on the book trade, clearly the scholarly underpinning of the literature review and the identification of relevant theories would have to be drawn from elsewhere.

The term *bookselling* and its variations were then searched in tandem with other terms which it was proposed would be central to the research. For instance, *online*, *culture*, *community*, *behaviour* and *browsing* were all used as a starting point. While some material was found, the term *bookselling* had an overly limiting effect, since very little scholarly material of relevance is available which included this term. The search terms were gradually widened, to include related fields such as publishing, and although the bulk of material unearthed was trade writing and opinion, some relevant literature was discovered. The initial material discovered in these early searches has in some instances provided inspiration for the direction which the research has taken. For example, Laura Miller (1999) examined the community role of the bookshop in American society in her article ‘Shopping for Community’ and this provided a useful starting point for further investigation into an area which has proved extremely fertile. In
his book ‘The Great Good Place’, Ray Oldenburg (1997) provided further material on this subject and supported the examination of the role of bookshops in the community.

**Broadening the literature search**

Given that the proposed research was to be underpinned by an examination of the branding and marketing techniques used by bookshops, it was clear that scholarly work in these fields would provide the theoretical foundation for the body of the research. The search terms evolved to cover these particular subject areas and a wealth of material was uncovered. In particular, broad search terms such as *consumer behaviour, marketing, branding* and *retailing* were searched, which subsequently unearthed further material on related fields such as shopping theory. These search terms were also allied with the term *online* to provide further scholarly material. It was necessary to be much more selective when selecting material sourced at this stage in order to focus upon relevant and current material. Advice was sought from supervisors and the most appropriate literature was focused upon. Thus the academic underpinning to form the foundation of the literature review came from fields outside of bookselling, but these are fields within which bookselling sits quite comfortably.

Key texts on the areas of consumer behaviour, marketing, branding and retailing were consulted. In many cases, these texts covered the application of these subjects online. In particular, texts on retailing and marketing by Gilbert (2003), Kotler (2001) and McGoldrick (2002) have provided a firm foundation in these areas, while Schiffman (2004) and Solomon (2002) have provided solid introductions to consumer behaviour.

This approach; looking at the wider context of consumer behaviour, marketing, branding and retailing within which bookselling sits, proved a crucial step in widening the context in which the project was examined. By setting bookselling into an established set of scholarly criteria, important comparisons and studies were able to be made. Most importantly, the following data collection was able to be analysed in an established academic context.

**Reviewing the methodological literature**

Clearly an important aspect of the literature review has been the approach to the literature dealing with methodology. The developmental style of the research design has necessitated an holistic approach to methodological texts, beginning with an all-encompassing, wide ranging approach dealing with research such as: handling the literature review; approaches to data collection and methods therein; the qualitative and quantitative paradigms; methods of analysis; and the approach to writing up. While
a broad based approach to methodological literature was taken initially, it has since become necessary to focus in detail upon relevant literature in a much more practical way, in order to aid particular data collection methods (such as focus groups or interviews) or methods of analysis used throughout the project (such as using SPSS, or coding of qualitative data). Information sources looking at approaches to data collection online have also been consulted.

**Information sources**

**Databases**
The databases which proved most useful for reaching relevant literature and therefore consulted most frequently included Business Source Premier; Emerald; IngentaConnect and Metapress. Business Source premier was consulted most often as it provides a comprehensive source of academic writing on a wide range of business related issues. Emerald was used to support this reading as was Ingenta, although IngentaConnect provides abstracts rather than linking directly to electronic sources. Metapress was used primarily to keep abreast of Publishing Research Quarterly issues. Library Literature Online; WARC.com; Web of Knowledge also proved useful, as did LISTA and Zetoc. Library Literature Online was a useful source of library and information science material, as was LISTA. Web of Knowledge provided a wider, arts-based scope to the searching and Warc.com was useful for locating trade sources. Zetoc provided a broad subject base of journals and conference papers affiliated with the British Library. Dialog was also consulted in order to give breadth to the searches carried out. Mintel and Key Note were vital sources of current data on retailing and book retailing in particular, providing useful information on buying patterns of book consumers and sales figures.

**Websites**
Some websites have proven particularly useful for gleaning data and current trade information about bookselling. [www.booktrade.info](http://www.booktrade.info) provides up to date information on book trade news. It also covers related areas such as publishing and librarianship and provides a daily e-mail with breaking news. This site has been invaluable for keeping the research up to date with breaking stories, takeovers and personnel changes in the book trade. [www.bookmarketing.co.uk](http://www.bookmarketing.co.uk) is the website of Book Marketing Limited (BML). They are the ‘premier source of information and research on the book industry, undertaking a wide range of private and syndicated research projects, and publishing a variety of market reports’ (BML, 2005c). Their website gives access to much of what is
current in the UK book trade. The website of the Booksellers’ Association, www.booksellers.org.uk has also proven useful. This association represents booksellers in the UK, giving support and advice about all aspects of bookselling to members. They run an annual conference where issues pertinent to bookselling are presented by trade experts and discussed among attendees. Publishers’ websites were also consulted in order to provide an introduction to current titles and issues in the publishing industry.

**Trade sources**
The most helpful and comprehensive publication on this topic is the trade journal *The Bookseller*. There are other trade journals which were also consulted, such as *Publishing News*. Both of these journals are also available online. Much of the writing in these publications deals with current trade issues, for instance, new publications; interviews with authors, publishers and book trade people, as well as opinion pieces and current subjects of concern to the trade, such as digitisation, electronic books and the growth of online and supermarket bookselling. While this material is obviously not academic in nature, it nevertheless gives a useful commentary on current trade issues and serves to set the research in a current business context, especially given calls for research from within the trade (Watson, 2002; Horner, 2006).

**Important journals**
Journals dedicated to publishing were regularly consulted, in particular *Publishing Research Quarterly* and also *Logos*. With regard to the wider context of the research, journal articles looking at consumer behaviour, retailing, marketing and branding were also consulted, as were articles looking at these topics in an online context. Given the newness of the topic being researched, there were no dedicated journals which were consulted on a regular basis. Rather, articles were selected for reading, according to the relevance of the title or abstract. These articles clearly were sourced from a wide range of journals and can be consulted in the relevant reference list.

**Conferences and people**
Attending the annual Booksellers’ Association Conference (April 2005) gave the researcher the opportunity to meet with Tim Godfray, chairman of the Booksellers’ Association and external advisor on the research project. It also facilitated networking with others in the book trade - both publishers and booksellers - and gave the researcher direct experience of trade discussion of pertinent issues. Attendance at the International Conference on the Book (September 2005) allowed the researcher the
opportunity to present findings from the research project to other experts in the field as well as affording the opportunity for academic discussion of current research issues with researchers in the field of books and publishing. The conference provided further sources of academic reading, relevant to the research.

**Committing the literature review to paper**

The approach to physically putting down on paper (or screen) the information gleaned from reviewing the literature has proved a thought provoking process. This initially began as a physical process, writing notes and thoughts on what seemed relevant, on each piece of literature reviewed. This gradually developed into the collating, compiling and ordering of these notes and thoughts into larger pieces of writing as it became clearer that some notes needed to be set along side each other in order to be considered in tandem and to interact with each other. This in turn developed into several different broad ‘chapters’ covering wide subject ranges. As each set of notes was expanded upon, and set in the context of other material on the subject, the writing process became thought provoking and naturally seemed to link to other notes which had been written on the literature already read. Lofland and Lofland (in Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.101) say ‘writing aids thought, inspiration, memory and clarification’. Miles and Huberman concur: ‘writing is thinking, not the report of thought’. The natural development of writing as thought led to the construction of broad themes or subject groupings, into which each piece of writing on the literature was placed. The writing seemed naturally to come together to form a broadly sense-making foundation for future chapters. It was envisaged that these rough ‘chapters’ would form the basis for the writing up stage, once all or most of the data had been collected and analysed. The ‘chapters’ which developed initially from the review of the literature were as follows:
As more writing, more data collection and more analysis has been carried out, some of the above chapters have assumed more importance and some less, while some of the titles of the chapters have been reworded in order to more accurately reflect the contents.