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It's Not What You Sell - It's Whom You Sell it To

Ulf Aagerup

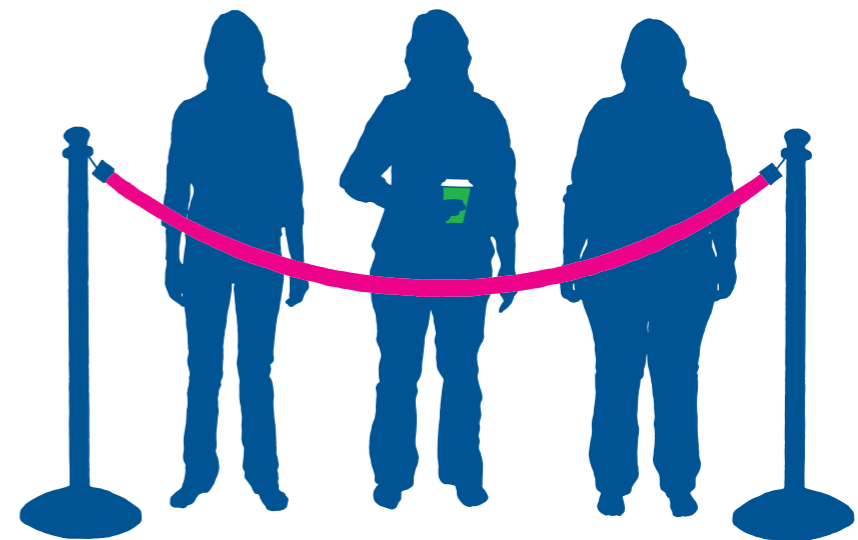
2016

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It's Not What You Sell - It's Whom You Sell it To

How the Customer's Character Shapes Brands and What Companies Do About It

Ulf Aagerup



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, ECONOMICS AND LAW

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Abstract

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In this dissertation I investigate the effects of user and usage imagery on brands and how businesses employ user imagery to build brands. Over four articles I present results that suggest that user imagery affects brand personality and that companies under certain conditions adapt their behavior to optimize this effect. Although both mass market fashion and nightclubs are susceptible to the influence of user imagery, out of the two only nightclubs actively reject customers to improve its effect on brand perception. I relate these practices to the practical and financial feasibility of rejecting customers, the character of nightclubs' brands, and to their inability to differentiate their brands through any other brand personality influencer besides user imagery. In this dissertation, I also discuss the ethical ramifications of user imagery optimization through customer rejection. In one study, the role of conspicuous usage imagery on socially desirable consumer behavior is investigated. It is concluded that conspicuousness increases consumers' propensity to choose environmentally friendly products, and that this tendency is especially pronounced for individuals that are high in attention to social comparison information. The conclusion is that consumers use green products to self-enhance for the purpose of fitting in with the group rather than to stand out from it.

Svensk sammanfattning

I avhandlingen undersöker jag hur varumärken påverkas av sina användares image och de situationer ett de normalt används i. I fyra artiklar lägger jag fram resultat som visar att varumärken påverkas av sina användares image, och att företag under vissa förutsättningar anpassar sitt beteende för att optimera den effekten. Trots att både massmarknadsmode och exklusiva nattklubbar påverkas av sina användares image är det endast nattklubbarna som aktivt avvisar kunder för att gynna sina varumärken. Jag relaterar detta till de praktiska och finansiella möjligheter nattklubbarna har att neka kunder, till karaktären på nattklubbarnas varumärken, och till nattklubbarnas brist på andra varumärkespåverkande faktorer. Jag diskuterar även de etiska följderna av att bygga varumärken genom att avvisa kunder. I ytterligare en studie undersöks hur en iögonfallande konsumtionssituation påverkar socialt önskvärt konsumentbeteende. Jag och min medförfattare kommer fram till att en iögonfallande konsumtionssituation ökar konsumenters benägenhet att välja miljövänliga produkter, och att tendensen är speciellt tydlig för människor som ligger högt på ATSCI-skalan. Slutsatsen är att konsumenter använder miljövänliga produkter för att skapa en positiv bild av sig själva i andras ögon, och att deras motiv snarare är att passa in socialt än att utmärka sig.

Keywords: brands, self-image congruity, brand personality, user imagery, fashion, nightclubs, green consumer behavior, self-monitoring ability, attention to social comparison information, ATSCI

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I would also like to thank my parents, Kurt and Gunilla Ågerup for their support.

This project has been for my own gratification, but it is my family that has had to accept my physical and mental absence from home life. I would therefore like to thank my wife Hanna, and our children Karl, Sofia, Sara, and Ella for putting up with me. Once finished with this dissertation, I will strive to make their dream of a husband and father who can remember details from everyday life come true.

Ulf Aagerup

November 15, 2015

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In the same way that we judge people by their friends, we tend to judge brands by the people that consume them. Previous research (e.g. Aaker 1997, Keller 2000, Hayes, Alford et al. 2008) has established a general principle that if consumers have a clear picture of what kind of person would use a specific brand, they also perceive that brand to display the same characteristics. Companies use this knowledge when they display models alongside their products in ads (Vermeir and Sompel 2014) and the impact of user imagery on brand perception is the reason they show users that are more attractive (Hovland and Weiss 1951-1952, Baker and Churchill Jr. 1977), thinner (Grapentine 2009), and younger (Kapferer 1994, p. 47) than the average individual. Apart from the idealized imagery of advertising, real-world users can also shape brand perception (Sirgy, Grewal et al. 2000). These typical users can be helpful to brands. An example of this is the Hush Puppies shoe brand. In the nineties, the brand was close to bankruptcy, and could only be found in a few shops that catered to senior citizens. A group of cool kids on Manhattan's Lower East Side started buying the shoes and when other people saw them wearing them, the public's perception of the brand changed and sales took off (Gladwell 2000, p. 4). On the other hand, if typical users are people that consumers do not look up to or wish to emulate, their effect can be detrimental. Schroeder (2006) and Neate (2013) for instance describe how the upscale Burberry brand became popular with the wrong kind of people. A derided group of people called "Chavs" became enamored with the distinct tartan pattern of the Burberry brand, and adopted the brand as their own. The conservative upper middle class that at the time constituted the brand's target market did not appreciate the new typical users and abandoned the brand.

If typical user imagery does shape the public's brand perceptions, it would make sense that companies try to optimize it by controlling who is allowed to become a user, and there is indeed a prevalent notion in the public sphere that

fashion companies discriminate against consumers whose image they suspect will hurt brands (Ritson 2003, D'Amato 2005, Female First 2006, Kulturhuset Stockholm 2006, Jönsson 2009).

In addition to user imagery, symbolic brand image is also shaped by usage imagery (O'Cass and Grace 2004), which describes the context in which the brand is used (Keller 1993, Hayes, Alford et al. 2008, Parker 2009). When usage imagery in the minds of consumers is appropriate for the product, it has significant effects on brand attitude and brand loyalty (Fang, Jianyao et al. 2012). User imagery and usage imagery can be combined into a construct called brand imagery (Sotiropoulos 2003).

Over a series of five articles this dissertation addresses how brand imagery affects consumers' brand perception and behavior, and how companies employ brand imagery to build brands. Two articles are studies of consumer reactions, and three articles are management oriented. Even though some aspects of brand imagery have been covered extensively (e.g. certain aspects of advertising model characteristics), there are also some notable research gaps. These gaps are outlined below.

Research Gap 1: The Effect of User Imagery on Brand Perception

Ideal user imagery has received considerable attention over the years, probably because it has direct and practical relevance for advertisers. Existing quantitative research on ideal user imagery has primarily focused on the effects different types of models have on ad perception. Examples of investigated model characteristics are the gender of the model (Kanungo and Pang 1973), the attractiveness of the model (Baker and Churchill Jr. 1977), the sexiness of the model (Steadman 1969, Jones, Stanaland et al. 1998) as well as his or her age (Huber, Meyer et al. 2013). There are however user characteristics that have not been explored within this research, one of which is model weight. This is surprising given that plus-size models are increasingly prevalent in fashion and beauty advertising (Lin 2014). The skinny model is the norm, but from time to time companies try to win favor with the consumers by

employing models that resemble average women. These companies claim it works (Lunau 2008), although some experts (Neff 2008) would have us believe that plus-size models only give a positive image but do not sell products. The purpose of the first article is to investigate how the weight of ideal users affects the perception of mass market fashion brands. It is important to study this, because although the use of plus-size models is a major trend in several industries, it is not clear whether this is a good idea from a business perspective. What is more, brands are generally not perceived simply as good or bad, but as characters (Aaker and Fournier 1995). A brand character that is appropriate for one brand may be inappropriate for another. For companies, it is therefore important to understand not just whether model weight affects brand perception, nor just if the effect is positive or negative; it is also important to understand what kind of brand characters thin, overweight, and obese models establish in the minds of consumers. Knowledge of this kind could help companies instill their brands with the particular associations their positioning requires. What is more, it is theoretically valuable to build the knowledge of how user imagery relates to brand personality.

Research Gap 2: The Effect of Usage Imagery on Consumers' Choices

Despite its importance, specific empirical studies on usage imagery are rarely reported (Fang, Jianyao et al. 2012). Usage imagery in a more general meaning, namely the context in which the brand is used, is a wide area of research. It encompasses e.g. research into servicescapes (Bitner 1992, Tombs and McColl-Kennedy 2003, Rosenbaum and Montoya 2007), customer-to-customer interaction (Söderlund 2010), as well as consumer behavior (Sotiropoulos 2003).

An interesting area of usage imagery research is how the conspicuousness of the consumption setting might affect consumer choice in categories where there are options that are more or less socially desirable. This notion is based on the mechanism described by Veblen (1899), by which individuals derive appreciation from others when they conspicuously consume certain goods. Veblen described how the consumption of expensive products elevates a

person in the eyes of others. Bourdieu (1984) focuses on similar themes, but introduces class, taste, and culture into the equation. Other sociologists (Hebdige 1979, Thornton 1995, Rivera 2010) draw on the same themes when they outline how knowledge of the codes of consumption benefits specific groups of people. On the most general level, conspicuous consumption thus amounts to consuming products and brands that for some reason make other people think more highly of you. A prerequisite for this, is that to use consumption for self-enhancing purposes, it has to be conspicuous, which means it can be easily seen (Hornby, Turnbull et al. 2010). After all, if no one can see that a person has made a good choice, no one can be impressed by it. It therefore stands to reason that conspicuous usage imagery would be a trigger for self-enhancing green consumption. There are some indications that this may be true; individuals are willing to pay more for cars that are conspicuously friendly to the environment (Sexton and Sexton 2011), activation of status motives in combination with public consumption scenarios raises willingness to choose green options (Griskevicius, Tybur et al. 2010), and consumers are more prone to fulfill their stated intentions to choose green products if they are monitored (Öhman 2011). Self-enhancing green consumption is however a new and emerging area of research, and therefore in need of further study. What is more, although the topic of environmental sustainability has received much attention within the marketing literature (Powell 2011, Leonidou, Katsikeas et al. 2013), the traditional research focus on functional benefits has not solved the category's attitude/behavior gap (Carrington, Neville et al. 2010, Moraes, Carrigan et al. 2012, Carrington, Neville et al. 2014); there is still a vast difference between consumers' positive intentions towards green consumption and the category's low market share. Despite an emerging understanding that green consumption, in addition to environmental benefits, also offers consumers a possibility to self-enhance, little research has actually investigated how social or symbolic factors impact consumers' choice. Considering the general importance of green consumer behavior (Sandhu, Ozanne et al. 2010), and the fact that symbolic/expressive meaning of consumption is a commonly accepted idea within brand research (e.g. Park, Jaworski et al. 1986, Aaker 1997, Petruzzellis 2010), this is surprising. To address the attitude/behavior gap, it is necessary to further investigate not only how the conspicuousness of the usage imagery affects

green consumer behavior, but also how consumers' personalities moderate this effect in relation to their different self-enhancement motives. The second article aims to expand the emerging field of symbolic green consumer behavior by investigating the impact of anticipated conspicuousness of the consumption situation (usage imagery) on consumer choice of organic products. In addition, the paper also explores whether self-monitoring ability and attention to social comparison information (ATSCI) impacts green consumer behavior in situations with highly anticipated conspicuousness.

Research Gap 3: Whether Companies Control User Imagery to Build Brands

If typical user imagery affects brand personality, companies that sell brands that are used for symbolic/expressive reasons (like e.g. fashion) could improve their brands by controlling who is allowed to become a brand user. Even so, accounts of such practices (e.g. Ritson 2003) are anecdotal. What is more, industry representatives do not confess to them (Gripenberg 2004). There is therefore a need to quantitatively confirm or reject whether companies discriminate customers for branding reasons, i.e. whether they treat certain people differently, not because of their willingness or ability to pay, but because their patronage may affect their brands positively or negatively. Such evidence adds to the theory of user imagery. What is more, it is relevant to do this because if such practices are prevalent, it has social implications. Today, the only criteria for discrimination that are considered illegal are gender, transgender identity, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, and age (Diskrimineringsombudsmannen 2015). However, given the rise of fat activism (Kwan and Fackler 2008), which is a movement that strives to normalize society's view on heavier physiologies (Lee 2012), it is not unthinkable that discrimination laws may change so to encompass overweight in the future. There is therefore a need for structured quantitative research to determine whether companies reject users that could reflect poorly on their brands in order to optimize typical user imagery. In article 3 I compare the supply of mass market fashion to the demand with regards to sizes to find out if overweight and obese consumers have fewer garments to choose from than their relative purchase power would motivate.

Research Gap 4: How Companies Control User Imagery to Build Brands

There are companies that actually discriminate based on user imagery (i.e. treat certain people differently, not because of their willingness or ability to pay, but because their patronage may affect their brands positively or negatively). The next research gap refers to *how* companies do this. There is very limited research on how companies classify and select customers for brand building purposes, what types of customers are desirable when they do so and why these customers are considered desirable. Ever since the end of World War II it has become increasingly important for people to be perceived as cool (Frank 1997). Cool has therefore become an increasingly important association for self-expressive brands (Pountain and Robins 2000). I have however to date encountered no research on how companies optimize typical user imagery to seem cool. This is remarkable given that the only way brands can be cool is by being associated to cool people (Southgate 2003). Article 4 is a case study of two exclusive nightclubs. This industry is well suited for the study of typical user imagery management for two reasons. Firstly, exclusive nightclub consumption is highly symbolic/expressive, and the brands should thus be susceptible to the influence of typical user imagery. What is more, the self-expressive character of exclusive nightclubs is probably emphasized by their restrictive door policies. Exclusivity leads to scarcity, and scarcity is related to self-expression. Johar and Sirgy (1991, p. 30) state “the greater the product scarcity, the greater the persuasiveness of the value-expressive appeal.” Secondly, nightclubs are suitable objects of study because they actually select who they admit. Because they are aware of the importance of guest quality, nightclubs develop elaborate strategies to pick the best guests; they optimize typical user imagery. This makes them interesting objects of study.

Research Gap 5: The Ethical Ramifications of Controlling User Imagery

In business ethics, it is common to scrutinize what types of products a the firm produces, and how it produce these products. However, despite the ample

research into both what products firm produce and how they produce them, research is lacking in one product category in which the what and how linkage create questionable corporate practice – luxury products. In article 5, my co-author and I therefore address the ethical aspects of typical user imagery optimization. Because any attempts to optimize typical user imagery entails customer rejection, there is a moral dimension to the phenomenon. Generally, when a service fails, and a customer does not get the offering s/he expected, there are negative consequences (Smith and Bolton 1998). However, exclusive nightclubs do not make their customers miserable as a result of service failure; it is a conscious strategy, which makes the transgression worse from an ethical point of view. Despite this, the ethical ramifications of a constant rejection of undesirable customers have thus far received little attention. The issue is important to address because rejection of customers because their image is poor has social as well as ethical implications.

Problem Setting and Purpose of the Dissertation

Berry (2000, p. 129) states that consumers interpret brand meaning according to three types of input: the customer experience, the presented brand, and external brand communications. This is mirrored by Balmer's (2003) notion of total corporate communication, which similarly breaks down into three categories; primary; secondary; and tertiary communication. The first level (primary communication/the customer experience) refers to the first hand experience an offering presents to the consumer. This includes product design, pricing, distribution, how company staff acts, how corporate policies are perceived, etc. The second level (secondary communication/the presented brand) pertains to communication that is controlled by the company, for instance advertising, promotions, and PR. The third level (tertiary communication/external brand communications) relates to the uncontrolled forms of communication in society that affects a brand. These include public speech and print, word-of-mouth (Balmer 2003, p. 310), but also typical brand imagery (Twitchell 2002, p. 34). A simplified way of expressing Balmer's and Berry's frameworks is thus that the first level concerns what companies do, the second level what they say, and the third what people say about them. The third level is gaining in importance relative to the first and second levels, and

of its different forms of communication typical user imagery and usage imagery should be especially important.

The advent and rapid growth of the Internet makes it increasingly easy for individuals to see both user imagery and usage imagery. Because people use the Internet to display their own ideal self to the world they simultaneously partake from and contribute to the ever-increasing volume of available brand imagery. This display of consumption is occurring on an unprecedented scale. In discussion forums people express what they will and will not consume, and why (Williams 2003). They will share commercial messages with their friends if the ads convey something positive about the sender (Taylor, Strutton et al. 2012). Nightclubs post photos of their customers on the Internet and guests experience great pride if they are chosen to be displayed in this way (Östberg 2007). Fashion retailers offer in-real time screens called 'tweet mirrors' that enable customers to send images of their outfits to friends for comment and feedback (Harrison 2014). Nowhere is self-enhancing consumption however more obvious than on social media. It allows consumers to selectively self-present themselves (Durayappah 2011) and they only showcase the most witty, joyful, bullet-pointed versions of their lives (Copeland 2011). Social media is like a play in which users make up their own characters and props, and whose worth is determined by the reactions of online friends and strangers (Turkle 2011). What is more, social media is becoming increasingly visual in character (DeMers 2013) which further boosts the amount of user imagery and usage imagery consumers get to see. If an individual five years ago would post a text-based status update on Facebook when he had bought a new shirt, he now posts an image of himself wearing it on Instagram, and soon pictures will be supplanted by video. The public thus gets a visual representation of the type of person that would wear a shirt like that (typical user imagery) and the context in which he would wear it (usage imagery). As Internet connected devices become mobile a society where everyone is online all the time may not be far off, and for newer consumer cohorts like Millennials the trend of ever-increasing self-enhancement through display of consumption is set to continue. Millennials are emotionally needy and want constant feedback (Fretwell and Hannay 2011), and as digital natives born in an online environment they do most of their communication via the channels described above (Aquino 2012).

Outline of the Dissertation

To sum up the setting of this dissertation, the trend towards increased display of consumption through new channels of communication means that the study of brand imagery is becoming increasingly relevant. To address this, the purpose of this dissertation is to answer the following research question:

What is the impact of brand imagery on consumers and brand building practices?

The research question breaks down into two parts:

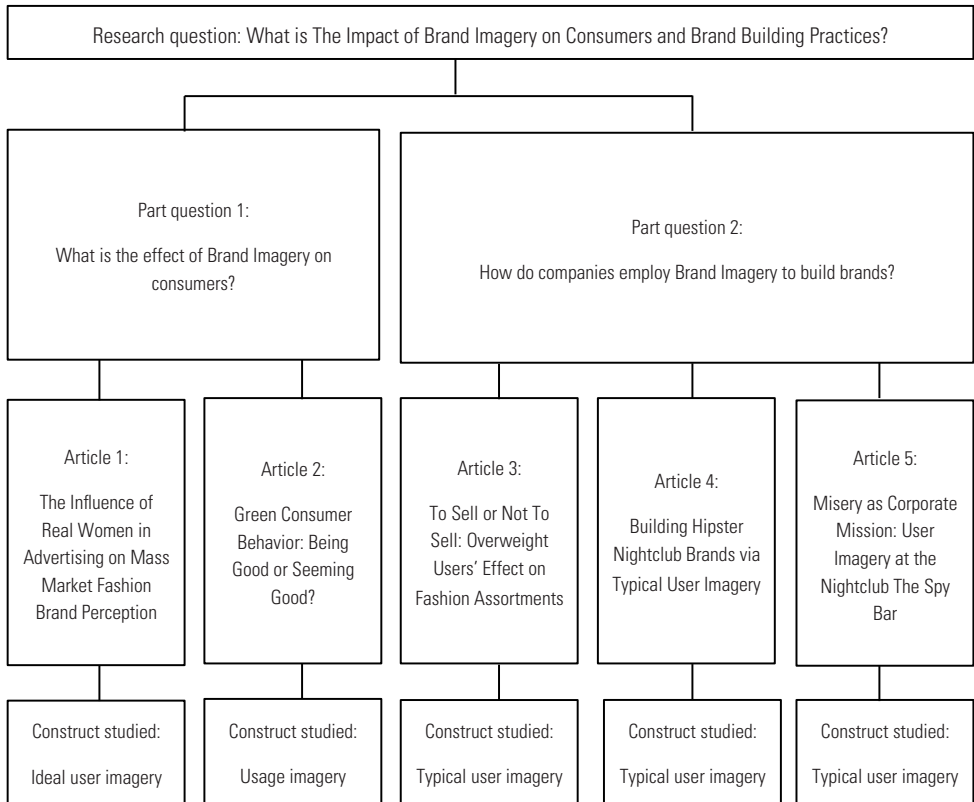
1. What is the effect of brand imagery on consumers?
2. How do companies employ brand imagery to build brands?

These in turn break down into five sub-questions that are outlined below. These sub-questions correspond to the research gaps presented earlier in this chapter.

1. How does user imagery affect brand perception?
2. How does usage imagery affect consumers' choices?
3. Do companies control user imagery?
4. How do companies control user imagery?
5. What are the ethical ramifications of controlling user imagery?

They are addressed in one article each, which together make up this dissertation. The outline of the dissertation is presented in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1
DISSERTATION OUTLINE



Chapter 2

Theoretical Points of Departure

A brand will be used and enjoyed when it joins with, meshes with, adds to, or reinforces the way a consumer thinks about himself (Levy 1958). This insight guides much of the identity related research (e.g. Sirgy 1982, Belk 1988, Batra, Lehman et al. 1993, Fournier 1998, Kressmann, Sirgy et al. 2006, Parker 2009, Venkateswaran, Binith et al. 2011) that has occurred in marketing during the last thirty years. This field of research draws on findings in psychology that explains how humans have a preference for everything that reminds them of themselves (Wiseman 2009, p. 62). The tendency to identify with others if their characteristics match your own is evident in the consumption of brands. Consumers seek out brands that fit their idea of who they are and what they are like (Maehle and Shneor 2010). When consumers achieve congruity between the self and a brand, which is a state that is called self-image congruity (e.g. Sirgy, Grewal et al. 1997) or self-brand congruity (Parker 2009), they reach different forms of satisfaction or avoid different kinds of dissatisfaction, which in turn results in positive attitudes or persuasion to buy a brand (Sirgy 1982, Johar and Sirgy 1991). Self-image congruity has been proven to increase consumer preference for stores (Sirgy and Samli 1985), influence purchase behavior (Malhotra 1981), and improve brand loyalty (Kressmann, Sirgy et al. 2006). The consumer's self-image and the brand may not always be in agreement (Keller 2003, p. 86), but in those categories in which the consumer's self-image is important to consumer decisions they are more likely to be related (Sirgy 1982).

Self-image congruity is thus important for this dissertation. The reason is this: at its most basic level, the reason why individuals consume symbolic/expressive brands is because they fit the idea of who they are, or who they want to be. Therefore, self-image congruity relies on a match between the consumer and the brand. In reality, because the personalities of a company's target consumers are difficult to change, any match between

consumer and brand must come about through the brand's personality. This means that a company must adapt its brands to fit their consumers. Brand personality is shaped by various factors, one of which is user imagery (Keller 1993). The relevance of user imagery for this dissertation can thus be summarized like this:

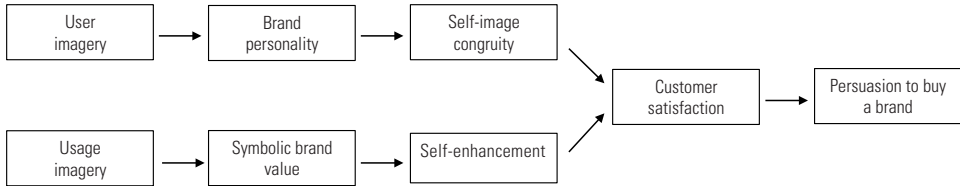
1. User imagery influences brand personality
2. If brand personality matches consumers' self-image, self-image congruity occurs
3. Self-image congruity leads to customer satisfaction
4. Customer satisfaction in turn leads to persuasion to buy a brand

The second construct that together with user imagery makes up brand imagery is usage imagery (Sotiropoulos 2003). For this dissertation, the relevance of usage imagery is that the anticipated consumption setting (the usage imagery) will change the type of brand value that an offering provides. More specifically, organic coffee that is inconspicuously consumed provides functional brand value (saves the earth, helps avoid cancer, etc.), and experiential brand value (tastes good). The same product consumed conspicuously provides symbolic/expressive brand value (makes people think you are a good person) and therefore transforms the product into a tool for self-enhancement. The relevance of usage imagery for this dissertation can thus be summarized like this:

1. Conspicuous usage imagery adds symbolic/expressive brand value to socially desirable products
2. The conspicuous symbolic brand value allows consumers to use socially desirable consumer behavior to self-enhance in the eyes of others
3. The self-enhancement that is enabled by the conspicuous setting provides customers with increased satisfaction
4. Customer satisfaction in turn leads to persuasion to buy a brand

These mechanisms are visualized in the theoretical framework below.

Figure 2
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



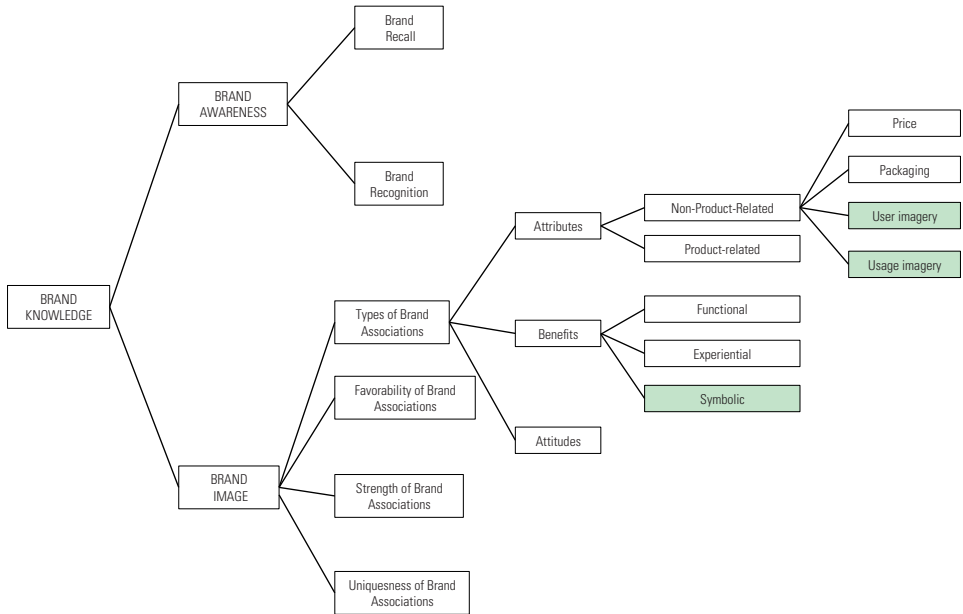
In the following section I review the theoretical constructs of user imagery, usage imagery, and brand personality, and present the conceptualizations at which I have arrived.

The Dissertation in Relation to the Field of Brand Research

There is a general agreement on the idea of what a brand is (something that differentiates a product, provides value to customers, and therefore allows companies to make more money). The brand construct can however encompass many dimensions, out of which I focus on a very limited number. To situate this dissertation's theoretical focus in relation to the general field of brand research I employ Keller's (1993) influential model of the dimensions of brand knowledge. The dissertation's key constructs are highlighted in green in the model, which is shown below.

Figure 3

DIMENSIONS OF BRAND KNOWLEDGE



Source: Keller, K. L. (1993). "Conceptualizing, Measuring, Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity." *Journal of Marketing* 57(1): p. 7.

Keller lays out a comprehensive framework for customer-based brand equity. In his model, brand knowledge consists of brand awareness (the degree to which a customer knows that a brand exists), and brand image (what his or her impressions of that brand is). For this dissertation it is the latter that is of interest, and within the realm of brand image it is user imagery and usage imagery that are central. They in turn matter because they provide symbolic benefits that allow consumers to express themselves. Brand benefits relate to the types of value that the consumer derive from using the brand. Keller bases his brand benefits on the three main categories of brand value delineated by Park, Jaworski, et al. (1986); functional, symbolic, or experiential value. In customer value research these are sometimes supplanted by additional types of

value that are especially important for a specific product category. Tynan, McKechnie et al. (2010) break out a relational type of value, because communities play an especially important role in their area of interest; luxury consumption. The value they describe is however one of experiences (e.g. if you buy a luxury car you get to meet exciting people at exclusive events). Their relational value could therefore just as easily be placed under the experiential/hedonic heading. The cost/sacrifice value that Tynan, McKechnie et al. (2010) and Smith and Colgate (2007) include refers to the ratio between what a consumer has to do to get value and the value she gets. Zeithaml (1988, p. 14) states that "...value is the consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given". The cost/sacrifice value is therefore not a separate value type but a basic function of all types of value. Certain scholars (e.g. Sheth, Newman et al. 1991, Holbrook 2005) choose to express value more specifically, but the types of values that they delineate are then possible to categorize according to the functional, symbolic, or experiential value taxonomy.

Utilitarian value has to do with what the offering can do for the customer in practical terms and is therefore similar to functional and instrumental value. Excellence refers to how well something works, and is therefore also related to utility. The experiential types of value have to do with how fun or rewarding an experience is. Holbrook's play value relates to fun and his spirituality value to rewarding experiences. Experiences are judged according to their context, which is how Sheth, Newman, et al.'s conditional value fits into the framework. The goal of many social endeavors is to reach an affective state, which relates to the emotional value a brand represents for the customer. Further, their epistemic value relates to curiosity, novelty, and the desire to satisfy knowledge, all which relates to the experiential/hedonic value type. Symbolic value is related to what a brand means and how it makes you feel about yourself. The relationship between different types of value is presented in table 1 below.

Table 1
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TYPES OF VALUE

Tynan, McKechnie et al.	Smith and Colgate	Park, Jaworski et al.	Holbrook	Sheth, Newman, et al.
Utilitarian	Functional/ Instrumental	Functional	Excellence	Functional
Symbolic/ Expressive	Symbolic/ Expressive	Symbolic	Status Esteem Aesthetics Ethics	Social
Experiential/ Hedonic	Experiential/ Hedonic	Experiential	Play Spirituality	Conditional Emotional Epistemic
Relational				
Cost/ Sacrifice	Cost/ Sacrifice		Efficiency	

The focus of this dissertation is symbolic brand value. It can be self-oriented or other-oriented in character (Holbrook 2005). This means that brands' symbolic properties can either be rewards in themselves and provide internal meaning to consumers (self-oriented types of value), or they can allow consumers to show others what they are like (other-oriented types of value). The values of status and esteem are other-oriented types of values. Status indicates a person's rank, while esteem is a function of admiration as a result of e.g. a person's consumption, taste, and accomplishments (Holbrook 2005). Sheth, Newman, et al.'s (1991) social value is also other-oriented because it refers to the effect a person's consumption has on others' opinions of her. Aesthetics and ethics can be rewards in themselves, and if so, they are self-oriented symbolic values. Aesthetic value can for instance be realized through the appreciation a beautiful garment and ethical value can come from the satisfaction of knowing that you are a good person for driving a hybrid car. The same consumer

behavior can however have other motivations and thus provide other types of value. If the consumer wears the garment to display her taste, or if she drives a hybrid car to appear good, the symbolic value derived is esteem.

Conspicuousness thus transforms self-oriented types of value into other-oriented ones. The premise of the articles that make up this dissertation is that individuals choose products that have brand meaning that allow them to express who they are to others. They are high on meaning, and conspicuously consumed. The dissertation thus focuses on other-oriented types of symbolic brand value.

In summation, the key constructs of this dissertation are; user imagery, usage imagery, and symbolic brand value/image. User imagery and usage imagery can be combined into one construct; that of brand imagery (Sotiropoulos 2003). It is possible to lump them together because both constructs describe factors that are symbolic in nature. We, as consumers, look at the type of person that would normally use a brand, and the context in which this happens, and as a result draw conclusions about the brand. The symbolic brand value/image is conceptualized as brand personality. This is the topic of the next section.

Brand Personality

In this dissertation, I view brand personality as the symbolic character of brand image. According to Plummer (1984) there are three primary components to a brand's image; its physical elements or attributes, the functional benefits of using the brand, and the brand's character—its personality. Personality has been a main brand focus since the seventies (Kapferer 1994, p. 44, Hanby 1999), and it is one of the most studied constructs of brand associations (Brakus, Schmitt et al. 2009). In practice, brand personality is used to differentiate products, to drive consumer preference and usage, and as a common denominator that can be used to market a brand across cultures. The concept originated from practitioners who felt the concept of unique selling proposition (USP) was too limited to describe the intangible facets of a brand (Azoulay and Kapferer 2003). Plummer describes how advertising shows the prospective consumer a brand's personality, which then allows the individual to evaluate if it is appropriate for him. He (1984, p. 29) explains that “inside his

or her head he or she has said, I see myself in that brand, or I see that brand in myself". Keller (2003, p. 94) describes brand personality as how consumers feel about a brand rather than what they feel the brand is or does. Kapferer (1994, p. 43) describes brand personality as a character of whom consumers form an opinion by the way the character speaks of products or services. The most common definition of brand personality is "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Aaker 1997, p. 347). Brand personality is the result of inferential processes (Johar, Sengupta et al. 2005). This means that individuals infer what brand personality is like based on information that they take in from various sources.

As described in the theoretical framework, I employ brand personality as the conceptualization of the brand. It is the thing that is affected by user imagery. It would have been possible to focus on direct outcomes of user imagery on e.g. consumer attitudes or behavior. I however chose to concentrate my inquiries on brand personality for the following reasons. To start with, there is ample evidence that brand personality leads to many positive outcomes, which reduces my need to research this link. Brand personality induces emotions in consumers (Ogilvy 1985, p. 14, Biel 1993) and has a positive relationship with levels of trust and loyalty (Fournier 1994, Kumar, Luthra et al. 2006), and in some instances positively influences consumer-brand relationships (Chang and Chieng 2006). Brand personality can also have positive influence on brand preference, affection, and purchase intentions (Zhang 2007). What is more, brand personality has a direct positive effect on customer satisfaction (Brakus, Schmitt et al. 2009). On a general level, a recognizable and well-defined brand personality is thus the key to a successful brand's appeal (Venkateswaran, Binith et al. 2011). Brand personality brings a lot of positive outcomes merely because it allows consumers to clearly perceive a brand on an emotional level, and understand its meaning. More specifically for this dissertation, brand personality is an interesting construct because it offers a nuanced description of brand character. When a company determines how to position a brand, it is not just a question of whether to make it good or bad, positive or negative. Instead, the issue is how to describe its character so that it speaks to the intended consumer. It is well established that a match between brand personality and the consumer's self-image brings customer satisfaction and

persuasion to buy a brand (e.g. Kressmann, Sirgy et al. 2006, Parker 2009). For this to happen, companies must understand the character of their intended customers, and then mirror it via their brand personality. There is thus a clear need to do research on brand personality.

Because brand personality matters, it is important to understand how it comes about. Hayes (2008) states that product attributes, corporate associations, and user imagery shape brand personality. Other scholars (Levy 1959, Plummer 1984, Batra, Lehman et al. 1993) list influencers such as user imagery, advertising, and packaging. Brand personality is created directly, via the people associated with the brand; the brand's user and usage imagery, the company's employees, or CEO, and the product's endorsers (McCracken 1986, McCracken 1989, Keller 2000, Parker 2005). Brand personality is also shaped indirectly through product-related attributes, product category associations, brand name, symbols or logos, advertising style, price, and distribution channel (Batra, Lehman et al. 1993, Aaker 1997, Parker 2005). To sum up, brand personality is created either via the marketing mix, or via the people consumers associate to the brand, and the context in which it is consumed. The two latter can be expressed as brand imagery, which is the subject of the two following sections.

Brand Imagery: User Imagery

User imagery is a stereotyped perception of the generalized user of a particular brand (Parker 2005, p. 19). Sirgy (1982) formally defines the construct as the set of human characteristics associated with the brand user. It comes about when personality traits are directly transferred to a brand through the people that are associated with it (McCracken 1989). This psychological shortcut facilitates the establishment of a brand personality (Aaker 1996, p. 147). User imagery attributes can be formed directly from a consumer's own experiences and contact with brand users or indirectly through the depiction of the target market as communicated in brand advertising or by some other source of information (e.g. word of mouth) (Keller 1993). Aaker (1996, p. 147) refers to these two types as the ideal user and the typical user. The ideal type is a personality that the company wants to project as a user of a brand in order to improve brand image. Sponsored athletes, brand spokespersons, actors using

products in films and on TV because companies have paid for product placement, as well as people portrayed in advertising are examples of ideal users. Ideal users should however not be confused with the target group for the brand. As an example of the difference, the actual target group for most cosmetics brands is older than the ideal users portrayed in ads (Kapferer 1994, p. 47).

In contrast to the ideal users, the typical user is a person that uses a brand out of choice, for example colleagues, friends, people in the street, real people in media, etc. Associations of a typical brand user may be based on demographic factors (e.g., sex, age, race, and income), psychographic factors (e.g., according to attitudes toward career, possessions, the environment, or political institutions (Keller 1993). Gladwell (2005) provides a clear example of typical user imagery and how relates to brand image. He recounts "I once had a conversation with someone who worked for an advertising agency that represented one of the big luxury automobile brands. He said that he was worried that his client's new lower-priced line was being bought disproportionately by black women. He insisted that he did not mean this in a racist way. It was just a fact, he said. Black women would destroy the brand's cachet. It was his job to protect his client from the attentions of the socially undesirable." Typical users thus reflect on the brand, but not always in the manner intended by the company. Interestingly, for self-expressive product categories, negative user stereotypes are considered particularly powerful (Banister and Hogg 2004). In the UK this was made explicit when a consumer survey discovered that Jeremy Clarkson, a middle-aged, middle-class, and blue-jeans-wearing presenter of Top Gear, a television program about cars, was almost single-handedly responsible for making denim uncool to the under-thirties (Pountain and Robins 2000, p. 19). If the gap between ideal and typical user imagery becomes too wide, the general public will have a hard time accepting the brand meaning proposed by the brand owner, and instead come up with an alternative interpretation of the brand that is based on what they see in real life. The Burberry brand faced a situation of this kind (see the introduction chapter). The figure below uses the Burberry case to illustrate how different ideal user imagery and typical user imagery can sometimes be.

Figure 4

USER IMAGERY GAP



Burberry ideal user imagery
 Photo courtesy of Burberry

Burberry typical user imagery
 Unknown photographer

It is apparent that consumers perceive that the qualities of the individuals that use the brands also apply to the brands, and in return, that consumers can be more like those users if they consume the brand. This connection is obvious in the world of advertising. For instance, Management consultant firm Accenture wants their brand to represent “high performance” so they displayed high performing golfer Tiger Woods in their ads with a caption that read “Go on. Be a Tiger” (Stelter 2009). In the classic “Be Like Mike” commercial it is even spelled out that you can be like basketball great Mikael Jordan if you drink Gatorade (Rovell 2006). As to the effect of ideal Vs. typical brand users, it is possible that celebrities and models could have a stronger effect on brand perception because they are more accomplished and more attractive than the average person. However, because consumers can relate personally to them, typical users may on the other hand have a stronger effect on brand perception. After actual experience of a product, word-of-mouth is the strongest influence on consumers’ attitudes towards a brand (Keller 2003, p. 71). The reason is that the opinions of independent individuals that are not

talking about the brand to sell it are perceived as more authentic and therefore more credible than the commercial messages that companies communicate. Typical user imagery could be considered a kind of visual word-of-mouth, only instead of other people's opinion of a brand it constitutes unfiltered visual information about the brand user. Typical user imagery does not offer the insights and reasoning about brand meaning provided by word-of-mouth. It does on the other hand offer a straight observation of the type of person that use a brand, and as Silverman (2010) points out, observations constitute the purest and least distorted source of information available. For consumers authenticity is of central importance for brand evaluation (Ballantyne, Warren et al. 2006, Beverland 2006), and it is increasingly vital for younger consumer cohorts (Bennett and Lachowetz 2004), which would suggest that non-commercial endorsements like typical user imagery is destined to gain in relevance for future brand builders.

User imagery is equally important to brand owners, brand users, and indeed to individuals who choose not to use a brand. For companies, the importance of user imagery is that it affects brand personality (Keller 2000, Hayes, Alford et al. 2008), and therefore self-image congruity (Sirgy, Grewal et al. 1997, Parker 2009), and therefore in turn the company's ability to create customer satisfaction (Sirgy and Samli 1985). In other words, user imagery is directly linked to the customer value that a company provides, and thus to that which generates sales and profits (Malhotra 1981, Kressmann, Sirgy et al. 2006). For consumers, user imagery matters because it allows them to express who they are through brand use, but only if the shared notion of what the brand user is like fits their self-image. They therefore have a vested interest in user imagery. If it deteriorates, the value of their chosen brand does too. The third stakeholder with an interest in user imagery is the non-customer. Because user imagery lets us understand whom a product is for, it is equally useful for those that do not use it. Brand avoidance can be experiential, moral, or identity-based in nature (Ward and Dahl 2014). Experiential avoidance is simply when you avoid a brand because you have tried it and you did not like the experience. Moral brand avoidance means that brand avoidance is related to norms and values. If a consumer rejects a fashion brand because it uses fur, he or she displays moral brand avoidance. Identity avoidance develops when the

brand image is symbolically incongruent with the individual's identity. Certain brands become closely associated to specific groups of people, and for those that do not wish to be mistaken for members of those groups, it is important to distance themselves from the brands in question. This is the case in the example of the Burberry brand (Neate 2013). It is the fear that other people will think that you are like the new and undesirable type of users (a Chav) if you wear Burberry that drives people away from the brand. The role of typical user imagery is pronounced when it comes to brand avoidance, because typical user imagery is the representation of the type of person who uses a brand, and if that person is lacking in morals or has an undesirable identity it will drive the self-expressive consumer away.

Brand Imagery: Usage Imagery

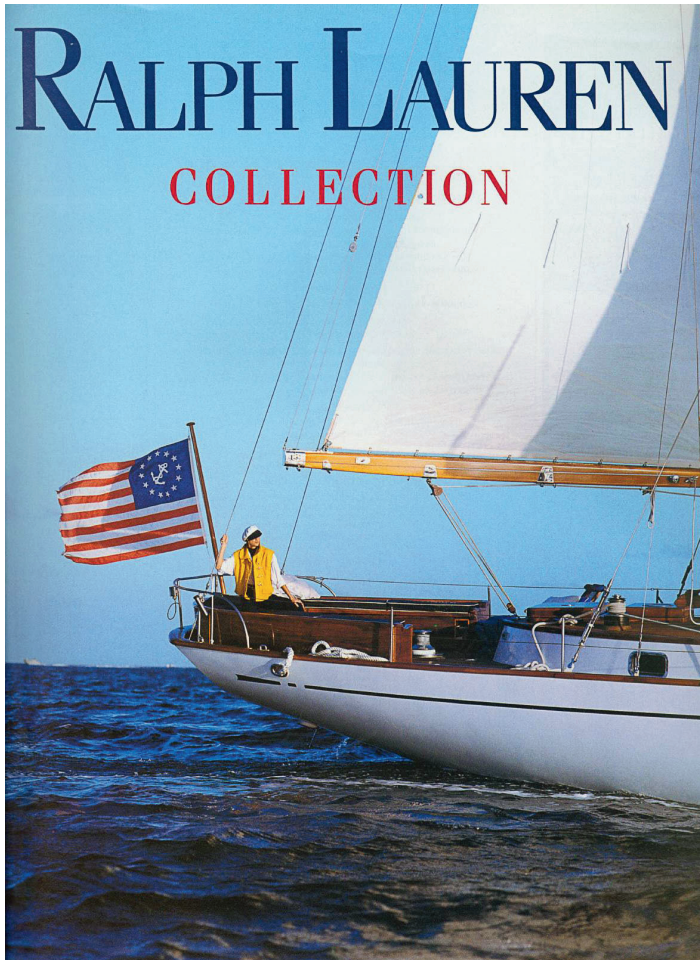
In this dissertation, I view usage imagery narrowly, as just the conspicuousness of the consumption setting. The construct is normally wider than that. Biel (1992) defines brand usage imagery as the perceived stereotype of the situations in which a brand or product is generally used. It thus depicts situations or lifestyles in which the brand is used (Fiore 2010, p. 29); it relates to context (Keller 1993, Hayes, Alford et al. 2008, Parker 2009). Just like user imagery, usage imagery attributes can be formed directly from a consumer's own experiences, or indirectly through the depiction of it through e.g. advertising or word-of-mouth (Keller 1993). When usage imagery in the minds of consumers is appropriate for the product, it has significant effects in brand attitude and brand loyalty (Fang, Jianyao et al. 2012). This is called usage imagery congruity. According to this principle, consumers would rate an evening gown higher if they observed it at a fancy party than if they saw the same garment worn to the supermarket. This means that symbolic brand image is shaped by usage imagery (O'Cass and Grace 2004). If consumers have the impression that a brand is normally consumed in a particular type of setting, in a particular way, the brand will take on connotations of that context. The meaning of usage imagery thus shapes brand meaning. It is a common technique to display a brand in an environment that signals different symbolic types of value. An example of this is the Ralph Lauren corporation. The company is a pioneer of lifestyle branding (McDowell 2002), and frequently employs usage imagery in its advertising. Below is an example of how the

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU SELL - IT'S WHOM YOU SELL IT TO

company emphasizes the context in which the brand is used in order to imbue it with the right connotations.

Figure 5

USAGE IMAGERY BASED ADVERTISING



Photograph courtesy of the Ralph Lauren Corporation

However, not all research into contextual factors of consumption concerns usage imagery. Research on servicescapes (Bitner 1992, Tombs and McColl-Kennedy 2003) for instance investigates how the physical surroundings affect the functional and experiential benefits of brands. This is different from usage imagery, where it is the consumption setting's effect on a brand's symbolic meaning that is central.

For this dissertation, the role of usage imagery is however not to influence brands in itself. In article 2, usage imagery is operationalized as the conspicuousness of the consumption setting. An easily observed consumption setting allows participants to impress their peers by choosing a socially desirable product over a regular one. After all, if participants choose a particular option to fit in with, or stand out from the crowd, the crowd has to be able to see what they buy. In this particular case the role of usage imagery is therefore that it enables consumers to consume environmentally friendly products symbolically rather than for functional or experiential benefits, and thus self-enhance in the eyes of other people.

Problematizing the Key Constructs

As laid out above, the central theoretical constructs that I employ in this dissertation are brand personality, user imagery, and usage imagery. Although they at first glance may seem straightforward, there are some issues related to their meaning, how they are usually employed by brand researchers, and how they relate to each other. In the following sections I review these issues, and present the perspective and conceptualizations that I have arrived at.

Delineating the Relationship Between User Imagery and Brand Personality

My view is that symbolic brand image is conceptualized as brand personality. It is in turn influenced by user imagery, and these constructs are distinct from each other. This is however not obvious to all branding scholars, and there is therefore no consensus regarding how user imagery and brand personality relate to each other. There are three main schools on the subject.

School 1.) Symbolic brand image is conceptualized as user imagery and there is no distinction between it and brand personality. Symbolic brand image is expressed as product-user image (Sirgy 1982), stereotypical user (Johar and Sirgy 1991), or brand user image (Kressmann, Sirgy et al. 2006). This was the original conceptualization of symbolic brand image as self-image congruity research got started. The researchers that take this position (e.g. Dolich 1969, Gentry, Doering et al. 1978, de Chernatony 2006) are primarily interested in the psychological mechanism of self-image congruity, what moderates it, and what its effects are on consumers and brands.

School 2.) Symbolic brand image is conceptualized either as brand personality or as user imagery. For scholars (Helgeson and Supphellen 2004, Parker 2009, Malär, Krohmer et al. 2011, Fang, Jianyao et al. 2012) that view brands in this way brand personality and user imagery are two separate constructs that that can be used to represent symbolic brand image in the pursuit of self-image congruity. The focus of these researchers is to deduce which of the two constructs is the most effective for building strong brands in different categories and contexts, and they often test the effect of brand personality-based congruity and user imagery-based congruity on a third brand performance measure like brand equity.

School 3.) Brand personality describes the character of a brand and is therefore a suitable conceptualization for symbolic brand image. It is shaped by several influencers, one of which is user imagery. This view is the most prevalent. It is adopted by brand management researchers that want to emphasize that they are focusing specifically on the symbolic character of the brand image (Plummer 1984). It is also used by those that measure how different factors affect brand perception (e.g. Aaker 2011, Chu and Sung 2011, Möller and Herm 2011, Venkateswaran, Binith et al. 2011, Keller, Apéria et al. 2012), among them user imagery (Hayes, Alford et al. 2008, Sung and Yang 2008, Roy and Moorthi 2009) and situational factors (Ballantyne, Warren et al. 2006). There is also a group of researchers that concentrate their efforts to investigate how brand personality in itself affects other brand outcomes (Batra, Lehman et al. 1993, Biel 1993, Aaker and Fournier 1995, Zentes, Morschett et al. 2008,

Valette-Florence, Guizani et al. 2011), and how suitable the personality metaphor is to describe brands (Hanby 1999, Caprara and Barbaranellie 2001, Wee 2004).

The view that brand personality and user imagery are distinct is also adopted by researchers that are interested in the evaluation of brand personality measurement scales (d'Astous and Lévesque 2003), and who are of the opinion that it is important to differentiate personality from other brand characteristics to get correspondence between the brand and the self (e.g. Azoulay and Kapferer 2003, Bosnjak, Bochmann et al. 2007, Geuens, Weijters et al. 2009).

Although he does not expressly use the terms brand personality or user imagery I have included McCracken (1986) in this third category of scholars. He breaks down brand meaning into age, gender, social class, lifestyle, and personality. He thus refers to brand meaning as characteristics of the brand that are normally used to describe people, and because the Aaker (1997) definition of brand personality transcends personality in a strict sense, McCracken's brand meaning is very similar to the most commonly used conceptualization of brand personality (see the review later in this chapter). What is more, McCracken treats brands as separate entities from their users; brand meaning describes a brand, not its users. McCracken states that the people associated with a brand (among others, its users) affect how it is viewed. Another scholar that does not employ the actual terms, but whose thinking places him in the third category alongside McCracken is Belk (1988). He considers the brand not as its user, but as an extension of the consumer and it is therefore closely related to his or her identity. McCracken and Belk both address consumption of products. Products are however often equated to brands and both scholars have become influential in the field of symbolic brand consumption. The three types of brand image conceptualization and their supporters are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BRAND PERSONALITY AND USER IMAGERY**

Conceptualization	Scholars
School 1) Symbolic brand image is user imagery	Sirgy; Johar & Sirgy; Kressmann; de Chernatony, Gentry, Dolich
School 2) Symbolic brand image is either brand personality or user imagery	Parker; Helgeson & Supphellen; Malär, Krohmer, et al.; Fang, Jianyao et al.
School 3) Symbolic brand image is brand personality. It is influenced by user imagery	Aaker, D; Aaker, J; Fournier; Venkateswaran, Binith et al.; Möller & Herm; Roy & Moorthi; Batra, Lehman et al.; Biel, Caprara & Barbaneillie; d'Astous & Lévesque; Hayes, Alford et al.; Azoulay & Kapferer; Keller, Apéria et al.; Geuens, Weijters et al.; Hanby, Sung & Yang; Chu & Sung; Wee; Ballantyne, Warren et al.; Zentes, Morschett et al.; Valette-Florence, Guizani et al.; Plummer; McCracken; Belk; Bosnjak, Bochmann et al.

The advantage of conceptualizing symbolic brand image as user imagery (School 1) is mainly related to identification. Because self-image congruity rests on the idea that consumers want brands with which they can identify, it makes sense to conceptualize brand image as a person (user imagery) rather than a theoretical entity (brand personality) because it is easier to identify with other people than with the physical or mental representations of a brand (Helgeson and Supphellen 2004). The downside to conceptualizing symbolic brand image as user imagery is that because brands are not people, user imagery does not encompass all that a brand represents. As previously mentioned, the symbolic properties are colored by product attributes and corporate associations (Hayes, Alford et al. 2008), making brand personality a wider construct than just brand users. Most scholars therefore separate the two constructs, and for good reason; it is entirely possible for a brand to have one brand personality and different user imagery. For instance, Aaker (1996, p.

172) describes how the Levi's jeans brand personality is that of a 19th century gold digger, but its user imagery is contemporary. For businesses, working to establish a brand personality that is different from the personality of the actual users is a common strategy to make the brands more attractive (Kapferer 1994, p. 47).

Brand Personality Encompasses More than Personality and Therefore Equals Brand Meaning or Brand Character

As described in the theoretical review above, a match between the self and the brand is central for symbolic/expressive consumption. This suggests that it is possible to take a theoretical construct that in some way describes an individual, and compare it to an equivalent construct that describes a brand. If they match there are positive outcomes. The problem is that although brand researchers use the same words as psychologists, they have not made sure their terms describe phenomena that correspond to those of psychology. The term brand personality suggests that the construct describes the personality of a brand. Although there are many definitions of personality, most analysts (see Aaker 1997) agree that for humans it is tied to traits that are stable over time, so if identity outlines whom you present yourself as to the world (Oyserman 2009), personality describes what you are like at the core (Dollinger 1995). In trait theory (McCrae and Costa 1989) a common conceptualization of human personality is the Big Five personality dimensions (or OCEAN after its dimensions: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism (Aaker 1996, p. 143)). The most widely used conceptualization of brand personality is the Aaker (1997) Big Five brand personality scale shown in table 3. An attractive aspect of the Aaker Big Five scale is that it was generated through the same factor analysis process as the original Big five personality dimensions for human personality. Thus, it should be able to measure brand personality the same way that the OCEAN scale does human personality. However, many researchers (e.g. Azoulay and Kapferer 2003, Geuens, Weijters et al. 2009) claim that this is not the case because the brand personality construct encompasses more than just personality. It is thus strictly speaking not a pure measure of personality (Azoulay and Kapferer 2003), but rather of more general brand character. It therefore resembles McCracken's

(1986) brand meaning construct. His brand meaning dimensions are: age, gender, social class, lifestyle, and personality. Because the Aaker (1997) Big Five approach touches on intangible aspects of the brand that are not personality traits, thereby widening the construct, brand personality and brand meaning become synonyms for all practical intents.

At the dimension level of the Aaker Big Five brand personality scale, the similarity of the two frameworks is not apparent. However, if one takes into consideration the facets and traits that were used to generate the dimensions the similarities become obvious. The Aaker Ruggedness dimension is based on masculine traits. The Charming facet that is part of Aaker's Sophistication dimension denotes femininity. These therefore correspond to McCracken's Gender dimension. Apart from Charming, the Sophistication dimension also comprises the Upper class facet and trait, which is a direct equivalence to McCracken's Social Class dimension. The Aaker scale also includes the trait Young, which is related to McCracken's Age dimension, and the traits Trendy, Up-to-date, Contemporary, and Outdoorsy, all correspond to McCracken's Lifestyle dimension. The brand personality framework thus covers the brand meaning dimensions as a whole. The brand personality construct's wide scope makes it more suitable to catch all dimensions of brand meaning and thus make the equation of the two constructs valid. The downside of this is that if both constructs denote the same phenomenon, at least one of them may be redundant. The Aaker scale's failure to only measure personality and its resulting, and unintentional, similarity to other brand constructs is symptomatic of brand research in general. In the field, it is common that researchers are studying the same thing with different names (Stern 2006). Aaker's loose definition of brand personality has spurred criticism (Azoulay and Kapferer 2003, Bosnjak, Bochmann et al. 2007) and Geuens, Weijters et al. (2009) have attempted to rectify the problem with a new scale that only measures personality. It has to date enjoyed limited impact (165 citations Vs. 4,300 citations for the Aaker scale in Google Scholar), but may in time prove to be a worthy contender as the default scale for brand personality, especially since it in contrast to previous scales has an affinity with human personality.

Objections to the Aaker scale are often based on a perceived lack of stringency of the scale. For the purposes of this dissertation however brand personality's wide scope is not necessarily a problem. It may in fact be a blessing in disguise. Because my focus is on how user imagery relates to brand personality the most important thing is how comparable the two constructs are. Azoulay and Kapferer (2003) find "the set of human characteristics" too wide a scope since it includes skills, age, and demographic characteristics, which a personality scale according to psychologists would not. However, as Keller (1993) explains, user imagery may be based on demographic factors (e.g., sex, age, race, and income), as well as psychographic factors (e.g., according to attitudes toward career, possessions, the environment, or political institutions). This means that the Aaker Big Five Dimensions of Brand Personality scale is more congruent with the user imagery construct than a pure personality scale would be, and therefore more useful for the purpose of this particular dissertation.

Below the Aaker brand personality scale is presented.

Table 3

AAKER BIG FIVE BRAND PERSONALITY DIMENSIONS

Big Five brand personality dimensions	Facets	Traits
Sincerity	Down-to earth	Down-to-earth Family-oriented Small-town
	Honest	Honest Sincere Real
	Wholesome	Wholesome Original
	Cheerful	Cheerful Sentimental Friendly
Excitement	Daring	Daring Trendy Exciting
	Spirited	Spirited Cool Young
	Imaginative	Imaginative Unique
	Up-to-date	Up-to-date Independent Contemporary
Competence	Reliable	Reliable Hard working Secure
	Intelligent	Intelligent Technical Corporate
	Successful	Successful Leader Confident
Sophistication	Upper class	Upper class Glamorous Good-looking
	Charming	Charming Feminine Smooth
Ruggedness	Outdoorsy	Outdoorsy Masculine Western
	Tough	Tough Rugged

Source: Aaker, J. L. (1997). "Dimensions of brand personality." *Journal of Marketing Research (JMR)* 34(3): 347.

Brand Personality Only Measures Positive Traits

Research investigating brand-related trait attributions has largely neglected negatively valenced traits (Azoulay and Kapferer 2003, Stern 2006, Bosnjak, Bochmann et al. 2007). This means that if consumers experience that a brand has negative characteristics, existing tools may not pick up on them. This presents a problem, because the hypothesis of article 1 is that overweight and obese user imagery would be detrimental to fashion brands, and if the tool that is supposed to measure user imagery's effect on the brand is incapable of registering negatively valenced traits there is a risk that the effect goes unnoticed; a false negative. There are however ways to mitigate the issue. If there is an opposite value to the negative characteristic one is looking for, a low score on the positive trait can be interpreted as a high score for the corresponding negatively valenced trait. So if the idea is to measure if a brand is perceived as decadent for instance, it is possible to look at the opposite trait; wholesome, and if the wholesome score is low one can infer that the decadence score would be high. However, not all negatively valenced traits have an opposite in existing brand personality scales. What is more, even if they did, and researchers arbitrarily assigned negative traits that they felt were the opposite of the positive traits, scale validity would be an issue. Some traits, like Western, and Small-town, are not even positively or negatively valenced to begin with. There are thus a number of limitations to these instruments that one should keep in mind when employing them to assess brands. They are for instance of limited use if the goal is to measure brand strength. When human personality is assessed, it is not a question of how positive or attractive the personality is; it is to describe what the individual is like. The brand personality construct should work the same way, and the best use of a brand personality scale is therefore to describe a brand's character, or persona (Venkateswaran, Binith et al. 2011) rather than to employ it as a positive/negative instrument, where a high score is better than a low one. The objective of using the Aaker Big Five scale in this dissertation is consequently to enrich the description of the brand and to allow the interplay of all the brand dimensions relative to each other paint a picture of the brand's character.

A Narrow Conceptualization of Usage Imagery

The distinction between situational factors that are symbolic on the one hand, and functional and experiential on the other, puts into question whether it really is the effect of usage imagery that I study in article 2. On the one hand, the experiment's consumption settings are identical apart from the anticipated level of conspicuousness. The two treatments should therefore not result in different perceptions of brand personalities for regular and organic coffee (that comes from participants' personal and/or social norms towards the environment). It is not like one option was served in a glamorous setting and the other for breakfast. This is an argument against calling the consumption setting in this study usage imagery. On the other hand, what a conspicuous consumption setting does is to activate the self-enhancement motive for participants. Because conspicuousness makes their choices obvious to others, it therefore allows them to consume symbolically. They choose green to seem good rather than to be good. Because it directly transforms green consumption from a functional and experiential type of consumption to a symbolic one, for this dissertation, I refer to the consumption situation as usage imagery.

Conclusions on Theory

In this section I summarize my use of theoretical constructs. User imagery is a stereotyped perception of the generalized user of a particular brand, and it can be ideal (presented by the company) or typical (based on actual brand users). Brand personality is the symbolic character of brand image, expressed as the set of human characteristics associated with a brand. User imagery is distinct from brand personality, but user imagery is a brand personality influencer. This makes user imagery important, because if brand personality matches the personality of the intended consumer, self-image congruity occurs, which in turn leads to customer satisfaction and persuasion to buy a brand.

Usage imagery, for the purpose of this dissertation, is operationalized as the consumption setting's level of conspicuousness. Conspicuous usage imagery adds symbolic/expressive brand value to products and allows consumers to self-enhance in the eyes of others by consuming socially desirable goods. This

provides customers with increased satisfaction, which in turn leads to persuasion to buy a brand.

The industries that constitute the settings for this dissertation's articles were chosen because they have certain characteristics that make them suitable for each investigation. Fashion was chosen because it should be sensitive to user imagery, and because fashion companies have the ability to control user imagery via garment sizes. Exclusive nightclubs were chosen because they for reasons of image clearly control who is allowed to become a brand user. Organic coffee was chosen because it is a socially desirable product category that is normally consumed inconspicuously, but that could be consumed conspicuously. The next chapter provides an overview of each industry.

Chapter 3

Industries

Fashion

I chose the fashion industry as setting for articles 1 and 3 for two reasons; 1) because fashion has characteristics that should make it susceptible to the influence of user imagery, and 2) because fashion companies have the opportunity to control user imagery with regards to body shape.

Fashion should be susceptible to the influence of user imagery because it is used by the consumer to identify with others or to differentiate him or herself from others (Levy 1959, Ratchford 1987, McCracken 1988). Products carry meanings that are beyond their functionality (McCracken 1986) and their consumers use the products they consume to build and express their identity (Belk 1988). In the context of the consumer, the objects are the products you own, and they may bring associations, through the brand, to a specific group of people (Ahuvia 2005). In other words, although clothes are purchased for their functional properties, consumers choose fashion brands that allow them to display their personality to others; they fulfill a social need (de Mooij 1998, p. 58-59). Consumers bestow fashion with a high degree of meaning and the meaning of fashion is created and negotiated by companies and consumers. However, all fashion is not equal. It is therefore necessary to define the different tiers of fashion, and contrast their characteristics. This is the topic of the dissertation's next section.

Different Tiers of Fashion

In articles 1 and 3, I study mass market fashion. The findings I present cannot automatically be extended to all types of fashion, because consumers use different types of fashion for different reasons, and companies therefore behave differently depending on the market they serve. Fashion can span many levels, from haute couture to mass produced fashion. In-between falls prêt-a-

porter, or ready-to-wear (Waddell 2004). Within this spectrum it is possible to make finer distinctions, as described by Nellis (2010):

- Budget or mass market - The low end of the apparel spectrum. Mass market apparel is sometimes a knockoff of higher priced designer items (which are then sold at popular prices to the masses, hence the name “mass market.”)
- Discount or Off-price - Could be any price originally, but is retailing for less now
- Moderate - Dresses, sportswear, career wear and nationally advertised apparel brands are all in the moderate range
- Private label - Designed specifically for a store, often offering the latest looks for less than a name brand.
- Contemporary - More of a fashion-forward look, than just a specific price point. This classification is often aimed at women in their '20s and early '30s who are looking for trendy apparel, but at an affordable (at least compared to designer) price
- Better - The fabrics and styling are also of better quality than lower-priced items. Sportswear, coordinates, and dresses may all appear in better lines
- Secondary lines - This classification is sometimes used by designers to offer much lower priced items than the designer category. Also called bridge, see below
- Bridge - A “bridge” between better and designer, this category is often for career separates and dresses in finer fabrics
- Designer - True designer collections often sell for more than \$1000 an item. The fabrics, cut, detail and trim are usually superior to other ready-to-wear items. Some examples of designer labels are Gucci, Prada, Versace, and Marc Jacobs
- Haute Couture - Made-to-measure apparel or couture costs tens of thousands of dollars and only a handful of clients can afford it

The focus of the articles in this dissertation is the type of fashion that is located at the low end of the apparel spectrum. It is marketed by large companies whose inexpensive products are oftentimes inspired by those of higher priced

brands, and whose success is dependent on a high turnover rate. Brand image, product features, and communication styles are established by premium brands and are then copied by mass market brands. This product category is called mass produced fashion (Waddell 2004), or fast fashion (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst 2009) and is similar to Nellis's (2010) budget or mass market fashion.

This overview illustrates the point that fashion is differentiated and that there are many potential price points and fashion points on the spectrum. It is therefore reasonable to assume that there are many different motivations why consumers buy fashion, which in turn would mean that it is likely that different aspects of the brand may be important for different types of fashion. Products provide functional value (Park, Jaworski et al. 1986) like e.g. durability, and experiential value (Smith and Colgate 2007) like e.g. softness of the fabric. However, if consumers were not concerned at all with the symbolic properties of fashion, they could buy generic and comfortable clothes that just fulfilled their functional needs. Since few people do this, it is probable that fashion consumers of all types use what they wear to communicate who they are or what they want to be. There are different types of symbolic brand value; status, esteem, ethics, and aesthetics (Holbrook 2005). It is reasonable to assume that the purchase of high fashion provides aesthetics to a greater extent than does the purchase of mundane everyday clothes. The motivation for buying clothes made from fair-trade cotton is probably ethical, while the consumption of conspicuous and expensive brands bestows the wearer with status. An individual who manages to put together a great outfit by mixing and matching unexpected garments may become the object of admiration in the eyes of others, and fashion consumption thus provides him or her with esteem.

If the symbolic aspects that transform clothes into fashion are either aesthetic product related attributes or non-product related brand attributes as Hauge (2007) suggests, I would contend that the creation of mass market fashion is contingent on the former to a greater extent than are the more exclusive classes of fashion. This is not to say that high fashion can get by without offering the aesthetic experience, quite the contrary. It is very important for all fashion to look and feel right. For designer fashion it is not enough though.

Consumers pay a premium to acquire a garment with an attractive logo, and there must be a reason for this.

First of all, it is important to realize that not all logos are created equal. Mass market retailers adorn their clothes with logos, just like more expensive brands do. The difference is that their names and logotypes do not work the same way as those of designer brands. Rather, they can be considered ornaments; details added to the garments in order to enhance their appearance. For instance, one of the retailers in my studies, KappAhl, markets its line of men's jeans under the Redwood label. The jeans have a visibly marked Redwood patch on the lining above the wearer's right buttock. This is the normal place for jeans' patches ever since Levis' 501 model (arguably the original denim pant). However, in advertising, the Redwood brand is not emphasized. On the company's web site, the Redwood brand is not even identified. You have to enlarge the product photos and read the name off the patch to even know the product-brand of the jeans (KappAhl web site 2010). The brand that is communicated to the consumer is the corporate brand, KappAhl. The Redwood name seems to exist only because the jeans would look weird without a patch. For designer fashion the logos have a different function. Unlike mass market fashion, on the more exclusive levels of fashion, the visible logotype is of the brand that is relevant to the target consumer (Twitchell 2002, p. 92). It is the brand that is promoted by the owner, and its personality is what informs the consumer about its meaning. If a consumer buys a garment from Kenzo, it is because he or she is attracted to Kenzo's brand personality, not that of its parent corporation LVMH. Further, the logotypes allow the consumer to identify the brand. Therefore consumers can use this type of fashion to show the surrounding world that they wear a particular brand. The brand's meaning rubs off on the consumer and its job is done. If you wear a shirt sporting an embroidered polo player, your peers will probably know it is a Ralph Lauren shirt and therefore interpret its aesthetics according to their perception of that brand. They will have learned that Ralph Lauren stands for American East Coast old money elegance (McDowell 2002, p. 57) through product design of other Ralph Lauren garments, through advertising, or perhaps through word-of-mouth and typical user imagery. Thus, the meaning transfer of designer fashion does encompass aesthetics; it just does not have to

rely solely on it. Even a plain garment such as a white shirt will enjoy the connotations to everything the brand stands for in the minds of consumers because the consumers can identify the brand, and with the brand. The same garment, if sold by a mass market retailer on the other hand, would not have this advantage. For mass market fashion, the look of the garment is all there is. A consumer gains nothing by showing off a mass market fashion brand, but by putting together an outfit that looks a particular way that consumer can still communicate symbolically. Mass market fashion leaves out many of the non-product related brand aspects of the clothes, but it does communicate something about the wearer's sense of style. Going by Holbrook's (2005) taxonomy the types of symbolic brand value that mass market fashion offers the consumer are thus those of aesthetics and esteem rather than status.

To sum up, if one accepts the widely spread notion that clothes constitute a kind of language that permits the wearers to express themselves (McCracken 1988, p. 62), both mass market fashion and high-end fashion works. However, the latter allows for a more comprehensive expression because it lets the wearer communicate through both product-related attributes and through non-product related brand attributes. Because mass market fashion garments are cheap and less conspicuously branded, mass market fashion is limited to the product-related attributes. Hence high-end fashion could be considered a richer language. The reason I nevertheless chose to focus on the low-end of the fashion spectrum is that while high fashion is reserved for the rich, mass market fashion is a concern for large swaths of the population. Any findings regarding e.g. discrimination of consumers because of their weight (article 3) are therefore relevant to a majority of the people that make up our society. The turnover of the companies in articles 1 and 3 make up approx. 30% of Sweden's total fashion market (GfK 2007). This is substantial, and it is therefore possible to make inferences about the choice Swedish consumers face based on the findings.

The Logic Behind Assortment Building

In an earlier stage of my career I spent two years doing category management as an employee of the Procter & Gamble Corporation, a large fast moving consumer goods company and a driving force behind the development of ECR

(efficient consumer response) and category management. Category management is a moniker that covers more than just assortments. It also covers product introduction, product display, logistics, etc. The idea is to take a holistic view of each product category and treating it like a strategic business unit. However, when introducing category management as a way of working, the easiest way to get a big profit boost is normally through changes to the assortment. Poor performing assortments are low hanging fruit, and I therefore spent most of my time optimizing them. The logic behind the process is roughly the following: if the goal is to make as much money as possible, the assortment should mirror the demands of the target consumer group as closely as possible. For instance, if fifty per cent of the target consumers for fashion are female, fifty per cent of the garments offered should fit females. If ten per cent of shoe consumers are size 36, ten per cent of the shoe assortment should be size 36. This logic assures that the costs related to carrying each stock-keeping-unit (SKU) is proportionate to the demand for the product. It also minimizes the risk of out-of-stock situations (which equal lost sales) as well as redundant stock (which equals lowered profits because the items have to be discarded or at least sold at a reduced price). However, not all product categories exist to maximize profit, at least not in the short term. They can be image-makers; a form of communication of how the retailer wants to be perceived. A department store may allow more SKUs of cosmetics than sales would dictate in order to show that it is a full assortment retailer that will fulfill every need. Categories can also be loss leaders, designed to drive traffic but not make money. Diapers are a classic example of this. Stores accept losses on each pack of diapers to attract the desirable family with kids demographic. What they lose on diapers they make up for on high profit categories like confectionary. Although it is possible to find many different roles for product categories to play, the default goal is to make money. It is therefore possible to deviate from the rule of assortments mirroring demand, but if so, it should happen for a good reason.

This section is included to provide a background for article 3 in which I compare the garments that are offered in-store to the population that is supposed to buy them. For the study's results to matter, it is necessary that the

reader understands and accepts the assumption that companies that want to maximize profit put together their assortments to mirror demand.

The Importance of Weight and Body Shape for Fashion User Imagery

In articles 1 and 3 I investigate how user imagery in the form of body types affect consumer brand perception and if that in turn affects how companies put together their assortments. The underlying assumption for these studies is that consumers have different attitudes towards different body types and that those attitudes could shape how they perceive brands worn by individuals depending on if they are thin, overweight, or obese. To study these phenomena it is necessary to first define what thin, overweight, and obese means. To this end, the population can be divided into groups, depending on their BMI. They are as follows:

Table 4
BMI CLASSES

Class	BMI range	Explanation
BMI 1	<25	Under weight & normal weight
BMI 2	25-29.9	Overweight
BMI 3	Equal to 30 or above	Obese

Source: (WHO 1997)

Obesity is strongly associated with several major health risk factors, like diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, asthma, and arthritis (Mokdad, Ford et al. 2003). Abdominal obesity is directly associated with sexual dysfunction in several cross-sectional and prospective observational studies (Khoo, Piantadosi et al. 2010). Most seriously, obesity appears to lessen life expectancy markedly, especially among younger adults (Fontaine, Redden et al. 2003). For overweight rather than obese people, the immediate health risks

are more closely associated to body shape than overweight. If a person has a large waist circumference, health risks similar to those facing the obese can occur. If the weight is more evenly distributed, the risks go down (Janssen, Katzmarzyk et al. 2002). Given the health hazards associated to it, it is no wonder overweight and obesity is generally considered a bad thing. However, in addition to a shorter life span, overweight and obesity makes life harder for the afflicted. Even if they manage to avoid living their lives hampered by illness and restricted by physical limitations, the social connotations to overweight may stand in the way of happiness. Overweight and obese people are less content with themselves (Rodin, Silberstein et al. 1984). They also face discrimination. Employers are unwilling to hire overweight workers (Roe and Eickwort 1976), and obese individuals' experience of discrimination in the workplace is more pronounced than it is for thin people (Rothblum, Brand et al. 1990). When compared with persons of normal weight, obese individuals have fewer friends (Harris and Smith 1983) and are seen as less popular by others (Harris, Harris et al. 1982).

In addition to these problems, many people seem to agree that overweight people face difficulties when it comes to finding clothes. Opinions to that effect are found in the blogging community (e.g. Hilton 2013), in mainstream media (e.g. Ritson 2003) as well as in the political establishment (e.g. Kulturhuset Stockholm 2006). The prevailing notion is that companies do not provide clothes to overweight and obese people because the image of overweight and obese people wearing them would hurt their brands. It is therefore said to be much harder for heavy consumers to find garments that fit them than it is for normal and underweight consumers. The logic is impeccable, and you could find support for such business practices in branding literature (view article 3). Because of the negative connotations of overweight (Keys 1955, Wooley and Wooley 1979), it would make sense for businesses to distance their brands from overweight users. Unsurprisingly, the fashion companies claim not to discriminate against overweight consumers. For instance, a representative of H&M explains that the company uses international lists of body measurements to guide what sizes to manufacture, and in what quantities, and adds "It is extremely important not to exclude any customers because of their size" (Gripenberg 2004).

Apparently there are two clear sides to this controversy. The most commonly expressed opinion is that companies act in their own self-interest; that they claim not to discriminate but that they actually do so. This opinion seems to be conventional wisdom; knowledge that is convenient, appealing and deeply assumed by the public, even though it may not be substantiated by facts (Galbraith 1998: 2). If large companies systematically discriminate overweight and obese individuals it means that they believe that heavy user imagery would be such a turnoff to normal and underweight consumers that they would stop buying their brands. This is a serious accusation and it should not be accepted without inquiry.

In this case, I realized I first had to find out if there is any harm for a fashion brand in having overweight and obese consumers. Fashion companies certainly shy away from heavy user imagery in their marketing communications. Most fashion models are thin, and overweight models are largely absent. If one interprets the industry's advertising from an ideal user imagery perspective, and assumes that companies show images of individuals that they believe will be good for their brand image, the logic conclusion is that fashion companies believe overweight and obese user imagery would hurt their brands. It is however not clear if consumers share fashion companies' preference for thin models. The purpose of article 1 is therefore to investigate how the weight of ideal users affects the perception of mass market fashion brands.

If overweight and obese users were detrimental to fashion brands, companies would have reason not to serve them in the way they do other market segments. There is a kind of symbolic racism attached to fat people (Crandall 1994) and in the same way as blacks in the US have less choice in fashion than motivated by their relative purchase power (Lee 2005) it is reasonable to assume that overweight and obese consumers would face reduced choice. I therefore felt it would be interesting to see if heavy fashion consumers have relatively fewer garments to choose from than thin consumers. The purpose of article 3 is therefore to examine if retailers in the mass market fashion industry discriminate overweight consumers by not stocking clothes that fit them. The

results of these studies provide quantified empirical evidence on the theory of user imagery, but also provide new insights into an issue of social concern.

Organic Coffee

Because green consumption is important to the survival of our society (Sandhu, Ozanne et al. 2010), and because marketers so far have failed to create any real demand for environmentally friendly products (Moraes, Carrigan et al. 2012, Carrington, Neville et al. 2014), it is important to find out how to motivate consumers to choose green to a greater extent than they have so far. My co-author and I chose coffee as product category because it is the world's second most tradable commodity after oil, and its impact on the environment is considerable (Bacon 2008, p. 11). What is more, the environmental impact of coffee has received considerable attention in the public sphere (e.g. Blacksell 2011).

Coffee is what Kotler, Armstrong et al. (2008, p. 502) call a convenience product. As such, it is routinely purchased by consumers, without much deliberation. The benefits that consumers have traditionally sought from coffee have been functional or experiential -it provides caffeine to get going in the morning, and it tastes good. During the last few decades, a different type of coffee consumption has however emerged. A pioneer within this trend, the Starbuck Corporation, has shown that it is possible to sell coffee at four to five times the competitors' price without offering superior quality (Dada 2014). Starbucks does this by providing symbolic/expressive benefits. The brand's typical user imagery is positively charged, and a Starbucks drinker is seen as a trendy, cool, and sophisticated person (Fisher, Golden et al. 2012). This attracts individuals that aspire to these qualities. What is more, because the Starbucks brand reflects favorably on its user, it is desirable for the chain's customers to show that they drink Starbucks coffee. For this reason, it is important that the packaging clearly signals the brand. Consumers can only use Starbucks to self-enhance in the eyes of others if their choice of drink is obvious to the people they are trying to impress.

The emergence of self-expressive premium coffee brands show us that it is possible to create more value for the consumer if symbolic/expressive benefits

are introduced in addition to the existing functional and experiential types of value. The trend also highlights the need to make consumers' choices conspicuous if this value is to be realized. This is the foundation for article 2 on self-enhancing green consumer behavior. The rationale of the article is similar to that of the premium coffee business. However, instead of status, it is ethics that represents the added symbolic type of brand value (for a review of types of brand value, please see chapter 2). If choosing organic coffee provides consumers additional other-oriented ethical value, it is reasonable to assume that they would be inclined to buy more of it. This would in turn address the hitherto unsolved conundrum that people claim to like organic products, but that they still do not buy them (Carrington, Neville et al. 2010). The choice of organic products as industry setting is thus based on the notion that environmentally friendly products are generally considered socially desirable (Blake 1999). The study is not an inquiry into the actual effects they may have on the environment. My co-author and I have therefore not delved deeply into the different definitions that exist regarding organic labels (Essoussi and Zahaf 2008). We have limited ourselves to the use of Sweden's market leading coffee brew, and its organic version, marked by the KRAV-label.

Consumers most of the time cannot tell the difference between coffee alternatives (Dada 2014) but they nevertheless relate their choice of coffee to who they are and what they are like (Roseberry 1996). Different alternatives thus provide small differences in perceived function and experience, but great symbolic/expressive differences. This makes coffee a relevant industry for the investigation of the effects of conspicuous usage imagery on green self-enhancing consumption.

Exclusive Nightclubs

At first glance, nightclubs seem like a type of business that is easily described. The Mintel Group's report (2002) defines nightclubs as "permanent club/discos venues offering dancing, which would normally charge an admission and whose primary business activity is as a nightclub". This definition is problematic, because it is circular in nature; it defines a nightclub as a venue whose primary business activity is as a nightclub. What is more, it is too wide for the purpose of this dissertation. It covers any establishment that

regularly offers drinks and dancing. The type of venue that is of interest here is the exclusive nightclub. Exclusive nightclubs are establishments that carefully scrutinize prospective guests, and only allow the most desirable ones to enter the club. The criteria for what a desirable guest is can however vary. Previous research has highlighted such characteristics as individuals' ability to interact with others (Östberg 2007) and how violent they seem to be (Rivera 2010). Overwhelmingly, depictions of exclusive nightclub admissions practices have however focused on customers' propensity to spend big (Bernstein 2005, Williams 2007).

There is however another criterion for classifying and selecting guests at exclusive clubs, namely the reflection that they as individuals cast on the club. This goes back to the original definition of a club; a society of persons who subscribe money to provide themselves with a shared activity (Hornby, Turnbull et al. 2010). In traditional clubs, such as the gentlemen's clubs of London, it is a person's social, political, and professional identity that dictates which one to join. It is then up to the club's existing members to decide whether the prospective member makes the grade or not. There is a club for each type of person, unless that person is considered "unclubbable" due to an objectionable character (Collins Dictionary 2015). Although exclusive nightclubs are run as commercial ventures, and only mimic the organization of an actual club, much of their customer value resembles that of the original social club. If you are admitted, it means you are approved according to the standards of the club (you are the right type of person). If the club is exclusive, and you still get in, it means you are an important person. The club thus defines its members and its members in return define the club. The interests of the members determine the club's profile. London's The Travellers Club for instance caters to British men who travel (The Travellers Club web site 2015). The status of the members determines the status of the club. White's (Historic England 2015) for instance gains a lot of prestige from its aristocratic membership roster.

While membership to traditional clubs is based on a formalized process, while that of exclusive nightclubs is not, they function similarly. The interests of the attendees determine the exclusive nightclub's profile. Some venues are for club

kids who want to dance to electronic dance music, and some are for thirty-something media professionals who want to drink Indian Pale Ale and listen to Vampire Weekend. The status of the guests determines the status of the club. Clubs that attract high-status guests like celebrities and royals are perceived as high-status clubs. In exclusive nightclubs, it is the manager that decides who to admit and who to turn away. This decision is however just a consequence of the type of club s/he is trying to establish. If guest selection deviates from the wishes of the target audience, the club's reputation deteriorates, and people stop coming. Thus, even if the favored guests at exclusive nightclubs (which are the current-day equivalents of traditional club members) do not have any formal power over who gets in and who does not, in reality, their anticipated reaction to other guests determines what the manager can do.

If this process is related to branding theory, it becomes obvious that exclusive nightclubs are an extreme example of how typical user imagery determines brand personality, and how companies actively work to optimize it in order to build brands. There has been limited academic study on the nightclub industry, perhaps because it is a small and frivolous industry of non-essential luxury. Thanks to its single-minded focus on guest classification and selection it however lends itself well to studies of typical user imagery optimization; an activity that may be relevant to many other industries (view the discussion in article 4). In article 4 I investigate the cues doormen look for to evaluate how good a guest is for the nightclub brand, what these cues represent in the way of user imagery, and what types of symbolic value the investigated companies hope user imagery will bestow on their brands. In article 5 my co-author and I discuss the ethics of the excluding practices that nightclubs employ to optimize typical user imagery.

Chapter 4

Criteria for Reviewing the Articles

When it comes to evaluating quantitative and qualitative research alike, the same general criteria exist; it has to be original, credible, and useful in order to resonate with the reader.

Originality

“The first criterion by which people judge anything they encounter, even before deciding whether it is true or false, is whether it is interesting or boring” (Davis 1999, p. 245). This means that it is of the utmost importance for any scholar who wishes his or her texts to be read to create interest. Barley (2006) proposes that originality is the root of all interest. Whether originality is a result of innovative methods or a new subject matter, doing something original is required in order to attract interest. Bartunek, Rynes et al. (2006) did a survey of what the members of the AMJ editorial board felt makes a paper interesting. While the quality of the data has to be good, as must the writing, the findings were that interesting research should be counter-intuitive; it should offer aha-moments. It should be less formulaic and more innovative, have a looser requirement for theory and appeal to a broader base. In contrast to this opinion, what is actually favored by most marketing publications is carefully crafted, methodologically sophisticated quantitative studies in flawless English (Svensson, Helgesson et al. 2008). A common way to ensure that a scholar is researching something that has not already been studied is to spot various ‘gaps’ in the literature and, based on that, to formulate specific research questions (Sandberg and Alvesson 2011). This does not however guarantee that the subject is original. It can in fact make the subject very similar to previous research. It does however make the text feel well established in previous research and easy to grasp. Within marketing it is popular to borrow references from other disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, literature, art theory, etc (Söderlund 2009). However, this does not mean that the researcher can mix and match references from any theoretical

schools. Rather, it means that marketing is an open field from the outset, but that once one chooses a direction it is important to commit to it. If not, reviewers will not understand what the researcher is trying to do, and they will judge the work as messy and all over the place. Barley (2006, p. 19) states: "Papers that break too many substantive, methodological, or theoretical rules are more likely to be called flaky or wrongheaded than interesting. At minimum, interesting papers need to conform to genre constraints". It is therefore important to balance the urge to be different with the necessity of fitting in.

For my experimental studies I attempt to strike this balance by adhering to the generally accepted theoretical assumptions of what brands are and how they work as well as adopting an established methodology to discern causality. At the same time I study subjects that are novel, and I reach some unexpected results that possibly make my research stand out. In article 3 the theories on which I draw are well established. I can hopefully spark some interest through an innovative method of combining anthropometric data with demographic data and observational data into a gap analysis. What is more, the results are not what conventional wisdom would predict and therefore fulfill the criterion for originality of being counter-intuitive.

In the qualitative studies of articles 4 and 5, the methodology is straightforward according to the genre constraints of field-based case studies. What is different is the setting and the object of study; nightclubs constitute an environment where extreme emphasis is placed on guest selection and the empirical data therefore stands out. I hope this will be original enough to pique the curiosity of the reader.

Credibility

In addition to originality, the reader will also judge a paper on its credibility. Credibility depends on the reliability and validity of the data.

For quantitative research reliability and validity is equally important. Reliability has to do with the quality of measurement. It can be defined broadly as the degree to which measures are free from error (Peter 1979). In

social sciences, this is normally built into measurement scales via the use of multiple items for each investigated concept (Gliem and Gliem 2003) resulting in consistent results (Quantitative Methods in Social Sciences e-Lessons 2015). Validity on the other hand refers to whether an instrument measures what it was designed to measure (Field 2013, p. 885).

For article 1 I use the Aaker (1997) Big Five personality scale as tool of measurement. Its reliability and generalizability has been established numerous times (Parker 2009). As reviewed in the theory section, there are doubts regarding its construct validity, which means that there are those that are of the opinion that the scale does not stringently measure that which it purports to measure. For a more elaborate discussion on this topic, please view chapter 2. Poor construct validity could pose a threat to the credibility of the study. However, because the scale items are comparable to the characteristics of the user imagery characteristics I am trying to capture (personality and identity) the scale in this case is a good fit with the objective of the study, which mitigates the issue.

The studies in articles 1 and 2 are lab experiments, and as a result, the situation facing the participants is different from real life, thus lowering external validity. However, in article 2, the inclusion of two separate experiments that both demonstrate the same main effect to some degree supports claims of external validity. Thanks to the amount of control afforded by the experiment form, internal validity is high. In article 3 conditions are reversed. External validity is here high thanks to the realistic setting and the straightforward units of measurement; body measurements/BMI class, distribution of the population over BMI classes, and garment assortments in-store. For the body measurement data the data collection method guarantees that both reliability and validity is high. A medical researcher measured the bodies of a large number of individuals that are representative of the Swedish population. This method would yield the same data if repeated, and it provides a robust and valid image of what Swedes' bodies look like. For the distribution of the population over BMI classes, Statistics Sweden provides robust census data. As for assortments in-store, the garments were tallied and measured by hand. Because the data consists of observations rather than attitudes, reliability is

higher (Haberfeld 2007, Silverman 2010). What is more, because the fashion retailers that were examined claim to offer standardized assortments in all stores, it is reasonable to assume that the assortment in the examined stores is representative of a normal store. This would in turn support claims of validity.

In qualitative research reliability comes from the use of low-inference descriptors (Silverman 2005, p. 226). Low-inference descriptors seek to record observations “in terms that are as concrete as possible, including verbatim accounts of what people say, for example, rather than researchers’ reconstructions of the general sense of what a person said, which would allow researchers’ personal perspectives to influence the reporting” (Seale 1999, p. 148). To this end researchers tend to describe exactly what they have done in order to make the reader believe in the results (Browning and Morris 2012, p. 160). This is important, because only by knowing how the researcher comes up with the results can the reader judge their credibility. However, there is a risk of overbuilding a story so that it will stand up to scrutiny if it is ever challenged. To sufficiently describe methodology without overbuilding is a difficult balance to strike. I try by describing what I do and why I do it in concrete terms rather than go into too much polemic over what my position in the field may be called. I also try to be clear regarding what information is derived from the field (emic) and what originates from my interpretations (etic) (Murray 2005).

Validity determines whether the research truly measures that which it was intended to measure or how truthful the research results are (Golafshani 2003). Czarniawska (2004, p. 662) states that in qualitative research credibility and validity are the same thing. In other words, if the reader believes that the text is true, it has high validity. To make papers more valid, researchers use different techniques. One is respondent validation. As Kirk and Miller (1986:11) argue, the world does not tolerate all understandings of it equally. This means that it is possible that the interviewer misunderstands what the respondent is trying to say. To allow the respondent the opportunity to correct effects of miss-communication therefore increases validity. Another tool that can boost validity is triangulation (Bryman 1988, Creswell and Miller 2000). It is possible to triangulate e.g. by including more than one researcher in

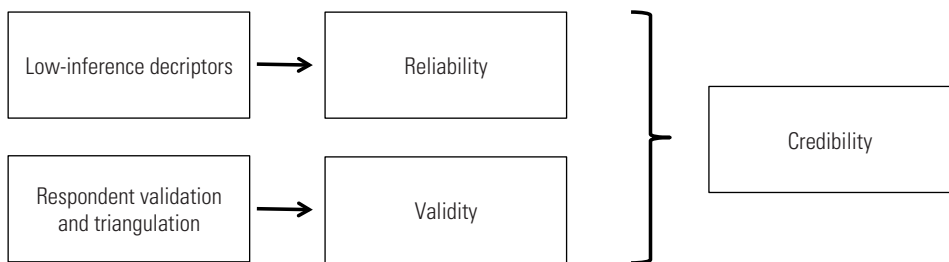
the data collection and analysis, or by gathering data through several sampling strategies (Denzin 1970, p. 303). Although Silverman (2005, p. 4) claims that triangulation is not a substitute for validation, he does agree with Flick (1992) that it can add rigor, breadth, and depth to an investigation. Thus, even if it does not prove that data is significant, triangulation can make a case stronger.

Although I use more than one method (observation and interviews), more than one case, and several data collectors, my studies are at best very light examples of triangulation. They would have to comprise more diverse methodology, more cases, and the data collectors that helped me would have had to be more independent and participate to a greater extent in the analysis of the findings for the methodology of the qualitative studies to really qualify as triangulation. Nevertheless, when the findings from one particular source are congruent with those of others, regardless of their number, it provides some sense of validity.

The components of credibility in qualitative research are displayed below.

Figure 6

COMPONENTS OF CREDIBILITY IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH



Usefulness

The next criterion for articles is usefulness. It can be expressed as impact and as practical implications. The former relates to research that stimulates new

empirical or theoretical work; has been cited or quoted a lot; has opened avenues for research in a new areas. The latter pertains to work that generates usable knowledge in the “real world”; addresses a subject that is very relevant to the real world (Bartunek, Rynes et al. 2006). Usefulness is thus closely related to theoretical contributions, and managerial and societal complications. They are covered at length in the articles, and they also have their own sections in the dissertation’s conclusions chapter. I will therefore not repeat them here. As of yet, the articles that make up this dissertation have not influenced academia or business to any great extent. Hopefully, my findings can be of theoretical and practical use in the future.

Resonance

If a good article must be original, credible, and useful, as proposed above, I consider resonance to be the positive outcome of these qualities. Resonance refers to the degree to which a text hits home; how true it feels to the reader (Czarniawska 2004, p. 662). It is a measure of trust level (Dimoka 2010) and in qualitative research it is especially important that the reader is won over as the method is characterized by constant choices in editing and interpretation on the part of the researcher.

Resonance is equally important for quantitative research, but because there are other, more structured ways to determine if quantitative research delivers on its promise it is not equally important that it resonate in each section. In quantitative research the eye of the needle which one must pass through is that the reader has to accept the underlying assumptions on which the study is based, the constructs that are employed and how they are conceptualized, as well as the study’s design. This is where the reader has to “buy it”. If the reader is satisfied with these and the following study is carried out scientifically, the results will be accepted. The reader does not have to be persuaded at every turn by the writer.

If the overall impression of an article does not resonate with the reader, it is very easy for him or her to dismiss it. The building blocks that make up a high-quality study are however not easily reconcilable. As described above, if I want to be interesting it pays to show the reader something new and different. On

the other hand, this may tempt me to prioritize exotic findings at the expense of more mundane, but perhaps more representative data. Overbuilding the descriptions of methodology may increase credibility, but it will probably make the text duller to read, and therefore less interesting. Practical application and academic contributions vie for space and one must make choices regarding what to include. This way, there is no one right way to compose a text. The process is full of choices, and for everything I choose, I reject something else. The important thing is that I realize this, and that I make my choices consciously in accordance with what I am trying to achieve.

Chapter 5

Summary of the Articles

In this chapter, I present a brief summary of each article that together make up this dissertation. The texts focus mainly on explaining the main research questions, and motivating why they matter. The most important findings are presented and discussed. Because of the short format, these summaries have less detail and depth than the actual articles, and should therefore be used only to get an overview of my subject. If the reader finds the topics of the articles interesting, the actual texts can be found in the dissertation's final chapters.

Article 1

Title: The Influence of Real Women in Advertising on Mass Market Fashion Brand Perception

Single-authored manuscript. Ref: Aagerup, U. (2011). "The Influence of Real Women in Advertising on Mass Market Fashion Brand Perception." *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* 15(4): 486-502.

Marketing scholars study consumption, and if the perception of who is using a particular product is enough to motivate another person to buy it, or conversely, to abstain from buying it, it should be of interest to the field. The positive effect of user imagery in advertising has received considerable attention. Such studies are normally experiments in which some characteristics of the model is the independent variable. Studies of this kind have among other things shown that consumer attitudes towards brands are affected by the attractiveness of the perceived user (Baker and Churchill Jr. 1977), his or her perceived sexiness (Steadman 1969), his or her gender (Kanungo and Pang 1973) as well as his or her age (Huber, Meyer et al. 2013). The goal of these studies is to help companies reach greater efficiency in their marketing

communications by identifying the characteristics of the ideal user imagery that will yield the most favorable attitudes and behaviors from consumers. In other words, the articles help build an advertising toolbox by testing the different positive model attributes that professionals normally employ to communicate their message. The rationale is that the more positive characteristics you load into an ad by way of user imagery traits, the more you will sell. This is why ads normally show individuals that are more beautiful, more successful, and thinner than the average person. Research on negative user imagery is however scarce, probably because companies do not willingly use less than perfect models. Research in this vein would therefore have limited application for advertisers. The issue of negative user imagery in advertising has nevertheless gained in relevance. In recent years a trend has emerged where companies use uncharacteristically heavy models to advertise products that have traditionally relied exclusively on skinny user imagery, product categories such as fashion (e.g. Neff 2007, Bissell and Rask 2010, McVeigh 2010). This new practice may be commendable for many reasons, but it breaks with conventional wisdom regarding fashion advertising. Overweight is universally considered to be negative (e.g. Rodin, Silberstein et al. 1984), because it is detrimental to both a person's health (e.g. Mokdad, Ford et al. 2003) and social situation (e.g. Crandall 1994). It should therefore, in contrast to what these companies claim, hurt brands. There is thus a gap in the research on user imagery, namely that of how potentially negative user imagery in advertising affects brand image. What is more, there is a real-world contradiction between branding theory that would suggest the use of positive user imagery to build brands, and business practices of the companies that break with this tradition by employing plus-size models. To examine this issue, I carry out an experiment on how overweight and obese user imagery affect brand perception. The findings show that consumers' impressions of mass market fashion brands are significantly affected by the weight of ideal users. The use of slender models lead to the brand personality that is most suitable for fashion, followed by obese models. Overweight user imagery is for fashion brand building the least appropriate kind. The contribution of this study is to validate that model weight impacts fashion brands as well as to quantify and nuance how it affects them.

Article 2

Title: Green Consumer Behavior: Being Good or Seeming Good?

Manuscript co-authored with Jonas Nilsson, in review for possible publication in *The Journal of Product and Brand Management* (second round of reviews)

Although the topic of environmental sustainability has received much attention within the marketing literature (Powell 2011, Leonidou, Katsikeas et al. 2013), the traditional research focus on functional benefits has not solved the category's attitude/behavior gap (Carrington, Neville et al. 2010, Moraes, Carrigan et al. 2012, Carrington, Neville et al. 2014); there is still a vast difference between consumers' positive intentions towards green consumption and the category's low market share. Despite an emerging understanding that green consumption, in addition to environmental benefits, also offers consumers a possibility to self-enhance, little research has actually investigated how social or symbolic factors impact consumers' choice. Considering the general importance of green consumer behavior, and the fact that symbolic/expressive meaning of consumption is a commonly accepted idea within brand research (e.g. Park, Jaworski et al. 1986, Aaker 1997, Fang, Jianyao et al. 2012), this fact is surprising. Article 2 addresses this need for research via two experiments on 1) how usage imagery (conspicuous Vs. inconspicuous) affects choice of organic products, and 2) how participants' personal characteristics like self-monitoring ability and attention to social comparison information (ATSCI) moderates the effect. Although related, self-monitoring ability has more to do with status-seeking consumer behavior (Gangestad and Snyder 2000), while ATSCI measures individuals' propensity to adapt to the opinions and behavior of others because they fear standing out (Lennox and Wolfe 1984, Bearden and Rose 1990). Because ATSCI significantly interacts with green consumption as a result of anticipation of a conspicuous setting, but self-monitoring ability does not, it is concluded that social identification rather than social distinction can be an important determinant of green consumption. This goes against findings of previous research (Griskevicius, Tybur et al. 2010, Sexton and Sexton 2011). By

offering an alternative explanation for self-enhancing green consumer behavior the study therefore extends theory and provides insights that could help practitioners better design conspicuous consumption situations to increase environmentally friendly consumption.

Article 3

Title: To Sell or Not To Sell: Overweight Users' Effect on Fashion Assortments

Single-authored manuscript. Ref: Aagerup, U. (2010). "To Sell or Not To Sell: Overweight Users' Effect on Fashion Assortments." *Journal of Brand Management* 18(1): 66-78.

In order to control user imagery perception in the minds of prospective customers, companies either have to communicate user imagery (which is primarily done through advertising) or actually control who is allowed to become a user. The latter means that the company not only targets attractive users, but also that it rejects unattractive ones. There is some literature on the practice of customer rejection. The authors however describe the phenomenon to illustrate non-branding interests. Haenlein, Kaplan et al. (2006) address how financial performance can be improved through customer abandonment. Yoo, Arnold et al. (2011) describe how customer-to-customer interaction affect social experiences in services settings, which has consequences on how many guests of different types should be admitted (which infers that everyone else should be kept out). For luxury, rarity affects the perception of exclusivity (Catry 2003), which by definition means that most people will not get to consume it. These studies do not however focus on how companies select and exclude customers to optimize their brands. This constitutes a research gap. It is reasonable to assume that if negative user imagery is detrimental to fashion brands, as partly demonstrated in Article 1, companies would avoid customers that display negative traits like overweight. It is certainly a widely held belief that overweight people are discriminated against by a fashion industry that does not supply clothes that fit them. Closer scrutiny however reveals that this belief is based on popular opinion that may be derived from the fact that

overweight and obese individuals are discriminated against in other areas (Crandall 1994). This issue has however to date not been scientifically examined. In Article 3 I therefore investigate if mass market fashion companies offer customers of different body shapes the amount of articles that their relative purchase power would merit. This study compares the sizes of clothes that the four leading mass marketing fashion retailers in Sweden offer to the body sizes of the population. Although branding theory would support the idea of rejecting overweight and obese consumers to improve typical user imagery for fashion brands, such practices were not evident. The main contribution of this paper is that it provides the first quantified empirical evidence on the theory of typical user imagery. In the discussion, it is posited that although mass market fashion brands should be susceptible to negative user imagery related to overweight and obese users, the companies avoid such problems by making garments that are not directly attributable to a specific brand, thus mitigating the influence of overweight and obese user imagery on brand personality.

Article 4

Title: Building Hipster Nightclub Brands via Typical User Imagery

Single-authored manuscript. Working Paper

Because exclusive nightclubs have more willing customers than they can accommodate, they will by necessity have to exclude some, hence the term exclusive. Nightclubs thus actively control who is allowed to become a brand user. Researchers (e.g. Rivera 2010) that have studied mainstream exclusive nightclub admissions have however mostly considered the criteria and cues that staff uses to decide customer attractiveness as tools to maximize short-term sales. The doormen evaluate the visible characteristics of prospective customers to glean their ability and willingness to spend money. There is on the other hand very limited research on how companies classify and select customers for brand building purposes, what types of customers are desirable when they do so, and why these customers are considered desirable. Article 4: Building hipster nightclub brands via typical user imagery, attempts to fill this

gap. It is a qualitative study where the managers of two exclusive nightclubs explain how they choose, reject, and treat different categories of guests in order to build their brands so they appeal to their hipster target market. The term hipster refers to a subculture of young people that derive their identity to a large degree from the popular culture they consume (Laudisio, 2010, Haddow, 2008), and “they [possess] tastes, social attitudes, and opinions deemed cool by the cool” (Lanham, 2008, p. 172). The findings are that the investigated companies use the same cues as those of traditional mainstream exclusive nightclubs. In contrast to them however, they interpret the cues in relation to how they express a cool disposition to the insider group that make up the nightclubs’ guests, not in relation to how the cues express their propensity for big spending. Doormen use the cues of recognition, dress, physical attributes, and behavior to glean how typical user imagery will affect the symbolic brand values of status, esteem, aesthetics, and ethics. These cues and values are used to include or exclude potential guests in order to optimize typical user imagery. Exclusive hipster nightclubs classify different types of guests within the group of people that the club is for, and these are then compared to outsiders. Within the clubs, managers differentiate between two guest categories; shepherds and sheep. Shepherds define the clubs’ user imagery. Sheep follow their lead, and act as a contrast that makes the shepherds’ high status conspicuous. Externally, exclusive hipster nightclubs use squares (= uncool people) as a negative reference group that makes it possible for careerist hipsters to make believe that they are cool, even though they hold down a regular day job. What is more, exclusive hipster nightclubs mitigate the negative effects of elitism on brand ethics by limiting customer rejection to squares. The contribution of the study is the descriptions of how companies classify and select typical users to build brands. What is more, because cool is related to people rather than things, and products can only be cool if cool people use them, it is important to investigate the concept of cool by studying people first, and then how they affect brands. Even so, this is to my knowledge the first attempt to study how companies control who is allowed to become brand users in order to build cool brands.

Article 5

Title: Misery as Corporate Mission: User Imagery at the Nightclub The Spy Bar

Manuscript co-authored with Niklas Egels-Zandén. Ref: Egels-Zandén, N. and Ågerup, U. (2008) Misery as Corporate Mission: User Imagery at the Nightclub The Spy Bar, Journal of Current Issues in Finance, Business, and Economics. Reprinted in L.A. Parrish (ed.) (2007) Business Ethics in Focus. Nova Publishers; 275-288, and M. W. Vilcox and T. O. Mohan (eds.) (2007) Contemporary Issues in Business Ethics. Nova Publishers; 163-176.

In business ethics, the focus of study is normally either on *what* is being produced, or on *how* it is being produced. This is logical, because these are most often the choices that affect the well being of the employees, the customers, and the environment. However, for offerings whose value relies on the typical user imagery provided by the customers, it is necessary for companies to control who is allowed to become a customer. This means that prospective customers will be rejected so that more desirable guests will appreciate the brand. This in turn means that some people must feel bad so that others can feel good. This way, the *how* (customer rejection) is intertwined with the *what* (the brand). In this article my co-author and I focus on the corporate practice of controlling the customer base to improve the typical user imagery of the brand, and critically analyze the ethical implications of this practice. This is much needed, since previous marketing research into user imagery and luxury products has neglected the corporate responsibility aspects of exclusivity. The contribution of this paper is that my co-author and I identify and describe how optimizing user imagery inherently leads to ethically problematic business practices. This in turn have managerial implications with regards to the public's perception of the exclusive nightclubs' brands. After all, "nothing classifies somebody more than the way he or she classifies" (Bourdieu 1990, p. 132).

Chapter 6

Conclusions

In my theoretical framework (view figure 2) I posit that user imagery influences brand personality, and if brand personality matches the self-image of the consumer, self-image congruity occurs (Sirgy 1982, Johar and Sirgy 1991). I also posit that conspicuous usage imagery activates symbolic brand value, and that it therefore allows consumers to use socially desirable consumption as a tool for self-enhancement. Both self-image congruity, and self-enhancing consumption leads to customer satisfaction and persuasion to buy a brand.

Articles 1, 3, 4, and 5 cover user imagery in different ways. The articles deal with the effects of user imagery on consumer perception of brands, and if/how companies act to improve user imagery to build their brands. Article 2 is concerned with usage imagery. The underlying assumption is that consumers prefer to be associated with environmentally friendly products in order to self-enhance. The positive product category associations of green products is however not the object of study here; rather, it is how the anticipated conspicuousness of the usage imagery affects green consumer behavior that is of interest. This dissertation thus comprises aspects of both user imagery and usage imagery, two constructs that Sotiropoulos (2003) combines into a construct called brand imagery.

Discussion

When looking at the findings of all the articles side-by-side, certain patterns become obvious. One is that typical user imagery does not seem to affect all industries equally. The effect of user imagery on the brand is subtle for mass market fashion, but is perceived as crucial for exclusive nightclubs. This is reflected in company behavior; mass market fashion purveyors do not attempt to optimize typical user imagery by limiting individuals with negative characteristics (i.e. overweight and obese customers) access to their offerings. Exclusive nightclubs on the other hand build their whole organizations around

the selection of good guests and the rejection of bad ones. A reasonable conclusion is that companies whose brands are affected by typical user imagery to a great extent pay attention to it in their day-to-day operations while others may not. In the following discussion I will with the help of the empirical findings of the articles attempt to explain the characteristics that make brands susceptible to influence from ideal and typical user imagery, and how this informs companies on how to manage user imagery to build brands. I will also discuss the effects of usage imagery, and then relate the two constructs.

User Imagery in Relation to Different Types of Symbolic Brand Value

In chapter 2, I use Keller's (1993) dimensions of brand knowledge model as a starting point to situate my dissertation within the brand research field. As Keller himself points out, the building blocks of his model are not distinct. Brand attitudes are for instance influenced by brand benefits, and brand attributes like packaging can determine the functional benefits of a brand. Another example, which is the assumption on which this dissertation is based, is that user imagery and usage imagery can shape consumers' perception of the symbolic benefits of a brand.

Because the focus of this dissertation is on the symbolic properties of brands, it is worthwhile to dissect the notion of symbolic brand value further. If brand image is the sum of all the subjective perceptions (functional and non-functional) of a brand in the minds of consumers (Fournier 1998, Patterson 1999, Sutherland, Marshall et al. 2004, Stern 2006) it is reasonable to assume that user imagery would affect highly symbolic brands more than brands whose value come from functional or experiential benefits. It is clear that the offerings of the studied industries are not symbolic to the same degree. Both mass market fashion and nightclubs are at least in part consumed for symbolic reasons, which is probably the reason user imagery affects them both. The symbolic value of mass market fashion is however just one of several types of brand value; people buy garments because they feel good to the touch (experiential value) and because they prefer to be warm and dry rather than cold and wet (functional value). The guests of exclusive nightclubs on the other hand choose which venue to go to based on its typical user imagery and

because they want to identify or distinguish themselves in relation to the people that make up the club.

Within the realm of symbolic brand value there are different types of value; status, esteem, aesthetics, and ethics (Holbrook 2005). For nightclubs brand status is a result of important guests. While it is likewise probable that status plays a great role in the consumption of high fashion where consumers can show their place in the social pecking order by wearing recognizably exclusive brands, for mass market fashion status is not a consideration at all. This does however not mean that mass market fashion cannot be used to self-enhance. Consumers can gain esteem from other people if they are able to put together an outfit that displays knowledge of what is fashionable and/or stylish. It is thus possible to impress others with one's taste rather than one's money. Similarly, nightclubs that have the right profile provide customers the opportunity to express that they are accomplished in ways that are important to the group that makes up the club. It also allows them to express their taste via their self-presentation. These signifiers show that they have the right identity for the club, which bestows them with esteem. The nightclub that is able to attract this clientele in turn builds its brand accordingly.

For mass market fashion aesthetic brand value is created via attractive models, beautiful garments, and attractive stores. For exclusive hipster nightclubs aesthetic brand value is important mainly because people who via their physical appearance show that they do not belong (e.g. bodybuilders, women with breast implants) scare away good guests. A reaction of this kind is an example of identity-based avoidance as described by Lee, Motion et al. (2009). It is congruent with the idea that consumers have an undesired self (Ogilvy 1987) from which they are trying to distance themselves (Bosnjak and Rudolph 2008). They in other words have an idea of the type of person that typically uses the brand, and if they do not like her they avoid the brand out of fear of being mistaken for such a person.

Ethical brand value also plays a role in both industries. If a brand fails ethically, moral brand avoidance (Ward and Dahl 2014), which is a form of behavior that is related to norms and values, may occur. For nightclub brands, ethics are

relevant, because although guests prefer to socialize with their own kind, nightclub managers do not like the idea that they are bad people because they discriminate prospective guests that are not good enough to get in. As discussed in article 5, there are nevertheless inherent ethical problems associated with the practice of user imagery optimization because it hinges on the idea that in order for a few people to be satisfied, many others must be miserable. It is reasonable to assume that prospective customers can experience the practice of letting in cool people ahead of others as unfair. We also know that perceived inequality and injustice leads to reduced trust (Rothstein and Uslaner 2005). The nightclub decision makers in articles 4 and 5 indeed express a preference for typical user imagery that will make their brands seem open minded and tolerant, but a closer inspection of their practices show that they reconcile the dilemma of being inclusive and exclusive at the same time by embracing differences in cool people, but at the same time discriminating squares (see article 4). This seems acceptable to their target market; there are no signs of moral brand avoidance as a result of the companies' excluding practices. Even though some guests object to the elitism of VIP sections and selective door policies, the same individuals complain when these restrictions are lifted (see article 4). The phenomenon that individuals do not want a product because others have access to it is known as the snob effect (Leibenstein 1950) and this effect is evident in the case of exclusive nightclubs.

There is nevertheless today an expectation that companies behave ethically. There are two main reasons why companies may choose to behave ethically; the moral case, and the business case (Spitzeck 2011). The moral case relates to the argument that companies should act ethically because it is the right thing to do. Organizations are just people, and people do not just act as representatives of their company. They are individuals that want to be able to look their fellow human beings in the eye and feel all right about themselves. If an employee of a company has values and norms that suggest it is wrong to turn away prospective customers because their image would be detrimental to the company's brand, that employee will feel bad doing so. Case in point, after the data collection phase for article 4 was concluded, the manager of Club B suffered a breakdown, and left his position, citing the psychological strain of treating people badly as the reason. What is more, employees that do not

believe in what they are selling rarely do a good job (Bauman and Skitka 2012), which leads us to the second case for ethical behavior; the business case. Apart from employee satisfaction and its subsequent business benefits, ethical behavior affects brands positively in the eyes of consumers (Kang and Hustvedt 2014), it can attract investors (Crifo and Forget 2013), and it reduces the risk of scandals (Knox 2004). There is thus a good case to be made for not optimizing user imagery through customer rejection. Nevertheless, for the investigated nightclubs, the advantages of rejecting customers so seem to outweigh the disadvantages, because they both continue to do it.

In contrast to exclusive nightclubs, mass market fashion companies are expected to treat everyone equally. Reactions from media (Jönsson 2009, Moore 2013) and consumers (Big Fat Blog 2004, Thompson 2013) are strong when there is suspicion of exclusion of overweight customers. This is most likely because the associations to the product categories are different. High-end nightclubs are expected to be excluding and elitist -much of the appeal of exclusive offerings is actually derived from the fact that they are not for everyone (Barone and Roy 2010). The ethical dimension of symbolic brand value is therefore not a big problem for this type of product. For mass market fashion however, there is a reasonable expectation of egalitarianism. Mass market fashion offers the most basic clothing available, which constitutes a physiological need (Maslow 1970); something everyone needs in order to survive. For companies to limit the supply of a basic need would naturally be more controversial than if the purveyors of luxury services did the same. Below is an overview of how the different types of symbolic brand value are expressed in the two industries.

Table 7**TYPES OF SYMBOLIC BRAND VALUE AND THEIR RELATION TO MASS MARKET FASHION AND EXCLUSIVE NIGHTCLUBS**

Types of symbolic brand value				
	Status	Esteem	Aesthetics	Ethics
Mass market fashion	Not applicable	Up-to-date garments	Beautiful models, garments, and stores	Fashion for everyone
Exclusive nightclubs	Important persons as guests	Guests with the appropriate identity	Non-ugly guests	Guests that pretend to be open-minded and tolerant

When the different types of symbolic brand value are laid out in this manner, the difference between mass market fashion and exclusive nightclubs is striking. Every type of symbolic brand value that exclusive nightclubs provide is somehow related to the clubs' typical user imagery. For mass market fashion on the other hand, only aesthetics is partly related to ideal user imagery. This goes a long way to explain why mass market fashion companies do not discriminate unattractive typical users (view article 3), and why exclusive nightclubs do (view articles 4, and 5).

Practitioners (e.g. Villanueva 2015) often think of brands as entities that should be consistent, and offer a clear image without conflicting and confusing contradictions that may reduce their impact. In reality however, brands frequently offer more than one type of value. Holbrook (2005, p. 60) even states "each product or service tends to offer all types of customer value to varying degrees". Because different types of brand value can be contradictory, tradeoffs have to be made. One such tradeoff may be between the types of brand value that allow consumers to self-enhance in the eyes of other people (status, esteem and aesthetics) and ethics. A possible explanation for why

companies persevere in using plus-size models for mass market fashion despite the inappropriate effects of overweight user imagery on brand personality (as shown in article 1), is that products that provide high ethical value lets the consumer feel good about herself, even if it makes the actual brand seem less pleasing. The benefit of plus-size models would thus improve the ethical value of a brand more than it would hurt its esteem or aesthetic value. This would in turn mean that for product categories for which the associations are inclusive and egalitarian (mass market categories), ethics could trump self-enhancing types of brand value, while for those that have elitist category associations (high-end/exclusive categories) the opposite is true.

Customers of nightclubs may want a club to be exclusive because it makes them feel more important if they consume a brand that not everyone has access to (Barone and Roy 2010), but they may at the same time want the other guests to be open and generous so that they will have fun (Hatfield, Cacioppo et al. 1994). Consumers may react negatively if mass market fashion restricts accessibility to its wares (Jönsson 2009) but lament that a particular garment is too ubiquitous so they see it worn by everyone. Consequently, there is not necessarily one homogenous and consistent brand personality that will appeal to a target consumer, but rather a mix of contradictory traits that have to be negotiated in order to make sense. Consumers have to accept that in order to get the good they must put up with the bad, and this means that they will have to go against their own values to some extent. For example, if they want status, they will have less inclusiveness. Several scholars have noticed the phenomenon that consumers act in ways that are incongruous with their beliefs and morals (a value-action gap) (Blake 1999). For instance, Foer (2009) describes the general public as carnivores that eat meat because it is easy, even though they deep down do not agree with how it is produced. People thus prioritize functional value in the form of convenience over the symbolic value of ethics. In the end, it is the extent to which consumers want the different types of values that determines what kind of offering they will choose. For the non-aspirational category of mass market fashion, it seems that aesthetics and ethics prevail, while for the aspirational nightclub consumption, status and esteem are more important.

Product Type Guides Which Type of User Imagery to Employ

Scholars (Murphy and Enis 1986, Kotler, Armstrong et al. 2008, p. 502) categorize products as convenience products, shopping products, specialty products, or unsought products. Convenience products are affordable everyday products that are bought without much deliberation. Examples of convenience products are fast moving consumer goods like washing detergent and diapers. Shopping products are higher priced and they are bought after a more elaborate information gathering and evaluation process on the behalf of the consumer. Examples of shopping products are shoes and home decoration. Specialty products are exclusive goods that enjoy extreme brand preference. Examples of specialty goods are mechanical watches and bespoke suits, i.e. luxury products for connoisseurs. Unsought products are products that the consumer actively or subconsciously avoids thinking about because they are boring or unpleasant. Examples of such products are financial services and funerals. Depending on the purchase, mass market fashion offer convenience products or shopping products. In the case of buying new socks because the old ones are worn out, mass market fashion is a convenience product. When a consumer makes a deliberate purchase of the season's new fashionable item, it constitutes a shopping product. Convenience and shopping products require advertising to build brands (Kotler, Armstrong et al. 2008, p. 502) because consumers' involvement is not high enough to make them search for information independently.

Unlike mass market fashion, exclusive nightclubs are specialty products, and as such, they are characterized by very high consumer involvement. Consumers voluntarily search for information about specialty goods. This is why companies can publish websites about their nightclubs and the people who frequent them, and attract a lot of readers (Östberg 2007). Prospective guests discuss the merits of different clubs online (e.g. Flashback 2010) and the merits are judged on the basis of each club's typical user imagery. The brand loyalty of specialty product consumers is evident in the case of exclusive nightclubs. Although the investigated clubs are door-to-door neighbors with other nightclubs that are just as exclusive, but that cater to other types of people, the guests of exclusive hipster nightclubs featured in article 4 would not dream of setting foot in those establishments.

The conclusion is that for specialty products like exclusive nightclubs, typical user imagery will influence brand personality to a great degree because their customers care enough about the product category to pay attention to the type of person who is frequenting a venue and evaluate it accordingly. The lower involvement levels associated with convenience/shopping products like mass market fashion will on the other hand necessitate advertising to build strong brands. Specialty products can thus rely on typical user imagery and other forms of tertiary (Balmer 2003, p. 310) or external (Berry 2000, p. 129) brand communications to create brand personality. This does however not mean that any specialty product provider can employ typical user imagery to build its brand; it is easier if the customer base has some particular characteristics. This is the topic of the next section.

Homogenous, Distinct, and Extreme Typical User Types Influence Brand Personality the Most

For customers to evaluate a brand on the merits of its typical user imagery, the brand's users must resemble each other, they have to be different than the users of other brands, and the personality they represent must be signaled strongly. Typical user imagery therefore has more impact on brand personality if the brand users are homogenous, distinct, and extreme. This ties into the dissertation's theoretical departure. Keller (1993) states that brand image is a result of the strength of brand associations, and the uniqueness of brand associations. If typical user imagery provides a brand with associations, it is therefore possible to relate its homogeneity to the strength of brand associations. Since user imagery builds on generalizations of what someone that uses a particular brand is like, brand personality should be influenced to a higher degree if the user types were homogenous. For instance, if all Porsches were driven by stockbrokers, while Audis were driven by soccer moms, executives, and farmers, the typical characteristics of stockbrokers would color the perception of Porsche's brand meaning to a greater extent than the more diverse group of users would the Audi brand.

The typical users' distinctiveness can be related to the uniqueness of brand associations in Keller's (1993) model. If a brand has a user base that is distinctly

different than that of other brands, typical user imagery should have a greater effect on the brand. The Stockholm nightclub scene is for instance dominated by white customers. Hip-hop themed clubs are an exception; they to a greater extent cater to blacks. Even though the hip-hop crowd does not behave better or worse than other clubs' clientele, hip-hop themed clubs receive more scrutiny from owners and from the police because their typical users' appearance is conspicuously distinct from that of other clubs (Levin 2014).

Finally, extreme typical user types should be more effective for brand personality creation than more anonymous users. When the upscale Burberry brand suddenly became a favorite of the derided group of people called Chavs (Neate 2013), the damage to the brand was exacerbated by their extreme look, and their ostentatious use of the brand's classic tartan pattern. They stood out, and the brand's target consumers could therefore not ignore that Burberry was no longer for them.

The idea that homogenous, distinct, and extreme typical user imagery affects brands to a greater extent than would heterogeneous, indistinct, and mainstream typical user imagery is supported in the findings of article 4. The investigated clubs have a clear target group; creative professionals with a penchant for alternative culture (so called hipsters). Hipsters constitute a relatively homogenous group of people. Most other clubs do not target this group, so the typical users of the studied nightclubs are distinct compared to the guests at other clubs. Visible consumption cues can dominate the overall impression of a guest, either because the cues are highly distinctive or because little additional personal information is available (Johar and Sirgy 1991). This is the case in exclusive nightclubs where the doormen scrupulously weed out those that do not fit the visual criteria and they reward those that have the ability to outwardly express in an instant that they belong. To express affiliation so clearly that it at a glance stands out among a gaggle of prospective guests requires an extreme look. The homogenous, distinct, and extreme character of the guests thus enables typical user imagery to function as a brand personality influencer in exclusive nightclubs. Mass market fashion on the other hand by definition addresses a majority of the population. Because they come from all walks of life, the typical users of mass market fashion will

therefore be heterogeneous, indistinct, and mainstream. It will as a consequence be very difficult for consumers to make any generalizations regarding the typical users of mass market fashion, so if companies want to establish a brand personality via user imagery they have no choice but to employ ideal user imagery.

Characteristics of Brands that Can Feasibly Optimize Typical User Imagery

In addition to the characteristics of the customer base that allow companies to use typical user imagery to build brands as described above, there are other considerations that determine whether typical user imagery optimization is a viable option for a brand; the financial feasibility, and the practical feasibility. To optimize user imagery a company must have more willing customers than it can accommodate so that it can reject the inappropriate ones. This is the case for exclusive nightclubs. If the business model on the other hand hinges on selling to the greatest number of people possible, turning away customers is not financially feasible. This is the case for mass market fashion. Apart from the financial side of things however, there is the question of practical feasibility. If a company had a brand that was sensitive to typical user imagery as well as the financial means to pull it off, *could it* actually reject customers? Fashion manufacturers can avoid obese customers by not providing garments that fit, and nightclubs can reject unsuitable guests at the door. Could a maker of handbags or cars do the same? There are many symbolically consumed product categories that would find it hard from a practical standpoint to say no to customers even though doing so could benefit their brand image.

One last characteristic that is a prerequisite for a brand's susceptibility to typical user imagery is that the brand is consumed in a way so that other people are able to observe the act of consumption. If it is not, the public will not be able to form an opinion of the brand users, and this in turn means that they cannot judge the brand on typical user imagery. This insight is however not limited to user imagery; it extends to all symbolic brand meaning that consumers wish to be associated to in order to look good to their peers. The role of conspicuous usage imagery is the subject of the next section.

Usage Imagery: The Role of Conspicuousness

The value that consumers seek from symbolic consumption can be either self-oriented or other-oriented (Holbrook 2005). When a symbolic brand is consumed for self-oriented benefits, the consumption offers rewards in itself. They can for instance be in the form of self-actualization, personal fulfillment, or spiritual awakening (Forester 1987, p. 35). When a symbolic brand is consumed for other-oriented benefits, the brand user wants to communicate something about him or herself to other people. The objective is to signal positive characteristics; consumers want to enhance the impression others have of them by associating with goods that have desirable social meaning (Parker 2009). Other-oriented value is thus related to the consumer's desire to self-present in a way to maximize social rewards (Schlenker 1980, p. 91).

The industries that are investigated in this dissertation all offer other-oriented symbolic value to some extent. Fashion is closely tied to self-presentation (Grubb and Grathwohl 1967), and so are exclusive nightclubs (Rivera 2010). Although traditionally considered a type of consumption motivated by the desire to reap self-oriented benefits, like the satisfaction of knowing you are a good person, the study of green consumer behavior has also begun to focus on other-oriented consumer motives (Griskevicius, Tybur et al. 2010, Sexton and Sexton 2011). The individual's ability to self-enhance by means of other-oriented symbolic consumption however depends on whether other people notice the act of consumption. This is where the conspicuousness of the usage imagery becomes relevant. Brands embody meaning, and individuals are able to tap into this meaning as a means of self-enhancement only if the consumption setting is conspicuous.

It is obvious even from the articles that do not specifically deal with usage imagery that the conspicuousness of the consumption is a factor. Fashion is clearly visible consumption. However, as discussed in article 3, mass market fashion is less conspicuous than more expensive types of fashion. Although most garments are worn publically, their lack of visible logos and their mainstream styling often makes mass market fashion brands hard to identify just by looking at the clothes. In turn, this means that consumers wear the garments not because they feel an affiliation with the brand, but to look good.

Outwardly, consumers thus have to take responsibility for their style, but not for the company or brand behind it. The choice of garments signals only taste, and good taste in turn bestows the consumer with esteem (Holbrook 2005).

Exclusive nightclubs show off their typical users. They keep a line of representative guests waiting on the outside each night, and some clubs post images of their patrons online (Östberg 2007). The impression of typical guests' character is visible in their dress, hairstyle, belongings, and behavior. What is more, they make their exclusivity conspicuous. Good guests are let in before everyone else. The manager welcomes them personally, shakes their hands in front of the hopeful crowd that are kept waiting in the bullpen, and then loudly announces that they do not have to pay to get in. The open differentiation between categories of guests is paramount in this business, because as my co-author and I discuss in article 5, the reason good guests enjoy exclusive nightclubs, is that when they are prioritized over other guests, it demonstrates that they are better than them. The symbolic types of brand value that allows individuals to self-enhance via exclusive nightclub consumption are thus mainly status and esteem.

Article 2 (the article that specifically deals with usage imagery) provides evidence that consumers are more prone to act green when they expect that their peers will observe their choice. This does not mean that their internal norms and values do not matter. It does however mean, that regardless of personal norms, conspicuous usage imagery will trigger their desire to self-enhance by signaling to others that they are good people. The symbolic type of brand value that allows individuals to self-enhance via green consumer behavior is thus ethical.

In addition to the main conspicuousness effect, article 2 also demonstrates that certain personalities are more affected by conspicuous usage imagery than others, and that this in turn can be related to their motives. In the particular case examined, the conclusion is that self-enhancing individuals use green consumer behavior to fit in rather than to stand out. This is contrary to the findings of Griskevicius, Tybur et al. (2010) and Sexton and Sexton (2011). Both their studies indicate that consumers' green consumption is positively

affected by conspicuousness because people want to distinguish themselves in relation to others. This difference may however be related to the product categories studied. Sexton and Sexton study how car choice is affected by conspicuousness. Griskevicius, Tybur et al. examine how greenness compares to luxury in the realm of customer choice. Both cars and luxury are high-involvement, aspirational product categories that are normally consumed to satisfy motives of social distinction. Conversely, my co-author and I studied coffee, which is a low-involvement convenience product. It is therefore possible that the pedestrian nature of our product category offered participants limited opportunity to stand out via green consumption, but obvious social downsides if they did not choose the environmentally friendly option. It is hard to impress your friends by spending an extra SEK 5 on organic coffee, but failure to do so may brand you as cold-hearted and petty. If one extends the idea that product category associations (aspirational Vs. everyday products) play a part in determining the type of self-enhancement a brand can provide to the other industries studied, the notion still holds up. Mass market fashion offers mainstream products that will make you look like everybody else, and it therefore allows you to fit in. Exclusive nightclubs on the other hand constitute a niche offering for very particular groups of people. If you get in, it is proof that you are better than other people; you stand out.

In summation, the articles that make up this dissertation show that conspicuous usage imagery does not in itself shape brand personality. Its function is that it enables consumers to derive different types of other-oriented symbolic brand value from offerings, and thus self-enhance so that they either fit in with their reference group, or stand out from it.

Summary of Contributions

The individual contributions of the articles are presented in the table below. It is followed by an explanation of the contributions the dissertation as a whole provides.

Table 8
CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE DISSERTATION'S ARTICLES

Article	Key issue and Main finding	My incremental contribution
1	<p>Key Issue: how consumers react to plus-size advertising imagery</p> <p>Main finding: consumers' perception of mass market fashion brands is significantly affected by the weight of ideal users. Slender models lead to the brand perception that is most appropriate for fashion, followed by obese models. Overweight user imagery is the least appropriate kind for fashion brand building.</p>	<p>Researchers have studied the effects of advertising models' characteristics for decades. The use of plus-size models is a clear trend. Even so, research on the effects of models' body shape on consumers' perception of advertising has advertising to date been scarce. This study therefore constitutes a contribution to the field. The fact that model weight affects fashion brands validates theories on user imagery. What is more, the use of brand personality as a measurement tool for user imagery's influence on brands provides a nuanced assessment of the effects, which in turn extends the theory of user imagery.</p>
2	<p>Key Issue: In addition to functional and experiential motives it is possible that individuals may use green consumption to self-enhance in the eyes of others. This tendency may be more pronounced for certain personalities.</p> <p>Main finding: Conspicuous usage imagery makes consumers more prone to choose organic options. This main effect is strengthened for consumers high on ATSCI, but not for those high on self-monitoring ability.</p>	<p>The article corroborates the emerging theory that green consumption can be symbolic/expressive in nature. Secondly, it adds to this theory by identifying that the personality of the intended customer moderates how s/he responds to conspicuousness. Thirdly, it relates symbolic/expressive green consumer behavior to the motives generally associated to self-monitoring ability and ATSCI; social distinction and social identification, which constitutes a further extension of the theory of self-enhancing GCB.</p> <p>Although previous studies suggest that consumers choose green brands to stand out, the article provides evidence for a related but opposing motive; to fit in. This constitutes a practical contribution, which has ramifications on product design and assortment strategies.</p>

Table 8, continued

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE DISSERTATION'S ARTICLES

Article	Key issue and Main finding	My incremental contribution
3	<p data-bbox="262 384 624 547">Key issue: although companies disagree, many believe that fashion companies discriminate heavy customers by not offering them clothes that fit.</p> <p data-bbox="262 593 624 760">Main finding: Mass market fashion companies offer overweight and obese consumers more garments to choose from in-store than their relative purchase power merits.</p>	<p data-bbox="652 384 1118 484">Provides the first quantified empirical evidence on the phenomenon of typical user optimization for brand building purposes, and thus adds to theory.</p> <p data-bbox="652 493 1118 620">The evidence contradicts the conventional truth that overweight and obese individuals are discriminated against by mass market fashion companies, and thus offers a social contribution.</p>
4	<p data-bbox="262 833 624 966">Key issue: how exclusive hipster nightclubs select customers for brand building purposes, and how they build cool brand associations.</p> <p data-bbox="262 1011 624 1210">Main finding: The investigated companies consider recognition, dress, physical attributes, and behavior when they evaluate typical user imagery. They use these cues as the basis for customer selection.</p>	<p data-bbox="652 833 1118 1346">Although previous works on exclusive nightclubs have identified the importance of guest selection, they have mainly considered it a tool to maximize turnover, ensure safety, and via artificial scarcity generate exclusivity. This paper identifies that guest selection at exclusive nightclubs can be a brand building process, and that the guests' primary value to the clubs therefore is the image they bestow on the brand. This constitutes a contribution to research on exclusive nightclubs, and extends theory on typical user imagery. As the first marketing study to describe how companies actively select and reject customers to create cool brands the study also offers a contribution to the research on cool.</p>

Table 8, continued**CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE DISSERTATION'S ARTICLES**

Article	Key issue and Main finding	My incremental contribution
5	<p>Key issue: to control typical user imagery, a company must reject unsuitable customers, based solely on who they are and what they are like. This is ethically problematic.</p> <p>Main finding: my co-author and I observe that at exclusive nightclubs, prospective customers will be rejected and treated badly so to make more desirable guests appreciate the brand. This in turn means that some people must feel bad so that others can feel good.</p>	<p>Previous marketing research into user imagery and luxury products has neglected the corporate responsibility aspects of exclusivity. My co-author and I identify and describe how the nightclub business model inherently leads to ethically problematic practices, because the what (exclusivity) requires a problematic how (harsh rejection of undesirable customers). In research on the industry, and on customer selection, ethical aspects have been largely absent. Our article therefore offers an empirical contribution to the area of nightclub research, as well as to that of customer selection literature.</p>

The overall contribution of this dissertation is that it provides new knowledge on the topic of symbolic brand consumption, particularly with regards to brand imagery. The knowledge provided by the dissertation as a whole break down into:

1. How user imagery affects brand personality
2. How companies as a result employ user imagery to build brands, and
3. How usage imagery affects brands' ability to provide other-oriented symbolic value that can be used by consumers to self-enhance

Brand imagery (user and usage imagery) has until now been a side note to round out the theoretical frameworks of traditional brand scholars like Aaker (1996, p. 147), Keller (1993, 2003, p. 94), and Kapferer (1994, p. 43). They each describe holistic views of everything a brand encompasses, and normally list user imagery and usage imagery as two of many peripheral brand attributes. What is more, user imagery and usage imagery have until now been constructs that are grasped intuitively rather than put through rigorous

testing. It has just been assumed that they affect brands, and that companies therefore try to optimize them. In this dissertation I provide evidence for such effects, and for subsequent practices. This constitutes a validation of existing theory.

Because I study the construct of brand imagery, and its constituting parts (user and usage imagery) in different contexts, I can draw conclusions that the isolated articles do not permit. An obvious pattern is that brands that owe much of their brand value to typical user imagery (see table 7), also place a great degree of effort into controlling it, while those that do not, ignore it. This is an indication that the theory of typical user imagery is sound, and the findings thus to some degree validate this theory.

The combination of study objects allows me to compare the effect of user imagery in mass market to that of high-end offerings, which in turn allows me to differentiate between the two. The realization that product type guides the decision of which type of user imagery to employ extends previous theory.

The juxtaposition between mass market that caters to everyone, and niche offerings that have a very specific and narrow user base, demonstrates how the typical user base will influence brand personality more if it is homogenous, distinct, and extreme. This insight constitutes an extension of user imagery theory.

By contrasting a high-volume/low-margin business like mass market fashion to a low-volume/high-margin business like exclusive nightclubs, I am able to identify that the financial realities of industries determine whether it is possible to optimize typical user imagery to build brands. I also identify that in addition to a brand's susceptibility to user imagery, there are certain practical requirements that have to be met for a company to be able to optimize typical user imagery to build brands. These findings constitute practical contributions.

In chapter 2 I review how brand personality is shaped by different brand personality influencers. When I study one such brand personality influencer (user imagery), I come to the conclusion that in order to have an effect on

brand personality, it has to be conspicuous. I later specifically study how a conspicuous consumption setting affects consumer behavior for another brand personality influencer (green product category associations), and I again find that conspicuousness is a factor. I can thus conclude that the constructs of user imagery and usage imagery are related, in as much as typical user imagery optimization is contingent on conspicuous usage imagery. Relating the conspicuousness of usage imagery to how user imagery works in this way therefore supports the notion of integrating them into one construct (brand imagery). I thereby validate the brand imagery construct as proposed by Sotiropoulos (2003).

Managerial Implications

User imagery influences brand personality. For companies that want to appeal to specific types of consumers, the managerial implication is therefore that they should take care to present the consumer with user imagery that corresponds to the desired brand personality. If the company's brand is affected by many influencing factors besides user imagery, and that effect is great, the relative importance of user imagery will be less pronounced. This could be any number of products. For cars, product attributes may weigh heavily on the consumer's brand perception, for luxury goods, price, logos, and perhaps distribution channel may matter. If on the other hand, the brand personality to a great extent depends on user imagery, it naturally makes sense to place greater focus on optimizing it. This is however not a straightforward proposition. The first thing to do is to define the type or types of symbolic value the user imagery is supposed to bring to the brand. If the manager wants to build a status brand, its user imagery should be characterized by important people. If s/he wants it to be esteemed, it should show users that are admired for their ability to self-present in a way that is relevant to the customers' identity. For aesthetic brands, beautiful user imagery is necessary, and for ethics, it is important to have users that are of high moral standing.

The first thing to decide is whether to employ ideal user imagery, typical user imagery, or a combination of the two to build the brand. The choice is dictated by the type of product that is marketed. It is possible to employ typical user imagery as a brand-building tool for high involvement products, but not for

low involvement products. Consumers have to care enough about the product category to pay attention to whom is using what brand. Typical user imagery is easier to establish if the customer base is homogenous, distinct, and extreme. This suggests that typical user imagery would be most effective as a brand-building tool for companies that narrowly target very specific groups of people. For such brands it may be feasible to build brands by controlling the customer base, provided that the company fulfills three criteria: 1) it must have the financial strength to reject customers whose image would be detrimental to the brand, 2) the company must be active in an industry in which people would tolerate customer rejection, and 3) it must sell a product that actually can be denied undesirable customers. In addition to these criteria, the brand must be consumed in a visible setting so that prospective consumers can observe the type of person who is the brand user, and from this infer what the brand stands for.

Unlike niche brands, mass market offerings per definition address a majority of the population. The typical users will therefore be heterogeneous, indistinct, and mainstream. It will be very difficult for consumers to make any generalizations regarding a brand's typical users, so if mass market fashion companies want to establish a brand personality via user imagery they have no choice but to employ ideal user imagery. This is however easier said than done. It is not possible to just decide on user imagery, and then execute it. For ideal user imagery, companies select models to display in ads. How these models are perceived is not self-evident, and finding out what works may take a lot of A/B-testing (Greenfield 2014). To complicate matters further, if one extends the principle of homogenous typical user imagery being the most effective way to establish a clear brand personality to ideal user imagery, it would mean that companies would do well to display models whose look communicates similar traits. An eclectic mix of models may therefore be counterproductive to consistent brand positioning.

The final implication of the dissertation has to do with usage imagery. It is concluded that a conspicuous consumption setting leads to increased propensity to choose socially desirable products. The managerial implication of this finding is that if a company markets a product that offers symbolic brand

value that is private, it is possible to further capitalize on that value if it is made public. In the case of my study, that brand value is ethical. In addition to the customer's internal satisfaction of knowing that she is a good person because she buys products that help the environment, the conspicuous consumption setting enables the consumer to self-enhance via his or her green consumption. This conspicuous effect seems valid for other product categories as well. In the media industry streaming services like Spotify and Netflix offer their customers the opportunity to display what they have consumed via social media. Consumers that previously watched great movies for their own enjoyment can thanks to the conspicuousness of social media now derive additional value from the consumption, because they can use it to self-enhance in the eyes of others. This is interesting for companies, because if a brand thanks to conspicuousness can offer more value than it used to, its equity increases, which translates into more money.

Companies would be well advised to pay attention to the insights presented regarding user imagery and usage imagery, because as mentioned in the introduction, the emerging world of ubiquitous Internet and social media promises a future in which symbolic/expressive consumption will become conspicuous to a never before seen degree. The typical user of a brand will be obvious to all, because so many people document and share what they consume. What is more, young people place especially strong emphasis on receiving positive affirmation online, and judge their own worth by the number of "likes" they receive. It may even go so far so that they think that if it no one sees what they do, it did not happen (Rushkoff 2014). This new attitude should have severe ramifications for branding. It points to a tendency to make private types of consumption public, and this will in turn trigger changes in the marketing mix. For example, the value of a takeout meal used to be taste (experience), and perhaps nutrition (function). If, however, much of its new, self-enhancing value is based on the meal's ability to generate "likes" on social media, its photogeneity may trump those traditional qualities. Restaurateurs who want to stay relevant would do well to realize this, because it may take a different product to satisfy these evolving needs.

New tech promises unequalled possibilities for companies to make consumption conspicuous. There is however a potential downside to this which should not be ignored. Some industries (pornography, adultery websites, etc.) have always provided anonymity to their customers, and it is of course not advisable to make these types of consumption visible. There are however in addition to shameful consumption many types of products and brands that consumers may prefer to keep private even though they are socially acceptable. Few women would for example appreciate a company that posts what intimate hygiene products they buy. An overweight person might not want the world to see that he eats fast food every day. A librarian may not want her co-workers to know about her consumption of romance novels. The list is endless, and it is the consumers' social self as described by Johar and Sirgy (1991) that determines which products are suitable or unsuitable for conspicuous consumption. It is only when the product's symbolic brand value fits with how consumers want others to see them that it is beneficial to make brand consumption conspicuous. For companies, the implication is that before they make the consumption of their symbolic brands conspicuous, it is paramount to know not just what the target consumers are like, but also what kind of identity and personality they want to signal to other people.

Recommendations

The recommendations that follow are the logical conclusion of this dissertation's findings. They refer to decisions that regard the employment of different forms of user imagery as brand building tools, and they refer to decisions of whether to make usage imagery conspicuous in order to increase consumers' perception of brand value. Companies that contemplate the employment of user imagery as brand-building tool should follow the steps outlined below.

1. First gauge the relative importance of user imagery to your brand. Are there many brand personality influencers that compete with user imagery, or is the brand to a great degree dependent on user imagery for meaning? The answer will provide a guide to determine the overall emphasis to put on user imagery

2. Determine what type or types of value the brand is supposed to provide consumers. This will guide the type of user imagery to aim for
3. If your brand is a low-involvement brand, promote it via ideal user imagery
4. If your brand is a high-involvement brand, you can wholly, or partly, promote it via typical user imagery, provided you have the financial strength to reject customers whose image would be detrimental to the brand, the company is active in an industry in which people would tolerate customer rejection, and provided it sells a product that actually can be denied undesirable customers

Companies that contemplate making usage imagery conspicuous in order to increase consumers' perception of brand value should follow the steps outlined below.

1. Determine how the brand's target consumers want to be perceived by other people
2. Contemplate whether the symbolic value that your brand represents is one that the consumer can use to self-enhance in the eyes of other people
3. If so, establish what kind of self-enhancement the brand is appropriate for; social distinction (to stand out), or social identification (to fit in)
4. If the brand, when consumed in a conspicuous setting, is supposed to bestow the consumer with social distinction, it is important that products be different from standard products. Only then will the conspicuous consumption make the individual stand out
5. If the product, when consumed in a conspicuous setting, is supposed to provide the consumer with social identification, the opposite is true. It is then important that the socially desirable brand is seen as the default choice by a majority of the target consumer's reference group. This allows a socially anxious individual to fit in with the crowd by conforming to social norms

Future Research

The findings of the dissertation's articles lead to some ideas for follow-up studies. Article 1 for example shows how plus-size models affect consumers'

brand perception for mass market fashion. The study was carried out in one market. However, mass market fashion companies depend, to a greater extent than companies in other industries, on standardized advertising to sell products to consumers around the world (Nelson and Hye-Jin 2007) and it is therefore imperative that their advertising generate similar results across markets. The question is, do consumers in different parts of the world perceive plus-size advertising imagery the same way? There are several reasons why they may not. Culture affects how consumers perceive fashion (Ratchford 1987, McCracken 1988, p. 57), it affects their aesthetic preferences (Whitelock and Pimblett 1997), their attitudes towards weight (e.g. Garner, Garfinkel et al. 1980, Bordo 2003, p IV), and how they read images (Usunier 2000, p. 471). Despite this, the use of plus-size models in mass market fashion advertising is usually standardized across markets. It would therefore be interesting to study whether models of different body types affect brand perception similarly regardless of the consumers' cultural background.

The main finding of article 2 is that consumers tend to choose green products to a greater extent if they believe that their choice will be visible to others than if it is private. This opens up two avenues for future research; further investigation of green consumer behavior as a form of self-enhancing behavior, and the general effect of making usage imagery conspicuous. In the first vein, future research could, for example, focus on how situational and demographic factors can moderate self-enhancement through green consumer behavior. Research could also focus on increasing knowledge of under what circumstances fitting in or standing out through green consumer behavior may be desirable.

As for the general effect of making usage imagery conspicuous, it would be of interest to investigate how different socially desirable forms of consumption are affected by a conspicuous consumption setting. Because the starting point is green consumer behavior, an obvious area of research is the other leg of CSR, social responsibility, like e.g. fair trade goods. It is however reasonable to assume that all types of consumer behavior that accords with social norms would be useful for other-oriented consumption. In the sphere of ethical self-enhancement one example of such behavior could be donating to charity.

Anonymous donations do not pay off socially, but it may on the other hand appear gauche to advertise one's donations too openly. It would therefore be of interest to investigate the conditions under which it is feasible to self-enhance via charitable donations, and under which conditions it is not. Another example of ethical self-enhancement is when individuals publically take a political stance. It has for instance in certain circles become very popular to oppose the rise of new xenophobic parties, or to support the fight for same-sex marriage by posting one's opinion on Facebook. Because these posts only reach the poster's friends, who probably already share that person's values to some degree, the communication will have limited impact on people's behavior and the progress of the cause. Exclamations against political wrongs will however allow the individual to identify socially, and thus fit in with the group. In the examples above, such herd behavior offers few benefits beyond the self-affirmation that the Facebook poster achieves. It however seems like it is possible to use consumers' need to fit in to actually make a difference. The Ice Bucket Challenge (ALS Association 2015) is a charity campaign that puts social pressure on people on social media to do two unpleasant things (empty an ice-filled bucket over their head, and pay money to charity), and then forward the challenge to other people in a chain-letter kind of scheme. It is the conspicuousness of the challenge that makes people who previously had never considered donating to the cause to open their wallets. Research on self-enhancing charity would be relevant, because if there were social rewards to doing good, even people who do not care about the issues could be persuaded to act according to social norms.

Lastly, there are many types of private consumer behavior that are not ethically charged, but that could nevertheless bring admiration to the consumer if only other people could see it. Examples may include prestigious education, membership to exclusive clubs, beautiful homes, impressive activities that one's children do, exotic travel, challenging physical accomplishments, etc. Even if the individuals' motivations for consuming such offerings conspicuously are related to the same needs that ethical consumer behavior satisfies, it would be of interest to find out if self-enhancement that is motivated by status, esteem, and aesthetics work in the same way. It would

also be interesting to investigate whether these effects are moderated by factors like e.g. the consumer's personality.

As a variation, it would also be relevant to look into consumer reactions to brands when consumption (by accident or design) is made public against their will. This situation is bound to arise more and more in the future simply because consumer behavior is now documented to an unprecedented extent. For example, twenty years ago, the Nielsen Corporation had to monitor a select panel of TV viewers to get a rough idea of their viewing habits. Today, Netflix can see on an individual level, what each person is watching, when he watches it, for how long, if he sticks with a series or abandons it, etc. The company also has access to the individual's e-mail address and possibly his or her social media profile. When companies have access to this type of data, some of them will attempt to use it, which will likely lead to situations when consumers' supposedly private consumption is publicized.

In article 3 I determine that mass market fashion companies do not discriminate overweight and obese consumers by limiting their access to garments that fit them. It is however probable that the companies' business model of selling great volume at low prices force them to meet demand, regardless of what their customers' image does to their brands. High-end fashion on the other hand fulfills the criteria for typical user imagery optimization in a way that mass market fashion does not. High-end fashion companies can afford to exclude customers, and their products are easily recognizable thanks to their designs and logos. It would therefore be interesting to see whether companies' fear of overweight and obese typical user imagery affects assortments in high-end fashion by replicating the study in this tier of the market.

In articles 4 and 5 I describe how exclusive nightclubs classify and select guests based on the typical user imagery that will build the desired nightclub brand. The findings provide avenues for future research. The use of typical user imagery for brand-building purposes presented here could be useful to any club-like venture that is attractive enough to have a surplus of willing customers. Apart from all types of actual clubs (e.g. country clubs and social

clubs) this could apply to e.g. higher education, elite employers, exclusive housing, or niche travel. It would be interesting to study if companies in these industries engage in similar practices, how they do it, and what ethical issues arise as a result. It is for example a serious problem if the best schools shut people out because they do not have the right image, as suggested by ongoing allegations against Ivy League schools in America (Karabel 2005, Teitelman 2011, Cava 2015).

Since the public's exposure to typical user imagery and usage imagery will continue to grow along with the Internet, the future promises interesting avenues for research in this area. One such avenue is the effect of typical user imagery in social media on brand perception. With the detailed information available to Internet companies, it would now be possible to map in detail how individuals respond to different types of typical user imagery. It is also possible to pair reactions to consumer characteristics. The Internet allows mapping and tracking of demographics and consumption habits. If you use proxies, parameters like psychological traits, ethnicity, and sexual orientation should be within reach. As research become more invasive, ethical considerations will however have to be strictly heeded.

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