
**Degree in Textile management
with specialization in fashion management and textile value chain management
The Swedish school of Textiles**

**END OF USE PROGRAMS AND THEIR
EFFECT ON BRAND EQUITY
OF FASHION COMPANIES IN SWEDEN**

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ABSTRACT

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Title: End of use programs and their effect on brand equity of fashion companies in Sweden

Background: The current situation of environmental sustainability tends to become a great issue for fashion companies. The number of companies that are willing to address their environmental concerns is increasing. Furthermore, the use of different programs in the post purchase part in relation to waste management is nowadays a very critical issue. The problem for fashion companies is the knowledge about how this affects their brand equity.

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to explore how end of use programs affect brand equity of fashion companies in Swedish markets.

Method: Interviews with CSR managers were conducted and focus groups with consumers in order to gain knowledge from both professional and consumer angle. This data in relation with the existing theory of brand equity according to Aaker's (1991) model show the effect that end of use programs have regarding the brand equity of a fashion company

Results, conclusions: This paper shows the way end of use programs affect brand equity since they can become a brand's asset and create competitive advantage under specific circumstances. It is also suggested that through marketing strategies, long term business strategies and transparency it is possible for fashion companies to enhance brand equity and acquire all the positive effects from end of use programs.

Key words: Brand equity, End of use programs, Sustainability

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Abbreviations:

EoU End of use programs

CSR Corporate Social Responsibility

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Introduction

The continuously rising awareness on sustainability in the fashion industry, leads stakeholders and fashion brands in an effort to respond in new demands and try strategically to integrate sustainability issues in business strategy (Bray, 2009). Stricter environmental policies in Europe and in many countries around the world create a constant pressure to fashion companies to incorporate rules that regulate their responsibility for environmental safety and obligations concerning waste management (Thøgersen, 2002). In Bruntland's Commission report sustainable development has been defined as the development that meets current generation's needs while reassures the potential of future generations to meet their own (WCED, 1987). It is necessary to realise that the concept of becoming "sustainable" affects all aspects of a business starting from the idea of a product or service and stretching till its disposition from the customers (Hamel and Prahalad, 1994).

Fashion companies and mainly big retailers, perceive this "green revolution" as a chance to compete with each other and show their high level of concern and responsibility towards the environment (Siegle, 2011). In this battle towards sustainability, consumers play an important role since they are the final recipient of a company's strategies and their preferences can affect them.

Through the years, consumers seem to change their behaviour and become more conscious about hyper consumption and environmental issues (Thøgersen, 2002). Taking a closer look in consumer behaviour, it can be divided in pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase activities that must be taken into consideration in the discussion about sustainable consumption (Jacoby et al., 1977).

Post purchase activities are connected with the consumer disposition behavior that can be explained as the consumer's attempt to get rid of a product that has fulfilled its purpose. They can reuse it, recycle it or just discard it. Consumers use to donate clothes in charities or exchange them between family and friends when they want to get rid of garments that they don't use anymore. With recycling is possible to give life to a discarded product using it for a new purpose or using parts of it to other objects (Raghavan, 2010).

Textile recycling is not a new practice. However, the last decades it seems that recycling have started playing a major role in waste management for fashion companies. Nowadays, there is an augmenting number of companies implement end of use programs as a part of their strategies towards sustainability. These programs are related to recycling and reuse of garments and include efforts to extend life circle of products and create an advantage with both environmental and economical benefits for a company (Birtwistle and Moore, 2007).

As Lee (2007) states, a business cannot be characterised as sustainable only because it prioritizes environmental issues without taking into consideration its profits. On the contrary, it is fundamental to secure the right strategies that can achieve its financial goals and built its image in the market in combination with the policies that will protect and enhance all the human and natural resources for its future (Lee, 2007). Thinking about long term profits for a company and its image in the market, brand equity seems as a term that fits perfectly to the description. It represents the strength of a brand in the market and the recognition it has comparing to its competitors which leads in higher sales and profits against them (Wood, 2000).

Although, there are many researches concerning sustainable practices in fashion industry, the authors of this paper realized that there is a lack of research concerning end of use programs and their connection to brand equity. Taking into consideration, the importance of brand equity for fashion companies and the necessity of end of use programs as a part of strategies related to textile waste management, the authors try to reveal whether end of use programs affect brand equity and in what extend.

1. Background

1.1 Companies facing sustainability

Despite the persistent efforts of fashion companies to market the “green revolution” during the last decades, there is any significant difference in the market (Peattie & Crane, 2005). It is difficult to distinguish who has the responsibility to look up for information and ameliorate fashion industry. Most companies offer environmentally preferable products and market it in various ways to their customers even if customers’ responds are not always

positive since there are still many people that don't care about environmental issues. Some consumers demand from companies to become more effective while others lack of knowledge thus they don't have a clear view of what they should expect (Thøgersen, 2002).

A recent research indicates that knowledge is the key that can lead consumers to an engagement with a more sustainable behaviour (Connell and Kozar, 2012). That's why companies created eco-labelling in an attempt to increase consumers' knowledge and information towards products and their footprint in the environment (Thøgersen, 2002).

Sustainability has become one of the most frequently referred words of our time in fashion industry (Carbonaro & Votava, 2009). The fact is that sometimes it looks as if companies don't have a clear view of what sustainability means exactly (Keynote, 2004). There is a gap between what companies state towards sustainability and what actually do, which creates confusion in the marketplace and societies. It is not enough for companies to highlight their actions with a word. For instance, the word "eco" can have different interpretation between customers than what a company intend to. It is a necessity now more than it was in the past to prove through actions that the meaning of this word is incorporated in company's values and leads its practices (Friedman, 2010).

Few researches have already attempt to find solutions in order to eliminate this gap and suggest better alternatives in consumers' decisions. According to Carbonaro and Votava (2009) people have the tendency to relate sustainability with an action of denial towards consumption and not just with durability and environmental friendly products or services. On the contrary, other researchers arouse their scepticism towards labelling of products as sustainable since this can motivate consumers to an increased volume of consumption without feeling guilty and as a result nullify all the environmental benefits that can possibly occur by a shift in eco friendly products (Thøgersen, 2002).

The discussion about sustainability can become more complex when is transferred in the field of fast fashion companies (Bray, 2009). Retailers as Zara, H&M etc. create garments in competitive price that will be used for a short period of time until the next trend or collection (McAfee, et al., 2004). The tendency of consuming for the "want" and not for the "need" has lead consumers to renew their wardrobe constantly and throw away garments

that are in perfect condition, only because they are out of style (Birtwistle and Moore, 2007).

Facing this vigorous throughway behaviour companies, including fast fashion ones, adopt strategies that include recycling garments programs, in an effort to strengthen their sustainable profile and manage their waste. Companies invite their customers to return clothes that they don't need anymore and recycle them in special bins that are placed in stores. To motivate customer's participation, retailers give in return vouchers with discount for a future purchase. These vouchers entice consumers in recycling garments in order to buy new clothes cheaper but at the same time leads to contradictory assumptions for companies' policies towards sustainability since it enhances consumption (Connell, 2010). After all it is not consumption solely faced as unsustainable but the high volume of consumption as well (Thøgersen, 2002). The most sustainable garment is the one that never gets produced (Ungerth, 2011).

The costs of doing nothing on the other hand can be high. Companies that don't implement sustainability in their strategies are threatened with costs related to energy, fuel and waste disposal while they face higher risks and a vulnerable brand image (Lee, 2007).

1.2 "Eco-confused" consumers

In times that mass production and trends change in a frenetic pace consumers struggle to create a unique appearance and style (Agin, 2000). Postrel (2003) refers that the twenty-first century emerge as the "new age of aesthetics" and introduce the shift to "my way" for individual expression in societies. The accessibility of fashion today brings consumers closer to the trends and this creates pressure to the companies: retailers face a "revolving door of fashion" where everything moves faster than before (Chapman, 2007).

The need to follow the latest trend and the desire for fashionable items in low prices from the consumers, challenge suppliers and retailers to ignore ethical standards in order to achieve competitive prices (Bray, 2009). On the other side of the coin, there is a strong economic interest for policies concerning sustainability in fashion industry that forces companies to adapt in new realities if they want to survive in the market (Fineman, 2001).

In this blur and complicated scenery, it is still difficult to perceive how consumers react in this “green” era for fashion.

Taking a closer look in the Swedish fashion marketplace, consumers seem to buy more clothes than they did in the past. In one decade (1999-2009) there was an increase in sales around 53%, with women spending most of their money in buying clothing (Ungerth, 2011). Even if the last three years, due to recession, sales have been decreased (Kjellberg, 2013), the Swedish environmental protection agency indicates that Swedes consume textiles in an unsustainable way. It is estimated that each Swede consumes around 15kg of textiles every year while in the phase of disposal 3kg of garments end up to donations, 8kg are incinerated and the rest 4kg whether remains in consumers’ closet or is managed in a way that is not possible to be measured (Palm, 2011). With the majority of younger women chasing the latest trend that fashion media promote (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009), it is not a surprise that they incline to throw away garments not because they are damaged but mostly because they are tired of using them (Shexun, 2012).

The lack of proper information towards the consequences that production, hyper consumption and throwaway behaviour of textiles have in the environment and fashion industry, leads to create confusion between consumers. An example that highlights the problem and its extent is the fact that many consumers believe that natural fabrics are always a better and more eco friendly choice than synthetics while there are synthetics that consist of a “cleaner” option for the environment comparing to natural materials (Chouinard, 2006)

1.3 Cleaning the closet

Apart from the availability of new trends, issues such as fitting problems or damaged clothes that can no longer be used, lead consumers to get rid of in order to create closet space. The findings of Ha-Brookshire and Hodges (2009) indicate that consumers choose to donate their used garments in charities not only because they don’t want them anymore but mainly because it makes them feel less guilty for their purchasing mistakes that lead to hardly non used clothes buried in their wardrobes.

Consumer disposition can be explained as a consumer’s attempt to get rid of a product that has fulfilled its purpose (Jacoby et al., 1977). There are of

course different ways of disposing no longer needed clothes. According to Goworek et al. (2012) research concerning sustainability of clothing the disposal options that were referred the most among consumers, apart from donations, were throw away, swap between friends and families and recycling. Attitudes toward general waste recycling have shown that consumers consider recycling of plastic, paper, metal and glass as a part of their daily activities (Morgan and Birtwistle, 2009). A sustainable practice seems to influence consumers in their general disposal behaviour when it becomes a daily habit (Goworek et al., 2012). However, recycling of clothes doesn't meet the same acceptance as disposal behaviour in the extent that it happens for other products (Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2010). Domina and Koch (2002) concluded that even if consumers use to recycle other materials, when they need to get rid of clothes it is more likely to throw them away since it is more convenient.

Nowadays, throw away behaviour has aroused concerns about the reasons that drive consumers to choose this way for discard garments. Some studies have proved that this behaviour can be connected with lack of convenience and information towards recycling options. Jound and Park-Poaps (2013) findings revealed that convenience has been explained as one of the most influential factors of disposal behaviour. Another study found that recycling behaviour is also related with availability of information regarding recycling programs as well as the availability of collecting bins in many and different collecting points. The respondents of this research stated that they didn't participate in textile recycling since there were no collection points for this material (Domina and Koch, 2002).

The increasing volume of textile waste has alerted fashion industry globally. Researchers have started to focus deeper in consumer's environmental attitudes and awareness in order to identify the factors that prevent recycling from being preferable disposal behaviour. Specifically, for Sweden that recycling of materials is successful and consumers' participation is sufficient, there are still a lot of issues in textile materials' recycling (Avfall Sverige, 2011). Fashion companies are trying to implement programs in order to manage garments that their customers don't want anymore. Recycling, repair and reuse are some of the end of use programs that can constitute a new option for disposal of used clothes. However, they are still in the beginning and there are a lot that need to be done to make them effective (Jing, 2012). As Avfall Sverige (2011) mentions Sweden is

pioneer in recycling but there is still a long way for the future and room for improvements. To sum up, continuing our throw away mentality in combination with low efforts to recycle textiles will create a risk in the near future by increasing waste.

Judging from the above, the issue of recycling garments is under consideration from many companies there is a lack of necessary information about recycling options consumers have either in stores from fashion companies or in collecting bins as it happens with the rest recycling materials of daily use. The practices that fashion companies use nowadays to eliminate textile waste that ends up in landfills are useless without the support and participation of consumers that need to get further informed and educated on the choices fashion industry provides (Domina and Koch, 2002).

1.4 Building brand equity towards sustainability

In an era that consumers have started turning their interest towards environment and getting aware about the issues that affect it, companies need to consider in depth how to manage their waste and adopt sustainable practices (Raghavan, 2010). Since sustainability has become the word of our time, companies need to understand sustainability and detect the right way to convert it into action. Sustainability is defined as “the ability of a system to maintain or renew itself perpetually” (Martin and Schouten, 2012). As a result, they need long term strategies that will reassure their survival and sufficiency through the years with respect to societies and future generations.

As companies trying to build green strategies to strengthen their relationships with consumers, they have started considering their brand image as one of the first aspects that they need to transform it into a “greener” one. Brand image is nothing more than the correlations that consumers create in their minds about a brand (Keller, 1993).

Aaker and Biel’s (1993) emphasize that the image which consumers have in their minds about a brand can highly influence a company’s brand equity. Discussing about brand equity a proper definition would describe it as a condition that represents consumer’s familiarity with a brand and the ability to recall some unique associations of that brand (Keller, 1993). A good

brand image can provide a company with the advantage to reinforce its brand equity and that indicates its importance (Berry, 2000). The most important components for the building process of a brand's image are its core values (Moser, 2003). Core values are the essence of a company's concepts and culture since it represents what the company stands for (Ferguson & Milliman, 2008).

When the implementation of core values meets consistency, they can differentiate the brand from its competitors in the market (Balmer & Gray, 2003) otherwise if consistency cannot be guaranteed there is the possibility that a brand will lose its credibility and provoke unfavourable consequences (Sull & Spinosa, 2007). A brand that claims to be characterised as a sustainable one, can achieve it only when its consumers can relate it with sustainable practices every time they think about that brand. As a result, sustainability should be a core value of a brand in order to build its image based on that (Insch, 2011).

1.5 Purpose of the study

In this study authors decided to research better the end of use programs that fashion companies in Sweden use so far in connection not only with the profits that environment has from their application but mostly on whether they can aid a brand to be successful in the market.

The purpose of this thesis is to map how Swedish companies deal with end of use programs and analyse how end of use programs affect the brand equity.

1.6 Research Question

Taking into consideration all the above it is obvious that there are a lot of efforts ongoing towards sustainability in fashion industry. Though, companies need to find solutions that will help them to implement stronger strategies and achieve results for a “greener” fashion landscape in the future. Considering textile waste as an important aspect of the problem that is under discussion vigorously in Sweden the last few years, the authors of this paper came across with a problematization about end of use programs and their possible impacts for fashion companies that use them. The question that authors try to answer is:

- How can end of use programs affect the brand equity of fashion companies?

2. Literature review

In order to understand the terms that are referred in this paper and provide a base for the structure of the research, authors divided their theory in two big chapters, presenting in each of them the main ideas that are under investigation. In the first chapter, is being analysed the theories around brand equity while in the second chapter authors try to give an insight about end of use programs.

2.1 Theories on Brand Equity

Through the years, the increased number of companies and the variety of their offerings in services and products aroused the importance of theories as tools for building strong brands strategies. In order to conquer something, someone needs first to understand it. In times that everything moves fast and change, companies need to conceive the change that occurs and adapt quickly on it (Keller, 2003)

In 1980's brand equity emerged as a concept that revealed the importance that a brand has in a business strategy. As a concept is of substantial importance not only for academics but for managers as well since through brand equity they can create competitive advantage and build successful brands (Farquhar, 1989). It has been defined by many researchers in different ways and for different purposes resulting to a term with numerous definitions that sometimes lead to confusion (Keller, 2003). For this research, brand equity consist a fundamental component and in the following paragraphs will be presented all the theories which are relevant to the topic.

2.1.1 Definitions

As has been already mentioned there are many definitions concerning brand equity each one of them seen from a different perspective. Keller (1993) tried to define brand equity towards a consumer perception and most particular in relation with consumer's response to products marketing. He perceived it as a condition under which a consumer is intimate with a brand and able to recall strong and unique brand's associations. Another definition that addresses to the same aspect of brand equity and observes it from marketing effects only is John's Brodsky who states that brand equity is the impact of profit and sales combination resulted from marketing efforts of previous years in comparison with a new brand (Keller 2003).

Furthermore, a definition related mostly with the strength of a brand is the one that Strivastava and Schocker (1991) formed. According to their definition brand equity is " the set of associations and behaviours on the part of a brand's customers, channel members, and parent corporation that permits the brand to enjoy sustainable and differentiated competitive advantages." However, few years before this definition another researcher, Leuthesser (1998) had formulated the same definition but from a different perception of brand equity that is focused basically on the name of the brand. He defined brand equity as the set of associations that brand's customers have in mind and allows a brand have higher profits due to its brand name.

Last but not least, Aaker presented a definition in which he based a model about brand equity that will be presented in this paper. For Aaker (1991) brand equity is " a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its

name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customer's". In an effort to deeper analyse brand assets, he separated them in five categories: brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, brand associations and other proprietary assets (Aaker, 1991)

2.1.2 Aaker's model

Aaker's model about brand equity is the basis for this paper's theory since it consist the most cited model related to consumer brand equity and it provides insights on future brands' performance through the understanding of the relation between its components (Keller,2003). This model presented for first time in 1991 and has been formulated as the figure below:

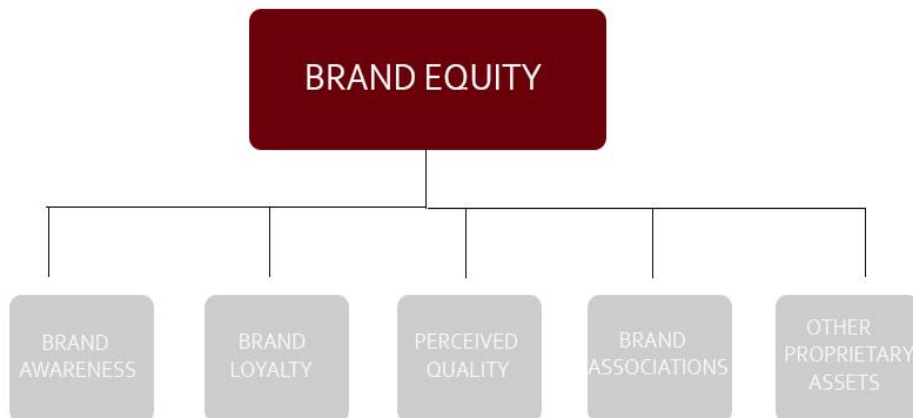


Figure 1: Aaker's Brand Equity model (1991)

There are five different categories of assets each one connected with the other in creating strong equity for a brand.

Brand awareness refers to consumers' ability to recall a brand because of its products or services and recognise it in the market between other

brands. It represents the extent in which a brand is known among the public (Aaker, 1991). As a result, brand recall and brand recognition can be perceived as the main dimensions of brand awareness, with brand recognition representing the first step that a firm communicates its product attributes before a brand is established (Keller, 1993)

Aaker in his definition about awareness identifies a connection between a brand and its product category. To explain this connection he uses an example about the brand Levis jeans. If that brand uses a balloon with the brand name on it, the name will be illustrated but this doesn't create necessarily awareness. On the contrary, if the balloon resembles to a pair of jeans it represents brand's product category and in that case it is possible to enhance brand awareness. Hence, it is logically concluded and pointed out the importance of brand awareness since when a name is recognised, there must be a reason (Aaker, 1991).

Brand loyalty is the major component and characterised as the heart of brand equity although it is hard to define and measure it. Define it as a behaviour it represents the extent in which a buying unit focuses its purchases only from a specific brand through a sufficient period of time, for a product (Schoell and Gultinan, 1990). Perceive it as an attitude the definition is formulated as "the tendency to be loyal to a focal brand as demonstrated by the intention to buy it as a primary choice" (Oliver, 1997).

For Aaker (1991), brand loyalty is a brand's tool that can create dedicated customers for a brand and add value to its firm. Loyal customers are valuable for a company since it is considered that they purchase more frequently than non loyal customers and it is hard to change their preferences if nothing serious occurs that can damage the credibility of the brand (Bowen and Shoemaker, 1998).

Perceived quality is the thoughts and ideas of consumer concerning the quality or superiority of a product in total in relation to its purpose and alternatives (Zeithaml, 1988). Through the perceived quality a brand can gain value since it allows a brand to differentiate from its competitors, convince customers to buy its products even pay for premium prices and create a basis for future brand extensions (Aaker, 1991). From all product and service categories, marketers point out the significance of perceived quality in brand decisions (Morton, 1994).

Brand association is anything "linked" in memory to a brand (Aaker, 1991). It is believed to contain the meaning of the brand for consumers.

Brand association can be seen in all forms and reflects features of the product or aspects independent of the product itself (Chen, 2001). A set of associations, usually organized in some meaningful way, forms a brand image. Brand associations create value for the firm and its customers by helping to process/retrieve information, differentiate the brand, create positive attitudes or feelings, provide a reason to buy, and provide a basis for extensions (Aaker, 1991)

It is, with the former reasoning concerning brand identity in mind, possible to understand that the associations a brand carries for the consumer is a key asset. Brand association is described by Rangaswamy et al. (1993) as being the unique meanings associated with a certain brand name and can be used to differentiate one brand from another (Aaker and Keller 1990). The associations are usable for a company in order to help the consumer to understand information concerning the brand, to differentiate the brand and to give the customer a reason to buy the branded product. (Kapferer 1997)

Further, the associations can also be used to create a positive feeling and attitude towards the brand and support an extension of the brand (Apéria and Back 2004). Thus, it is possible to see that brand associations have a positive influence on the consumers' choice, preferences and intention of purchase, their willingness to pay a price premium for the brand, accept brand extensions and recommend the brand to others (Cobb- Walgren et al., 1995).

All the components analysed above can be seen in the following figure that consists an advanced version of the primary model:

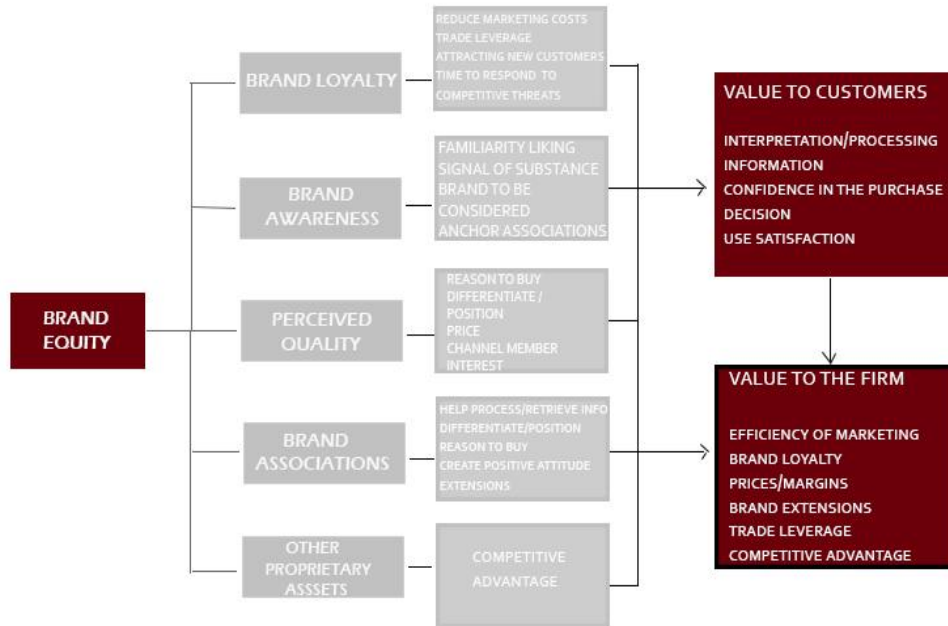


Figure 2: Brand equity model extension (Aaker, 1991)

2.1.3 Brand equity implications

Brand equity implies a special status among consumers' thoughts. In order to create successful equity it is of major importance consumers' reaction on marketing strategies of a company to be in a positive way (Keller, 1993).

Blackston (2000) focuses on the idea of brand equity as a notion with two types, the one of added value and a fundamental one. He comments that for years researches were trying to find a way and measure equity without making any effort to understand it first. In his research, concludes that since the reaction of consumers in a product determines the stage of a brand, consumer is an active member on creating equity.

The author leads to the conclusion that brand equity is a process that needs interaction between the brand and the consumer in order to create value (Blackston, 2000)

Brand equity as a concept consist a very important field of research both for academics and marketers. The power it has by creating competitive advantage is always a matter of request for building a strong brand with successful extensions differentiating a brand and its products from its competitors. It will be always under research to find the perfect way that can lead a company to obtain easy and fast equity's favourable. (Farquhar, 1989).

2.2 End of use programs

Textile manufacturing in combination with mass production and high demand of garments always cause serious unfavourable impacts on environment. There is no such thing as eco friendly process in textile manufacturing and even products that are originated from renewable sources like cotton, are environmentally "unfriendly" in their production.

On the other hand, there are textiles that their production is based on non renewable sources like nylon that is made from petroleum, though even if its production is unsustainable there is reserve of its resource enough for the several years keeping the same rhythm in consumption (Matear et al., 2010). Although virgin textiles are not sustainable and can be in some cases considered worse than synthetics, at the same time synthetic fibres are not bio-degradable and really hard to be recycled (Renewcell, 2012).

Fashion enhances textiles consumption in a rate that huge amounts of garments hardly used are discarded and end up in landfills (Hawley, 2006). There is a high demand for continuous products replacement basically connected with changes in fashion styles and boredom fuels the momentum for change, creating demand for ongoing replacement of products (Domina and Koch, 2002).

The last decades there is a general swift on the hierarchy of waste management that textile industry and governments seems to take under serious consideration globally. European Union follows the same direction by nominating textiles as a priority waste stream with important benefits for the economy and the environment .For this reason is becoming a priority the fact that every European country must adopt waste management programs that follows the hierarchy of the model presenting in figure 5. As

is been depicted in the figure below, prevention and minimization of waste are being perceived as the most preferred option in the waste management model. In the hierarchy reuse, recycle and recovery follow as practices while disposal that leads to landfills is the least desirable and consist the most expensive option of waste management process (European Commision, 2013).

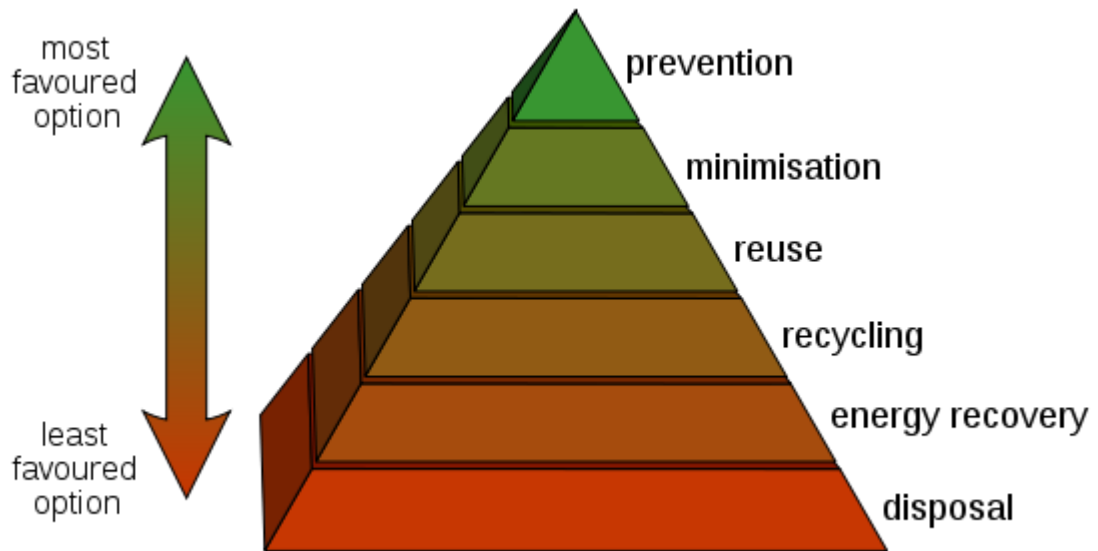


Figure 3: EU Waste Management Hierarchy (European Commission, 2013)

Today, most of fashion companies produce clothes that don't need to endure for years. Styles change continuously the same happens with the demand of new clothes. Although large supply of fashion products is available not all of them are sold. Some of the unsold products are exported to other markets but it also leads to creating waste with last recipient the landfills (Shexun, 2012).

At the same time, it still remains problematic the management of unwanted textiles not only from the industry but from consumers as well. The big loads of damaged or worn out textiles that cannot be used as second hand clothes are thrown in the bins as the most convenient provided option for consumers at the moment (Domina and Koch, 2002). The textile waste's environmental impact is severe (Zamani, 2011). Especially for Sweden, even if household waste is being used for energy recovery, this option is still incomparable with recycling and reusing since it still involves waste of resources (Ekström and Salomonson, 2012). According to Hawley (2006), in the textile and apparel industry almost

everything can be recycled and reused consequently rapid disposal must be decreased as soon as possible.

2.2.1 Definition

There is not a specific definition of EoU programs. Although, the term end of use connotes something that has reached the end of its life cycle. In particular when we refer to fashion products, it signifies that a product is not longer in use. EoU programs for fashion, can be defined as the programs that manage the last stage of the life cycle of all the non used garments. These programs are basically programs that are related with recycling, reuse and reduce of discarded garments and target to diminish these that end up in landfills (SAC, 2014).

These programs are considered to manage post consumer textile waste that accordingly to the Council for Textile Recycling (2014) is defined "as all types of garments or household articles made of textiles that the owner no longer needs and decides to discard." Post-consumer textile waste is being estimated to grow in higher rates than the population a forecast rather worrying that confirms the importance of action and implementation of End of use programs in the fashion industry (Council for Textile Recycling, 2014). The biggest proportion of the recycled post-consumer textiles is donated to non- profit organisations, although equally is sold at second hand stores (Domina and Koch 1997).

2.2.2 The 4Rs

Strategies concerning waste management aim to extend the life cycle of a product, basically through the 3Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle), setting as a final purpose to extract benefit from this extension (Fletcher, 2008). In order to build a more sustainable economic system for future companies, it is necessary to switch the life cycle assessment needs into a "cradle-to-cradle" concept, rather than the "cradle-to-grave" notion (Hagggar, 2007).

Today, new technologies improve continuously the processes in the textile waste management there are a number of strategies and make it easier to recycle and reuse more and more products. The 3Rs of strategies that was valid in the past has started to fade out and being replaced by 4Rs.

Nowadays, the implementation of 4Rs is the most common way to approach textile waste management and apart from recycling, reuse and reduce strategies includes strategies targeting the concept of repurpose (Jing, 2012)

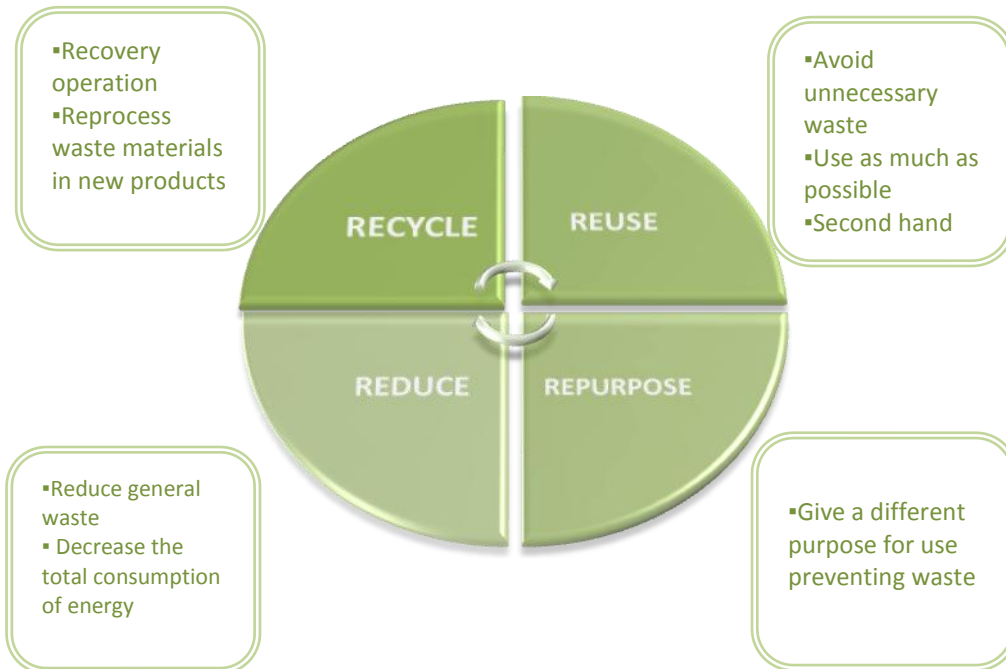


Figure 4: 4Rs model (Author's model based on Jing, 2012)

Figure 6 gives a first insight of this model of strategies that will be shortly analysed in this chapter. As recycling is considered any recovery operation of waste materials that creates new products from them giving them the same purpose they had before or new one (Tojo, et al. 2012). There are two main categories of textile recycling, the one of pre-consumer and the other of post-consumer. Products made from materials based on fabrics that are remanufactured and used by industries like automotive and furniture, belong to pre-consumer waste while post consumer waste consist mainly from household products and clothes that either given to charities or discarded in trash by the owner (Hawley, 2006).

Recycling technology even if it is not new, it seems that are for many years quite stagnated. The methods for separating fibre and fabrics is still the same as in the beginning like the most of the mechanical methods that are fundamental for making the implementation of recycling wider and easier for fashion companies (Jing, 2012).

A very important concept in textile waste management is repair. It is usually included in recycling since it doesn't consist a separate strategy although due to its old roots it is used from generation to generation and it is well known. Repair extends the life of a garment and it is the practice that influenced the most fashion and designing. Both in repair and recycling is highly addressed the component of reuse since it advocates the use of a product again and again from the owner of someone else, with the same purpose of use or different all of them targeting to reduce unnecessary waste (Jing, 2012).

Moreover, reduce refers to an overall aspect of reducing waste from generating activities ,diminish the total consumption of energy and restrict anything that consumes huge amounts of energy. Reduce strategy finds application in a wide range of activities in fashion industry and is applicable in information about material and knowledge about production. Over production and over processing can occur waste of resources that could be prevented. Technology and its implementation in the whole process could probably provide in the future the solution to this augmenting waste (Jing, 2012).

The integration of textile waste management from fashion companies is perceived as tool that creates the right circumstances under which a company can create profits (Jing, 2012). At the same point it provides a technology with "greener" solutions and less issues towards the environment.

3. Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze and describe the research methods that followed in order to conduct this paper. Furthermore it gives an evaluation of the methods in order to enhance and secure the validity and reliability of the research.

3.1 Scientific perspective

“Quantitative and qualitative scholars differ systematically and often dramatically in their approaches to concepts and measures” (Goertz, 2005).

There are two major types when referring to the design of a research paper the qualitative and the quantitative research. These strategies, they are developed through the explanation of two different philosophical issues, the ontology and the epistemology. Thereby the nature of this chapter is to give a clear view of the theory regarding qualitative and quantitative study which is very essential in order to select the appropriate strategy.

Starting from the ontological view, qualitative research is a semantic oriented approach which means that focus on providing all these characteristics that are valuable for the research (Goertz and Mahoney, 2012). Thus, qualitative research relies on the constructivism part of ontology. According to Oxford (1997) “Constructivism is the philosophical belief that people construct their own understanding about the reality”. In contrast, the part of ontology that relies on the quantitative research is the objectivism. According to Bryman (2012), “objectivism implies that social phenomena are independent or separate from human reaction”.

The other philosophical issue that was mentioned was the epistemology. “Epistemology is the transmission of knowledge” (Ozmon and Craver, 1999). In other words, epistemology can be seen as the second step after ontology, that creates a research strategy. Regarding the ontological view here there are two major principles behind epistemology the positivism and the interpretivism.

Qualitative research is related with the interpretivism part. According to Bryman (2012) “focus on the differences between people and the social sciences thus requires from the social scientists to use their subjectivity and their critical thinking in relation with the social actions”.

On the other hand, the opposite view of positivism is generally used by quantitative studies. Positivism is based on number and facts. So in contrary with the interpretivism view, here the theory says that the researcher and the social phenomena are independent and the one doesn't influence the other (Bryman, 2012).

The philosophical issues are very important in order to understand better the nature of qualitative and quantitative research strategies and help a researcher in order to follow the appropriate strategy and method.

3.2 Scientific approach

Theory and the relation with research is something very crucial. A well established research paper need to identify what is the effect that the theory has and how this is applied and helps the construction of the paper. According to Bryman (2012) there are two different types of theories used in social researches. These are the deductive and the inductive theory. Briefly, it is essential to explain that in deductive theory the researcher needs to conduct a hypothesis based on actual theory and then with the findings that will gather to specify if the collected data is rejected or approved according to that theory.

On the other hand, inductive theory differs in the sense that findings of the research can revise and influence the theoretical framework that the paper provides and in particular changes or add elements in that. Deduction is often used in quantitative studies whereas inductive theory is commonly used in qualitative studies. In this paper the process of both induction and deduction is followed in a way. Given the theory of brand equity and EoU programs in the theoretical framework the authors study the influence that EoU programs has on Aaker's (1991) brand equity model. Aaker's model analyses in a comprehensive way all the aspects of brand equity and their connection with each other in creating a strong brand equity for a company thus it is easier to see whether EoU programs fit in this procedure and understand if they contribute on brand equity of not. According to the results from the participants, authors study and address the influence of EoU towards the actual model of brand equity. So the results influence the theory and create a new understanding of the model as a result of the discussion of the data collected in the research.

3.3 Research purpose

Descriptive and explanatory studies describe three different research purposes. According to Robson (2002) exploratory study seeks to evaluate social phenomena throughout different angles and perspectives.

Descriptive study describes social phenomena in a great extent and explanatory study is related with the influence that different variables have. This study is an exploratory study considering the fact that try to explore the relationship that EoU programs have regarding brand equity throughout the collaboration with professional managers and consumers.

3.4 Research strategy

The theory described in the previous chapter includes basic foundations regarding the selection of the right strategy that is valuable for an academic paper. Having in mind what was mentioned previously, the authors according to the scope of their research and the nature of their topic decided that the qualitative approach was the most essential research strategy for that paper. The reasons behind are very clear and justified.

Qualitative study contains all these characteristics that are related with the purpose of this paper. Also gives the opportunity to the authors to answer the research question properly. This paper points out results that came through the interaction and collaboration with people. Understanding the effect that EoU programs have regarding brand equity the authors asked for the help of both consumers and professionals simultaneously giving priority to their opinion and knowledge about those issues.

Thus, inevitably it is very clear that the orientation of this paper is not according to numbers and statistics but towards the interaction that human beings had with the topic. This is one of the basic characteristic that a qualitative study contains according to Bryman (2012).

3.5 Research method

In the qualitative design there are three different types of research methods that are used generally. These are ethnography/participant

observation, qualitative interviewing and focus groups (Bryman, 2012). In this research paper, the authors used two of these methods, interviewing and focus groups.

According to Bryman (2012) interviews are the most famous method among qualitative researchers. The two main types of interviews in the qualitative approach are the unstructured interviews and the semi-structured interviews.

On the other hand, the other method that can be used is focus groups. Bryman (2012) mentions that focus group method is a technique of interviewing that involves more than one person. One of the major differences between typical interviews and focus groups is that focus groups emphasize in a particular topic while typical interviews can develop more general discussion.

For better understanding of the two methods it is essential to analyze in detail the steps that the authors have followed in this particular research. The selection of these two particular methods came out reasonably. In the first case semi-structure interviews selected for interviewing professional managers because of the flexibility that this type gives to interviewee to express himself into a particular issue with many different ways and not having strict barriers regarding his opinion. Semi structured interviews with the managers helped the authors to discover different issues that managers gave attention and were not in the first priorities of the authors. In that way the interviews supported the research in a positive way and gave the opportunity to the authors to address different angles of how managers see end of use programs and brand equity.

Considering focus groups on the other hand, the selection was made related to what Bryman (2012) says about the efficiency that this method provides in order to gain a variety of different opinions in collaboration with the complexity of the sample of each focus group.

3.5.1 Semi-structured interviews

It has been already examined above which are the two different types of interviews in qualitative research. In this paper the authors use semi-structure interviews with two different Corporate Social Responsibility's managers of two Swedish fashion companies. The managers represent the

companies, Nudie jeans and Filippa K and both the interviewers answered a variety of questions with the freedom to express their opinions without restrictions. The selection of both two companies realised after research on these companies and a common characteristic is that both of them operate EoU programs. This will be explained more thoroughly in the next chapter of sampling.

All the interviews took place during March 2014 in English language. The interview with Nudie jeans' CSR manager took place in the headquarters of the company in Gothenburg. The transcription of this interview took place in the University of Borås by the authors. With Filippa K the interview completed via e-mail due to the schedule of the manager. For Filippa K, authors contacted as well the CSR manager of the company.

Both managers replied to all the questions although they were informed from the authors to skip any question that would be considered inappropriate due to companies 'policies. For both managers the authors gave exactly the same questions since it was necessary to observe how two different companies view particular issues important to answer the research question. Although the questions were developed by the authors, the participants had the freedom to answer and discuss issues that they thought were important and were not included directly in the questions. This gave the opportunity to the researchers to ask and discuss more about EoU programs and brand equity from the managerial view.

In the table below, there is a short presentation of the companies that were interviewed.

COMPANY	RESPONDENT	DETAILS ABOUT COMPANIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NUDIE JEANS • FILIPPA K 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSR manager • CSR manager 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •swedish fashion company that is specialised in denim.Established Ecocycle . •swedish fashion company established in 1993. Promotes sustainability

Table 1: Companies that participated in interviews

3.5.2 Focus groups

Focus groups as has been already stated vary from conventional interviews because of the participation of more than one interviewee in the process. Focus groups give the opportunity to the researcher to study and understand different opinions at the same time and most important to observe the reaction of interviewers when they discuss about a particular issue (Bryman, 2012). For that reason the use of focus groups was considered as the most suitable one in order to examine the issue of EoU programs and brand equity from the consumers' angle.

The authors intended to realise eight different focus groups in order to get sufficient sample of answers. The groups were divided in four people per group and the event took place every two days for every group. The authors decided to use a mixed group of people with those that had good knowledge of the recycling philosophy and the fashion industry in general and people that were not so relevant with the fashion industry and they were typical consumers. This enhanced the interaction between interviewers and gave valuable feedback with a variety of different views and responses.

The interviews took place during the first two weeks of April 2014 and were hosted in the library and the Textile School campus of the University of Borås in English language. By the end of the fifth group the research finished because authors noticed a repetition of answers that made the fulfilment of the rest three groups unnecessary. It was unnecessary because the authors were satisfied with the results of the first five groups and the repetition of answers was useless.

The mix of people with different background in fashion and recycling helped the authors to come up with results that supported the flow of the research with a variety of information. A requirement for the selection of interviewers was to live in Sweden for at least one year and the age range to be between 19-40 years old. The interaction between the interviewers was satisfied and the authors tried not to interrupt the stream of the conversation except if it was necessary. The use of videos regarding textile recycling in all the focus groups supported specific questions which gave participants additional knowledge that they didn't have and gave them interesting insights about the research topic.

By the end of every focus group, all the people that participate expressed the opinion that they gain new knowledge and additional information about recycling in textile issues.

3.6 Sampling

The main goal when authors decided to develop this paper was to successfully answer the research question. In order to succeed this goal, one of the most important factors was the selection of the samples. For that reason the purposive sampling form was selected. Bryman (2012) describes purposive sampling as a procedure where sampling is conducted in order to answer with the most efficient way the research question. The goal of purposive sampling is to sample the participants not with a random base but in a way that helps the research to be developed properly. For that reason the selection of participants was specifically for the needs of the research.

3.6.1 Focus group

Before the focus groups took place it was fundamental to set some important criteria before recruit the participants that were suitable. Due to Bryman (2012), anyone for whom the topic is relevant can logically be an appropriate participant. Sometimes certain topics don't require participants of a particular kind so that there is little or any restriction on who might be appropriate. However, there are always small restrictions that must be referred due to the transparency of the procedure.

The first of the criteria that came across was the age of the participants that defined between 19-40. The age limitation is justified since it's the average age of consumers that use to change their outfit frequently following the trends and at the same time show more interest and involvement in recycling and environmental campaigns (Domina and Koch, 2002).

The research is been performed in Sweden and swedish market is in the centre of problematization for the authors. The participants were both Swedes and people that live in Sweden. In order to reassure the validity of the sample it was important to set another restriction since only people that live in Sweden for more than one year were suitable to participate. Based

on researches concerning the adaptation of a culture when people change their country and live to another, it has been proved that after a year a person can adapt easily to the new society and follow the habits and behaviours of the society he lives in (Peattie ,2001).

The aim to establish whether there is any systematic variation in the ways in which different groups discuss a matter. Inferences can be derived only when focus group participation has been organised in terms of such stratifying criteria.(Bryman,2012) Based on that, the last of our criteria was that the 4-5 participants of each group should be divided in a way that half of them would have a deeper knowledge of recycling garments because of their educational background and the rest would be regular consumer without any acquaintance with the subject at least in a professional level.

Last but not least, we formulate the groups in a way that most of the people knew one another in order to enhance a more natural flow of conversation and get more accurate results. Our groups can be characterised natural groups. According to Bryman (2012) the discussion can be as natural as possible and this quality can be succeed through the use of members with pre-existing relations.

3.6.2 Limitations of focus groups

Authors had already in mind the limitations that this method encloses and it is important to refer it.

First of all, there is less control over the participants since researchers usually don't know how far can allow focus groups' members to take over the running on the topic that is under discussion. It is not clear the degree of which it is appropriate to surrender control of a focus group to its participants, especially when there is a reasonable explicit set of questions to be answered.

Furthermore, there is a difficulty in analysing data. Usually the amount of collected data after each focus group are huge .It needs time and a proper strategy that incorporate both themes in what people say and patterns of interaction. Inaudible elements in focus groups recordings, is another issue that can make the transcription even more difficult that in combination with the double consuming time you need than in individual interviews makes the collection even more complicated.

Few of the last details that authors needed to take care and bear in mind is that usually it is hard to prevent the tendency of participants to speak at the same time. For that reason it is important before the discussion start to ask from the participants to help the conversation by speaking one at the time. Still though, it is very hard to stay into the firm during the discussion especially when researchers want from the participant to talk as spontaneously as possible.

3.6.3 Semi-structured interviews

For the semi structured interviews authors choose two companies that fit to the topic and could provide important insights for the purposes of this research. The companies, as has been already referred are Nudie Jeans and Filippa K . Both of them run at the moment EoU programs in different ways but with the involvement of their customers as a first priority for their future actions.

Nudie Jeans is a company that has incorporate in its values and philosophy, sustainability and recycling programs since its first launch in the market. In their stores customers can leave their old jeans and buy a new one using a voucher of 20% discount. What is more, they have the chance to repair and reuse their favourite jeans for free from professionals that working for fixing jeans that are lightly damaged. The company uses all the leftovers to create new raw material for new jeans and sales second hand jeans from the old ones that customers don't want any more. On the other hand, Filippa K collects old clothes from its customers and resells them in second hand concept.

The reason of choosing to interview with these two companies was that both have a background on EoU programs. Also it is important to mention here that another criterion was to choose two companies that have different experience in such programs. Nudie jeans perform EoU programs since has been while Filippa K is a new entry in these procedures and try to make the first steps. That was very crucial for the authors because they wanted to have different opinions from a company with more experience and one with less experience.

Last but not least, all of them are active in Sweden for years and well established in the Swedish market which is the geographical area of examination.

3.6.4 Limitations of semi-structure interviews

Regarding the interviews the limitations have some similarities that can be seen in focus groups that addressed previously. According to Bryman (2012) the amount of time needed in order to transcript the data gathered is also high. The transcription requires a significant time effort and the interviewer need to give great attention in order to understand all the parts of the interview and translate them in an effective way.

Furthermore the questions need to be clear and understandable in order to give the interviewee the ability to understand what the researchers ask exactly. Regarding both these issues raised in this method, the authors secured the procedure and guaranteed that the questions were clear, in a comprehensive language and sufficient in order to help the stream of the interview. Also the transcriptions were detailed and all the important parts were translated into the relevant data according to the topic.

3.7 Quality criteria

A good qualitative study can help to “understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing” (Eisner, 1991, p. 58).

Although many specialists in social methodology claim that reliability and validity is irrelevant with a qualitative study Patton (2001) claim that both these issues should concern all the researchers that conduct a qualitative study. Furthermore, Guba and Lincoln (1994) propose alternative terms in order to measure reliability and validity in a qualitative study.

3.7.1 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is related with qualitative methods and consists of four different criteria that are related each one of them with criteria that used in quantitative strategies (Bryman, 2012). Guba and Lincoln (1994) proposed four criteria that are related in qualitative research and are performing as an alternative to more traditional quantitatively-oriented criteria. Those four criteria reflected with the traditional validity and reliability criteria as follow.

Internal validity-credibility, external validity-transferability, reliability-dependability and objectivity –confirmability. Regarding both these terms these paper presents elements that reassure the quality criteria are properly established.

Credibility

According to Merriam and Merriam (1998), credibility is referring to the question “How congruent are the findings with reality?”. Furthermore Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider credibility as one of the most important factors. Credibility in this research is being supported by the triangulation method.

Triangulation method refers to the use of different research methods such as interviews and focus groups which in particular being used in this paper. In order to support efficient the credibility the authors enhance their research with conducting focus groups and semi-structure interviews to gain more information from different views. Gaining a variety of information from the participants gave the authors the opportunity to gain different views that haven't discussed and helped the procedure of the paper.

Furthermore the sampling of the people in the focus groups, where participants selected regarding their relation with the topic confirmed the “circling reality” that Dervin et.al. (1976) mentioned about the diversity of the results. Additionally, an important aspect that raises the credibility is the fact that both participants in interviews and focus group according to their opinion after the end of the procedure found the method that performed efficient and credible in terms of the effective stream of the research.

Transferability

Merriam and Merriam (1998) say that external validity ‘is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations’. Although qualitative studies research a limited number of people and views and thus external validity sound very difficult to be achieved, yet Shenton (2004) claims that although cases like interviews and focus groups are referring to a small sample they have the ability to referring to broaden groups and as a result transferability can be an issue under consideration. In this research the authors, in order to help the reader understand the procedure that is being followed and provide it with transparency analyzed all of the elements behind that.

From the number of the companies that participate in this research through the numbers of focus groups and the appropriate sampling in order to achieve the necessary results, till the research strategy that is followed and the purpose analyzed, all these elements increase the transferability and transparency of the paper in order to be feasible to implement in a future research. Giving great attention to transferability is according to the authors of this paper very essential because it makes the reader understand better the broader picture of the research and support the high level of implementation that a future study about brand equity and EoU programs can have from different researchers.

Dependability

Reliability which is the parallel method of dependability to a quantitative method refers that if a particular research will be repeated with the same methods and with the same participants the results that will come out will be the same also (Shenton, 2004). The goal of dependability on qualitative study is to ensure that a similar research can be feasible in the future although the results can be different.

Regarding dependability, this research makes sure as described previously that follows certain strategies and methods. In order to study EoU programs and their effect in brand equity in Sweden, the authors make clear all the steps in order to build this research and furthermore address all the limitation regarding this study. Giving in detail all the methods that used and a clear structure of the theoretical framework, help the increase of the dependability level of this paper.

Confirmability

According to Shenton (2004) confirmability is related with objectivity. Although reassuring confirmability in a qualitative study is very hard because questions are conducted by the researchers and cannot be absolutely objective still there are ways to support objectivity in a qualitative paper. This can happen again with the triangulation method that mention before.

A researcher should be aware to understand why he chooses one method instead another or why he made particular questions to the sample that examined. Triangulation role is critical in the way that reduces the

influence of investigator bias. Indeed as explained in very much detail the authors used semi-structure interviews and focus groups and gave the opportunity to the participants to express their selves and discuss what they really thought that matters them regarding the issue of brand equity and EoU programs.

Furthermore in previous chapters the authors present limitations of the techniques that are used for both interviews and focus groups regarding this paper. The main goal in order to increase confirmability is not only present a particular research as one without weaknesses but in order to be capable to gain knowledge from that weaknesses and help a possible similar future research to improve the strategy that followed.

3.8 Ethical issues

Ethical issues can be considered very important and it is worth to mention that authors work in respect of such issues regarding this particular research. According to Bryman (2012) ethical issues represent the role of values in the research process. This value can be translated as the treatment that the authors had regarding the people that participated in this research.

In order to keep a balance in the ethical issue matter the authors were extremely careful in their behaviour to the participants of both the interviews and the focus groups. Regarding all of them, the respect to anonymity was kept until the fulfilment of the paper thus their personal identity kept secret as they wished since the first contact that authors had with all of them personally.

Furthermore all the participants were informed about the procedure that would take place, the questions that would be addresses and information about the topic. For the interviews with the managers the questions were provided to them before the interviews so that the interviewees had the time to prepare themselves after their request. As far considering the focus groups, all participants were free to answer in which questions they would feel comfortable and nevertheless the authors made clear that there is not a right or wrong answer thus they could express their opinions without stress.

Considering the ethical issues, the authors believe that they gave the opportunity to the participants to feel comfortable answer the questions without pushing them in one particular direction thus the results would be more accurate.

4. Results

Collected data from our focus groups and interviews will be summarized and presented in two different chapters. In this first chapter are presented consumers' perceptions on the topic of this research and discuss terms as fast fashion, consumer behavior, sustainability, green marketing, green marketing campaigns and future of green marketing. In the second chapter, interviewers' responses are presented concerning managers' views on the same topic. All the data are separated in smaller chapters thematically.

4.1 Focus groups

4.1.1 Familiarity with end of use programs

In the beginning of the discussion with each focus group the researchers wanted to find out whether the participants had any acknowledgement with End of use programs so far. It was very important to find out how informed are about these programs and what do they think about these efforts that are quite new in fashion landscape.

It was a surprise that the majority of the participants didn't have a clue of these practices, haven't seen or heard of recycling bins in stores and services like repairing clothes instead of throw away. One of the participants mention:

" I don't have an idea about these programs. I have never heard about them so I just buy clothes and when they are not useful anymore I throw them away."(Focus group 2, participant C)

"When I hear the word end seems like something is over so talking about fashion can be connected with products end of life but I am not sure. I don't know what companies do for that" (Focus group 4, participant A)

Another participant comments that consumers can hardly find information about recycling clothes and the whole process:

“The process is not so clear. There are not enough information concerning the process how they recycle, what they make out of it, where it ends up.”
(Focus group 1, participant D)

The same person talking about sustainability in fashion companies highlighted his response by commenting that it is not right the way fashion companies usually choose to communicate to consumers their “green” side.

“There are reports of what they are doing in terms of sustainability but they look more like green washing. For example replacing a collection with another one that seems to be more sustainable doesn’t make you a sustainable company.” (Focus group 1, participant D)

On the other hand most of the participants with an educational background in fashion and more particular in the Swedish School of Textiles were familiar with the topic and knew what EoU programs are although they admit that this fact is basically connected with projects from school rather than their experience as consumers:

“ I know it only from school. I checked what few companies do due to a project for a school course. Otherwise as a customer I never heard about it.” (Focus group 5, participant A)

“End of life for products. What we do after a garment is been recycled, repaired or thrown away that’s what comes to my mind. I have first heard about these programs on a seminar about sustainability at school although I haven’t seen it so far to any company. Maybe it is because the whole practice is so new.” (Focus group 2, participant B)

Few of them mention that they have seen some campaigns in some companies and they knew that there are companies that use recycling bins in their store and attract customers to return their old clothes to them, taking as a reward for their good action a voucher with discount to use it in buying new clothes. Participants were skeptical towards the fact that

companies try to convince consumers act more sustainable while they entice them in consuming more at the same time. Recycling garments is being seen as a positive act for fashion companies although the process need improvements since the marketing that companies use so far creates suspicion between consumers that are slightly familiar with it.

“EoU programs deal with how companies manage their leftover textiles .It is a plan and a strategy on how to deal with their textile waste. I ‘m always skeptical if they use it only for marketing reasons when they use campaigns that invite consumers to shop more.”(Focus group 3, participant D)

Participant C at the same group adds that sustainability is connected with less consumption while with the voucher companies invite the customers to buy more. She thinks that it’s only for marketing and it is controversial trying to combine fast fashion companies with any kind of sustainable activities. Nevertheless, other participants argued that it is a new idea and it can change in a good way consumer’s behavior towards clothes recycling. Comparing it with the old fashion solution about leaving all the clothes you don’t need to the Red Cross or second hand stores, these programs look more useful for some people find it fun and exciting to see that their clothes can continue their “life” in a different way.

“ For me it is useful. I like the fact that when I need to get rid of clothes I can visit a retail store around my town and recycle them instead of keeping them until I have gathered enough to leave them in Red cross.”(Focus group 3, participant A)

“I like it since you can see what’s next with your clothes after getting tired of them. Its more connected with the whole life circle of a garment. There is even more transparency when it is connected with the whole production.”(Focus group 3, participant C)

4.1.2 Participation and consumers’ involvement

After having an insight on what our participants think about EoU and how familiar are with this term, the authors wanted to find out in what extend

consumers participate in these programs and what do they do when they need to discard some clothes from their closets. It is necessary to see whether consumers support recycling in clothes in the way they do it already for other daily products in Sweden or if they find it interesting to do it in the near future since they were not well informed about it but they think it is a great chance. As part of the topic that was under discussion, the authors showed to participants, pictures with collecting bins from retailers as well as areas that consumers can leave old garments in stores, having hidden any kind of information about the brand.

The majority of the respondents have never left any kind of garment in bins or in retail stores in general so far. When they have to get rid of their old clothes they usually give them in second hand stores, in charities and when the clothes are still in good condition some prefer to exchange them with their friends. Lots of the participants shared their intention to start using these programs as an alternative way of giving away clothes but only after specific conditions and not in the way companies do it today. It is important the whole process to become more transparent in order to make it easier for consumers to see where all this effort ends up. It seems that consumers demands more proof of doing something good than knowing that all this ends up to a direct profit for a company.

“So far I was giving my old clothes to Red Cross. I like the idea of giving them to fashion companies from now on but I still want to know how they use the recycled garments since fashion companies are not charity organizations.”(Focus group 4, participant C)

“ I think it is good and practical but I want to know also how do they use it otherwise it would be better to give it to someone in need. If I will give it to a business I want to know that they will do something good out of it.”(Focus group 1, participant B)

“For me I would prefer to give away my garments to a second hand store if it is for a company to take more benefit of this even if they give 20% discount voucher apart from the recycling” (Focus group 5, participant C)

Moreover, there were many people in the groups that commended the practical issues that a consumer can face during practices like recycling in

bins. First of all, usually a person gather old or damaged clothes for quite a long period of time until discard of them. The volume of clothes and the lack of information that reminds to consumers the option to recycle in stores can be negative aspects that will prevent them for participating in EoU programs. One of the participants states that even if she finds it good as a practice but when she needs to sort her clothes in order to recycle them it takes time and make it complicated.” I m too lazy, I want to recycle but I don’t want to think so much about it when I am doing it.”(Focus group 3, participant A)

Another participant comments:

“ I don’t want to use the word inconvenient but somehow it is. When I go shopping and I notice the bins thinking that next time I would like to bring some of my garments to recycle them it takes time since the next time I will go there and it is more probable to have forget it.”(Focus group 4, participant D)

At the same focus group another consumer mentions:

“ These bins seem to me that you need to put a lot of effort in order to be a good consumer. Especially for someone like me that I don’t have a car when I go for shopping I don’t feel like carrying huge bags going around. It’s not very practical.”(Focus group 4, participant B)

Finally, what was really interesting in total from the responses authors got, is the fact that only one participant has participated so far in recycling his old clothes in a retailer and he was basically motivated from the discount he could get.

“I have left my clothes to these bins in H&M and in second hand stores. I wanted to get rid of clothes and at the same time I knew you can get a voucher.”(Focus group 2, participant A)

4.1.3 Brand’s associations in consumers’ minds

Since brand equity is in the center of the discussion in this thesis, authors needed some answers on whether participants had in mind any brand that have noticed or heard doing activities related to recycling or repairing

garments. It is important to see if companies that work already with these programs have succeed to communicate it in consumers in a way that they can easily make connections between their brands and these activities.

In total it was hard for the majority of respondents to mention a brand that recycle old clothes. They were uncertain of whether there are brands that do it at all since it is so new that probably it is experimental.

“I can’t recall a brand. Only second hand stores and Red Cross.”(Focus group 1, participant C)

“There are not many brands that do it right now. None of my favorite brands do it. It is so new.”(Focus group 3, participant D)

“ I have never notice any company doing activities like these. They are probably still experimental” (Focus group 5, participant A)

Even students from the Textile School that refer some brands were not all of them sure if they still run these programs or what they do with them after collecting. H&M, Nudie jeans, Boomerang, Filippa K and Patagonia were the brands that few participants mention.

“I have seen recycling bins in H&M. Nudie jeans collect some as well but they mostly work with the repairing. What is more, Filippa K has some collecting of used clothes but

I have never seen it in stores I only know it from projects I did at school.”(Focus group 2, participant C)

“H&M but I don’t know what they do with these clothes afterwards.”(Focus group 1, participant D)

“I can recall Boomerang but I don’t remember exactly when they did it and for how long”(Focus group 4,participant B)

“Fillippa K and Patagonia did that for some time. I have noticed in store activities and ads.”(Focus group 4, participant A)

To continue the same topic, the authors choose to have a supplementary question regarding participants’ willingness and curiosity to find out more information about companies that deal with repairing and recycling of

garments. For this question a video from Nudie jeans activities have been shown as well as the part of H&M's webpage that has some information for their recycling activity.

When participants were questioned whether they had ever the curiosity to learn more about EoU programs and brands that work with them, either after working on a project at school or after seeing an ad campaign the answers we got were really interesting concerning the way they change their mind for different brands. Most of them that knew activities from H&M and Nudie jeans conclude that for Nudie jeans they had taken a look at their webpage since they give many information on how they do all the procedures from repairing jeans till the recycling and what happens next while in H&M webpage they couldn't find enough information about it and few of them didn't bother to check it since they don't trust H&M's reports. Participants mentioned that since Nudie jeans do it from the beginning they have put a lot of effort in it to make it transparent and go hand in hand with their brand while H&M find these activities as a trend that can boost their image as a responsible company.

“ When I'm thinking on EoU programs for both companies like H&M and Nudie jeans I have completely different opinion . Nudie jeans runs programs like these since it started and brands like H&M always jump on the trends to show that they are good and green. For Nudie jeans I searched about their EoU programs and saw how they do it although for H&M I don't have the same curiosity since I m not sure whether this is truth or not.”(Focus group 2, participant B)

“H&M needs more transparency to avoid being suspected all the time for green washing. A simple paper doesn't say much for their results and their actions. What is more if they don't use it somehow for their own production it makes it even harder to prove what happens after the collection.” (Focus group 3, participant B)

4.1.4 Advantages for companies in using EoU

Authors considered necessary for this research to move on with a set of questions that could point out advantages and disadvantages that participants could distinguish for companies which use EoU programs

already. The questions were accompanied with pictures from ad campaigns of H&M, Puma, Patagonia and Nudie Jeans and a video from Nudie jeans webpage showing the processes this company uses with recycled garments.

The majority of the respondents couldn't find any disadvantage for the companies since all agreed that in long term a company can have only profits out of these programs. Although, all of them agreed that it can be effective to the maximum only for companies that incorporate them to their image and philosophy and communicate it in that way to the customers preferably from the beginning of their emerge in the fashion industry. "Additional services for customers such as repairing definitely become a competitive advantage for a company. New steps in sustainability that are honest and transparent in their procedure can become a powerful advantage for companies to compete in the market."(Focus group 1, participant C)

"At the moment it is an emergent trend. So for companies that do it right now they have a benefit as one step forward. In a few years it won't be new anymore so only those that do it from the beginning and become pioneers for that can have an advantage." (Focus group 3, participant B)

Long terms profits and customer loyalty were some of the most focused points of the conversation that followed in groups. Participants found as a common point that loyalty it is the most important value and advantage companies can gain if they will use these programs wisely and as transparent as possible. Apart from recycling, services like repairing clothes instead of getting rid of them can strengthen customers' relationship with a company and create dedicated customers that can always work as a magnet for new one.

" Customers loyalty is the most important advantage a company can have. Especially for Nudie jeans when they offer these kind of services and concepts like repairing for free jeans." (Focus group 2, participant D)

“Keeping the customers with them. If you are a Nudie jeans lover you love the fact that your jeans will continue living even when you don’t want them anymore” (Focus group 3, participant D)

“ Recycling garments can influence a fashion company by being more famous among customers and by saving energy.” (Focus group 1, participant A)

“They earn loyal customers. So companies make money through that not directly but in long term. A satisfied customer will soon bring his/her friend and spread brand’s name from mouth to mouth” (Focus group 5, participant C)

“ I agree that it consists a competitive advantage and can strengthen customer relationship but there is the necessity to show what they do after collecting the clothes.”(Focus group 3, participant A)

4.1.5 Suggestions by consumers

At the end of our discussion authors made up a scenario that could permit to participants express their point of view on what improvements and changes are imperative to be imposed in order to make EoU programs more effective for companies. They have been asked to imagine that they have the chance to talk with a manager of a company responsible for sustainability and make their suggestions to them as consumers.

Most of the respondents conclude that the main problem that needs to be solved as soon as possible is the lack of proper and significant marketing and information of consumers about EoU activities. Companies need to start show more what they do especially when this needs consumers’ support and participation. More coverage from media and in stores in combination with more information provided by companies’ webpage are few steps that can augment the knowledge that lacks nowadays from consumers and attract them in participating more.

“ Communicate how they do it. Make it more distinctive into store. Even market it better in store.”(Focus group 1, participant D)

'Having a communication strategy regarding use and methodology of the program as well as raising awareness.'"(Focus group 4, participant B)

Other participants referred basically in the issue of vouchers and how companies can use this as a tool to entice customers in bringing back their clothes instead of throwing them away. Bigger discount vouchers seemed to be as a good opportunity for companies to reach out more consumers for their goal rewarding them for their behaviour.

"If i had bigger vouchers i would participate more and not really care for the rest. I would do it because i would have profit out of this." (Focus group 2, participant C)

"Entice consumers with bigger discounts and inform what they do with the clothes."(Focus group 3, participant B)

Although, few of the participants argued that this is a fatal mistake since a company can't support that is sustainable and conscious when use an activity to target sales and lead again to consumption after all. It is like fooling themselves and their customers. Sustainability can't be hand in hand with hyper consumption and consumers must change the way they think as well as companies.

" It is a bad consumer's attitude that we always want to get something back when we give something away. It would be better companies to do it in a swap way. Buy new clothes with old one." (Focus group 5, participant A)

Moreover, some participants gave interesting insights in the way companies should reinforce their communication strategy towards EoU programs. They underlined the importance of educating consumers about these activities since they demand a change in attitudes and behaviours and usually this takes time. Companies need to insist in marketing messages in an educational way and motivate consumers by promoting how the results of these programs return in long term back to society.

"They need to make some improvements to make it more convenient. Communicate it in a better way. It's about changing attitudes so it takes time. It's like recycling bottles in Sweden that took years to start having results." (Focus group 2, participant D)

" Educate customers .Show what they do better comparing to other companies through TV, social media." (Focus group 1, participant D)

“ Companies need to inform better their customers about the long term benefits these programs can add to the industry. Motivate them and educate them.” (Focus group 3, participant A)

Finally, practical information in stores seems to be important for most of the participants in order to make the bins or the collecting point more distinctive when consumers visiting a store. Screens with videos that inform about this program can be really helpful to catch attention from people while they shop.

“I ‘m more visual person as a result I need to see it in store to start thinking about it. A screen with some videos would help to get my attention.” (Focus group 2, participant A)

“ It is hard to find those bins in stores. I shop on a regular basis from H&M but i have never notice them. I think that it is important to place them in a way that can attract the sight of a customer.” (Focus group 4, participant B)

4.2 Interviews

4.2.1 Participation and consumers’ involvement

In that particular chapter the authors combine two questions that are related with the participation of the consumer in the end of use programs. The answers that presented below are considering very interesting. This chapter can be divided in two parts. In the first part the goal is to have a clear answer from the managers about the participation of the consumers from a sustainable point of view, regarding of course the professional experience of the managers in the field through all these years.

In the second part the conversation focus on the success of their programs so far in Scandinavia. This part is also crucial because the authors seek to gather information about other markets also rather than the Swedish market in order to be able to compare environmental sustainability issues and observe better the performance in Sweden.

Regarding the first interviewee, CSR manager of Nudie jeans, explained that the participation of the consumers in their end of use programs is so far successful. As she mention “we are very happy with the results so far. But of course we have a lot of things to work on in order to improve ourselves”. Here it is important to mention that her answer about the success focus on the repair of jeans program that they have and less in the recycling part. As

she mentions “we don’t have recycling bins in our stores, the consumers leave their second hand garments directly to the staff of our store and then the staff decides if the particular garment is a good looking garment or something that needs to transfer to the recycle process. So based on the judgment of the staff they decide what we do with garments.’ And she continued by saying that ‘so far the participation of the consumers in the repair of the jeans are very successful .Comparing with the recycling part currently it can be seen more successful. But I think that in the future the recycling part will increase also”.

On the other hand the CSR manager of Fillipa K replied regarding the participation of the consumers so far that “they are interested and aware and we can see an increase of interest and engagement”. Her answer focuses especially regarding the programs that they use particularly in their company.

Regarding now the second part of this chapter a clear view has taken only from the CSR manager of Nudie jeans because the manager of Fillipa K mentioned that she doesn’t know many thing about that . The answer of Nudie jeans manager was a description between London and the performance in Scandinavia and especially in Sweden. What she stated is that “I think in London they are very busy with recycling issues also. But London is a multinational city and I think it is difficult to compare London to Gothenburg or Scandinavia in that sense. But of course here we are aware of environmental sustainability.” The reference to London market was in terms of Nudie jeans’ store in London.

4.2.2 Brand’s associations in consumers’ minds

As Aaker (1991) says brand associations is one of the four categories that are connected with the customers’ evaluation and reaction regarding a brand. It is absolutely essential as a core value of the brand equity theory to explore the views of professionals regarding this dimension. For that reason in this chapter the authors asked from both the participants to answer the question regarding the connections that consumers can make regarding their brand and their end of use programs.

“I think that what we are trying to do is that, since we don’t have particular marketing strategies we focus very much to educate our staff in our shops. Also we have a lot of sales going on in other stores of different companies

like Åhlens and those people are selling a variety of clothes so we try to educate them also by having conferences in our offices with them and spread the values of what we stand for, to them also. In that way when they have a customer it will be very easy for them to transform that value. So that is the main part we want to do. To spread our values to consumers and make the consumers connect Nudie jeans with environmental sustainability. The focus on the word of mouth is very important to our company. Furthermore the connection we make to our product with the music industry and the street wear style is also very important. Also the opportunities that we give to consumers in order to speak about jeans with the guys that stitch their jeans and talk about music, lifestyle clothes also is something that associates our company in consumers' mind." That was the view of the CSR manager of Nudie jeans regarding the brand association question.

As it comes to Filippa K manager the answer in the question "how familiar are your customers with recycling programs" was "Not very familiar". Regarding the connections that their customers can make between their brand and their end of use programs the respond was that "a lot of customers in Sweden and especially in Stockholm they are aware but outside they are not. But as I said we are now just in the first stage so that will hopefully change in better result. Our way of having recycling will for sure be well connected to the brand".

The answer in that part differs in the way that both of the companies have different program and their approach to the associations also differs. Although Nudie jeans explain to the authors in particularly how and what kind of associations they want to build and Filippa K didn't gave detail answer of their strategy in relation with brand association they both similarly mention that they give very big focus in their end of use programs and how these affect their brand.

4.2.3 Advantages for companies in using EoU

In that chapter are presented the advantages of running End of Use programs inside a company. Regarding the first interviewee, Nudie jeans' manager responds to the benefits of what a company can have from running End of Use programs in a positive way. Her answer was "Of course

there are important benefits. In our particular company, it helps to strengthen the brand's image as a sustainable brand and as a sustainable brand we will increase our environmental awareness among the consumers. Because what we are doing with our Eco-cycle TM program is that we promote dry jeans. And dry jeans are those that have not been washed in the production process. We are quiet famous for our dry jeans and that part represent 30-40% of our sales.”

Regarding the second interviewee the respond were very similar to the other manager about the importance of End of Use programs. She also agreed that is very important the use of such programs and also stated the advantages that rise into her company in relation to the use of such programs. “Creating a strong bond/relationship to the customers, enable material and production cost savings and to receive customer insights and feedback from the returned products.” Of course there is a difference in how each manager observes advantages individually and these differences can be very easily seen between the two answers.

Finally, regarding that chapter it is worth to mention that the two managers mention that their companies' doesn't use recycle bins –a popular end of use program- and both justify their answer. Nudie manager state that ‘it is not in our philosophy and lifestyle culture to have recycle bins into our store, although she mentioned that having a recycling bins in other third parties that sell Nudie clothes would be possible, while Filippa K manager mention “Different kind of brands will find their own most suitable solution - and for us, we will not use recycling bins since we believe our clothes are more valuable than that and want to treat them and our customers with the respect they deserve.” This question was important for the authors since recycling bins is a common End of Use program that big companies as H&M use.

4.2.4 Measuring brand equity

This chapter describes how managers of both Nudie jeans and Filippa K measure brand equity in their companies and also how garment collection can augment customers' engagement with the brand. Their answers were very sophisticated regarding those questions although the differences can be clearly seen.

Starting with Nudie jeans' CSR manager regarding how they measure in Nudie their brand equity she states "we can see very visible in our stores the quantity of jeans that consumers give for repair is increasing since we have started. In relation with that we notice that even though they hand in old jeans for repair, they also buy new ones so we observe an increase in sales in our stores also. So financially speaking the increase in sales and measuring money is one way to measure brand equity. Furthermore I have to mention that the reason behind the increase of sales is the service with the repairs that we provide. You go to Nudie jeans store to repair your jean but at the same time you say maybe I should buy a T-Shirt also since I get the repair jean for free. On the other hand, we have made some videos on our web page on how to repair or stich by hand and so on and we can see that those videos gain many 'likes' on social media like Facebook".

On the other hand, the answer of Filippa K manager was more related to scientific quantitative tools that used by expertise. As she mention "we have several different tools that we are using. FK Fiber tool – is a classification of different fibers from 1-4, where 1-2 are considered sustainable fibers. That tool is developed by using the Made-By tool, Nike MSI and Eco metrics as guidance. Filippa K Code of Conduct where we cooperate with Fair Wear Foundation for the social part. FK CO2 calculation tools for materials and transportation We use the Natural step's four sustainability principles as guidance .We have started to use Teds Ten and MSI from Higg Index as a guidance for some products as well".

It can be seen that the approach between the two answers were different regarding the tools that they use to measure brand equity.

As for how garment collection can augment customers' engagement with the brand, the answers of Filippa K manager was that "Yes it can augment. It is about trust between us and our customers, showing respect to our products, being able to have a new deeper kind of dialogue with our customers, to be able to invite them on our journey." On the other hand Nudie jeans manager mention that the repair program that the company use "bring consumer more close to the Nudie jeans philosophy and inspire them to live in a specific lifestyle environmental friendly".

4.2.5 Suggestions regarding the future

Finally regarding future suggestion for the continuation and improvement of their End of Use programs, the clear answer that can be mentioned came only from the Nudie jeans manager.

She mention “since we are selling more and more, of course we will have more improvements to do. The plan is actually to increase this business in all shops that we are opening. Of course we will continue this way but I think that in order to do this successfully we need to be more structured and to have a better system for collecting jeans”.

Filippa K manager answers that it is too early for them to mention possible suggestion for the future.

5. Discussion

In this chapter authors present their findings and discuss them in combination with the theory that was earlier introduced. The chapter is divided in thematic sections that include both findings from consumers’ perception and managers’ perception and are highlighted by the chosen theory.

5.1 Lack of substantial information

According to the research, a great majority of consumers tend to the idea that there is not enough information provided by fashion companies in Sweden about their EoU programs. Consumers are unaware about what companies actually do in that field of their corporate responsibility and need to know more about their procedures. There is a huge gap between the information that companies think they provide and those that finally communicate to the consumers.

From the research of five different focus groups, clearly stated out that consumer face difficulties to say how EoU programs works and what happens in the post purchase part of a garment. Participants link this fact with the absence of transparency that in combination with limited information for these programs create vague scenery of insecurity and suspicion for consumers.

Due to Rogers (2003), when consumers have to face a new condition or innovation they need to be familiar with this in order to react positively. Rogers (2003), analyses a model about adoption of innovation that is preferable in many cases when consumer's adaptation to a new entry in the market is important for its success. For instance the same model has been used in situations like internet banking and internet shopping. In the same scope Aldas-Manzano ,et al. (2009) based on the results of their research mention that consumers choices and decisions are mainly based on the knowledge they have about their choices and the alternatives of them. Lack of awareness on competing alternatives, lead most of the times consumers' behaviors .That can explain on a great extend the low involvement of consumers in recycling garments so far especially when someone compares it with the same participation for other materials of daily use.

Both managers and consumers, which participate in the research, tend to the same thoughts. From the side of consumers it is important to see what happens with the collected clothes and identify results and prospect that these practices lead to a good cause and it is not for the profit of a company only. When they don't know how it works and their information are limited to few ad campaigns in stores or on a webpage then they can't be motivated in supporting a procedure that takes time and effort for them.

Retailers from their side are aware that the story they show to consumers is characterized by complexity and promotes mainly indirect profits that consumers are not that aware in order to understand. As Nudie jeans manager clearly stated is that the company doesn't follow a particular long term marketing strategy on promoting their end of use programs but instead they take short actions and decisions on doing so. This is related to the answer of many consumers about the lack of knowledge they have for the nature and the importance of such programs Due to Birtwistle and Moore, (2007), consumers are more likely to change their clothing consumption and disposal attitude only if they become highly alerted and aware of the consequences that their behavior has in social and environmental terms.

Finally, as both managers and consumers commented to questions regarding changing behaviors it always takes time and effort in order to reach the long-term goal especially when we refer to such new practices like EoU programs in fashion industry. As Birtwistle and Moore, (2007) conclude in their research, it is probably in the near future that companies need to adopt a more effective policy to inform consumers about clothing

disposal alternatives. Increasing consumers awareness and persuading them to change their “throwaway culture” as they did with glass, plastic and metals it is almost impossible without constant advertising and messages that target to educate consumers towards this direction.

5.2 Difficulties in brand associations

Brand equity as a term, describes the ability of consumers to identify a brand easily and recall its uniqueness and advantages. It is the favorable position that a brand has in consumer’s mind and as a result the possibility of a positive reaction to its marketing mix compared to the other brands (Keller, 1993). The most important condition that can reassure that a consumer can focus on brands’ strength and weakness is their awareness of the brand. Consumers need to know the brand and its reputation and differentiation in the market in order to be able to make their own associations related to a brand name. (Keller 1998)

Due to Rangaswamy, et al. (1993) brand associations are the ideas that are connected with a brand and distinguish them from other brands. Associations are valuable for a brand since it’s the tool that can lead customers’ decision making in purchasing its products. (Kapferer, 1997). The same importance of brand associations confirmed from many theories and it is highly valued in connection with brand equity contributing in probability of brand choice and reinforcing brand loyalty (Keller ,1993).

Following this, research findings present that it is obvious that the majority of participants were not able to make any connection of a brand name with EoU programs. It was very hard for them to recall a brand that have experience, see or even heard from other people that uses programs such as recycling garments, resell as second hand or repair. For most of them these activities are so new and difficult to translate that can be connected in regard with the lack of promoting that fashion companies in Sweden have in order to communicate the procedures of EoU programs.

Participants with a background in fashion admitted that they know some brands that have EoU programs although they mention that this is mostly connected with projects they had to prepare for school courses and not to their experience as consumers. Nudie Jeans and Filippa K were the brands mostly referred from participants about their activities and some of them

knew exactly what they do in order to create specific associations for instance about Nudie jeans with their repairing service and recycling of garments and Filippa K with second hand clothes collection. But this knowledge came only from consumers with specific academic background as mention which doesn't support the link that typical consumers have with EoU programs.

As Nudie jeans' manager mention their marketing activities are influenced by their EoU programs in a great extend so it is by all means a factor that plays an important role in the building of their marketing strategy. Also, although Filippa K's EoU program is still in its first step, the manager underlines the importance of a marketing strategy in order to associate consumers more with their philosophy and strength their brand name. Here it is essential to refer that although Nudie jeans set EoU program as a core value to build their brand equity the answer regarding the marketing strategy that is currently being followed by the company is not long term oriented. This of course is link not only with the associations that consumer can have with the programs but also with the poor substantial information that consumers have and discussed above.

On the other hand, another brand that was mentioned for its project with recycling bins in stores was H&M leading to very important views concerning this research. When some participants mention H&M as a company, they have addressed that runs EoU programs. Most of the participants though, took a clear view towards H&M and its brand marketing regarding its "green" activities. There was a general suspicion towards H&M's recycling garments activities and once again it appears the issue of transparency as something that lacks from brand's marketing and process. Consumer tend to be suspicious about the real goals of H&M regarding recycling ,consider that project very conflict since H&M is a company with a great volume of production worldwide.

It is very important for a brand to build its own image from the beginning of embarking in the market as a brand with severe CSR sensitivities in order to distinguish itself from the rest brands that will take the chance to perceive it as a trend. As some of the participants stated ,companies like Nudie jeans is more likely to make clear associations with EoU programs since it has these kind of services from the beginning, while companies like H&M need to work harder with their transparency for not being suspected for "green washing". Only when brand associations create a positive

feeling in consumers' mind can influence their choices and augment their intention to purchase and accept brand's extensions. (Cobb- Walgren et al. 1995)

5.3 End of use programs turn to an important advantage for companies

Brands with high equity can create competitive advantage in the firm and get the opportunity for successful flexibility towards competitor's pressures while at the same time builds barriers in competitive entries. (Farquhar, 1989)

In correspondence with results of the focus groups all the participants point out that EoU programs can offer only advantages to companies that use them. When the process is clear and there is the proper communication strategy regarding these projects then companies can have a strong competitive advantage in the market. EoU programs that are offered in a form of service for the customer such as the repairing section of Nudie Jeans is an important tool for creating loyal customers that apart from their brand preference will bring more customers with them in future visits. As companies often state what cost more in time and money is to gain new customers rather than keeping those that a company already has. If we put aside the frequency of purchasing products, loyalty in customers create the right condition for brand success and that is a factor that can bring in the doorsteps of a brand, new customers without any additional cost. (Aaker, 1991)

Apart from the repairing project, recycling garments on the whole seem to gain consumers approval and favorable acceptance under circumstances as Nudie jeans say. There is lot of things that companies must rethink and take into consideration in order to make them work properly and enjoy all the possible advantages that EoU programs seem to enclose. Participants- both managers and consumers- mention the necessity of showing to the consumers where all this effort ends up. Vouchers can be seen as a positive motivation but alone can't guarantee customer's participation since it's being seen as another way to make money and contradicts to the main idea of the process since it promotes further consumption. Examples like

vouchers can be seen only as a short term promotion to consumers the philosophy behind EoU programs.

Nevertheless, if companies follow the right track and amend the process and their communication strategy they can create a competitive advantage at the moment through the EoU programs. These programs consist something new for the fashion industry and it can be beneficial for companies that will incorporate them to their strategy as long as they are still in the beginning. Chouinard (2006) refers that companies that are open to diversity and know how to evolve themselves and adapt properly in urgent changes are these companies that will survive in the long run.

5.4 Brand's equity model transformation

For this research, authors based their theoretical framework on David Aaker's model about brand equity. As already mentioned in the theoretical framework of this research, the theory behind brand equity is the relation that it has by providing value both to consumers and to firms .On the one hand it can add value to the consumers by helping them to understand and evaluate the variety of information that received from them and also to affect them into the decision-making of purchase a product from a particular company. On the other hand it can be very useful to the firms by providing better solutions in order to improve and enhance products or create new ones with result of attracting new customers and keep current in the brand. (Blackston, 2000)

As determined by previous researches, there is a direct connection and interrelation between the four brand equity dimensions (Yoo et.al., 2000). According to Aaker (1991) brand awareness is the leading factor in regard to the other three dimensions of perceived quality, brand loyalty and brand associations. It is indeed a fact, that perceived brand quality depends on brand awareness due to the fact that a well-established brand is easier to provide increased quality (Zeithaml,1988).Furthermore, brand associations also depends on the brand awareness factor because it is useless for a company to market its attributes until it has built a sufficient brand name (Aaker,1991).Moreover, brand loyalty also influenced by the other three dimensions.(Yoo and Donthu,2002) .Those four dimensions of brand equity reflects to the consumers' views and perspective about the brand, thus they

are closely related with the marketing and consumer behavior part (Barwise,1993 ;Yoo and Donthu,2001 ; Yoo et al.,2000). The last perspective that is included in Aaker's framework about brand equity is the other proprietary brand assets. This represents according to Aaker (1991) all the patents, trademarks and distribution channels that can give to a company the protection from the competitors and tie the consumer stronger with the brand.

For this research the element of brand assets seems to have an important association with the use of EoU programs and play an important role in the connection of these programs with the brand equity of a company. Aaker's brand equity model it is not directly a consumer related factor, nevertheless is interrelated with the other four dimensions of brand equity because it leads to the development of competitive advantage. Analyzing the feedback authors got both from interviews and focus groups there is a very interesting insight to the primary model of brand equity that Aaker introduced, related with the equity's building blocks of brand assets and the competitive advantage they lead to.

As Nudie jeans' manager mentions EoU programs is a crucial chapter for the company since they consist its backbone in building company's brand image and a tool to enhance brand loyalty between its customers. The manager refers to their Ecocycle™ project as the centerpiece of Nudie Jeans that ensures the perfect quality for their customers with respect to the environment and at the same time reflects to the core values of the brand.

Furthermore, it is stated that they support the project of dry jeans in order to give the best quality to their consumers. From manager's answers so far it is clear that Ecocycle™ influence both four consumers' based equity dimensions of Aaker's model. But the most important aspect is the fact that EoU program according to Nudie jeans is linked with the fifth dimension of brand equity, the other proprietary brand assets. Manager points out that Ecocycle™ is a trademark used only by Nudie jeans and company's goal is to build a sustainable company known for their environmental sensitivities and awareness.

It is obvious that more or less all companies will need to apply an EoU program in the future as she mention. According to manager's perception having already adopted a plan and a strategy that includes programs such as repairing and recycling of garments, the company has already a

competitive advantage both from financial aspect and brand awareness compared to other companies. As they mention in Nudie jeans , nowadays more and more companies will have to focus on applying EoU programs more or less.

As for Filippa K , the manager mention that there are many reasons for using EoU programs. According to manager's comments, taking control of waste garments will be a necessity in the next years. This will create a competitive advantage to a company that applies such programs. Furthermore, from a more holistic view, it is mentioned that recycling will be a core brand equity aspect for their company. Clearly both CSR managers mention the necessity of applying a variety of programs such as recycling or repair. It is observed that from their answers where they highlight repeatedly how essential this is.

Comparing the results from the interviews with the managers and the answers from the participants in the focus groups, they lead to the assumption that EoU programs seems to be conceived as a new attribute with many possibilities towards a brand equity with strong reflections on the competitive advantage that all companies strive to acquire in the marketplace. Taking as an example the figure of Aaker's model ,that is been described in details in the theoretical framework chapter of this paper, authors suggest a new building block in brand equity's depiction.

EoU programs can be positioned as an important aspect that originates from a brand's assets and create an important competitive advantage that gives value to the firm. Although this can happen only under certain conditions such as adopting these programs from the beginning or through transparency in all the steps of the procedures and proper customers' education. If these conditions are followed by a company, then EoU programs can lead a brand to successfully acquire competitive advantage. That explains why authors in the figure below ,position EoU programs outside the main block of brand assets since from the results it is obvious that it is not a rule that EoU programs are assets for a brand but they have the potential to be considered as assets .

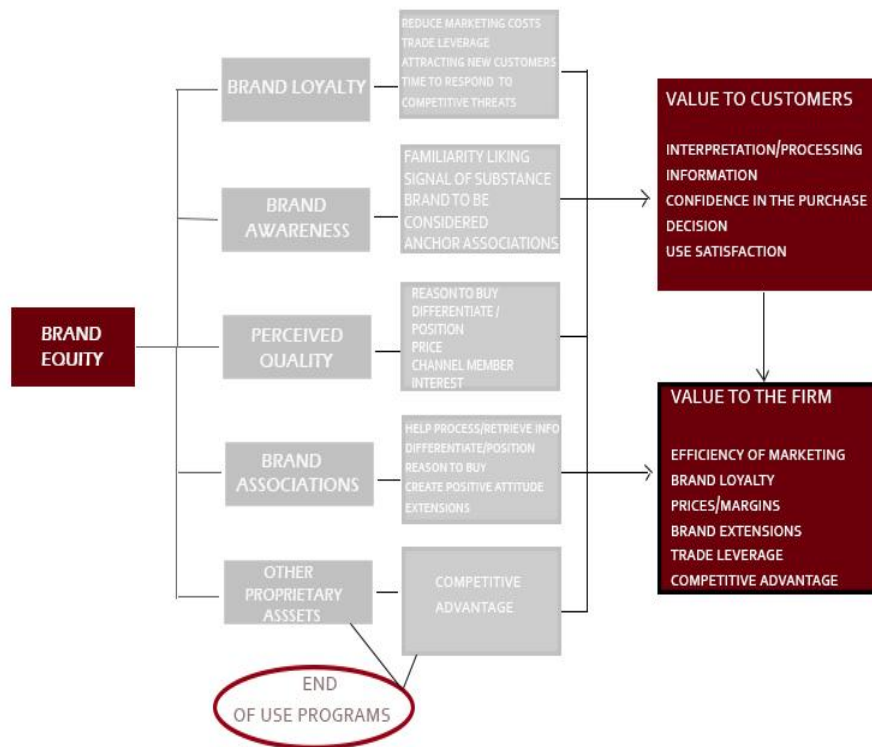


Figure 5: Brand equity’s model and end of use programs (Author’s model based on Aaker’s model about brand equity, 1991)

6. Conclusions

In this chapter, the authors address if the research question was answered and the purpose of this study was successfully fulfilled. Furthermore, there will be explained the reasons that led to these conclusions in relation with the theoretical framework that given.

According to the previous chapters and in particular the chapter of the discussion, the authors ended up in the conclusion that the research question of this paper came up with an answer. It can be observed by the progress of this paper that the answer to the research question is built clearly. It is obvious that EoU programs influence the brand equity of companies in the fashion industry of Sweden in many different ways that are presented in detail.

Based on Aaker’s (1991) model the authors successfully justified all the connections and influence that EoU programs have on the brand equity of a fashion company regarding the Swedish market. The goal of this paper

through the research question was to answer 'how' this can possibly happen and the reasons that came to the surface are significant and imperative to be taken into consideration from companies.

The conclusions that came up are a result of both the interviews that authors had with CSR managers and consumers. The importance of the results is that they can be observed from two different angles. The first is the professional view referred to the results from the interviews with the CSR managers and the other the consumer view referred to the focus groups with the consumers which give a more spontaneous view of the connection between EoU programs and brand equity of a fashion firm.

According to this research paper EoU programs create competitive advantage to the firms considering the fact that can be identified as a brand's assets in the core of brand equity dimensions of Aaker's model (1991). According to the figure presented above, that was developed from the actual theory and the results, it can be seen very clear that the authors strongly conceive end of use programs as a competitive advantage that will enhance brand equity of a firm by creating value to the consumers and this value will be transmitted from them to the firm in return.

Furthermore, analyzing the influence of EoU program in a broader conceptual framework, it has been concluded that the marketing strategy is a significant factor that influences the brand equity dimensions and it has serious effects in relation with EoU programs. It has been highlighted the importance of promoting the end of use programs with an efficient way, which so far it doesn't exist and inform consumers more on how companies deal nowadays with these programs. There is a general feeling that companies don't know how to market end of use programs successfully and consumers are aware of this fact and in many occasions they become suspicious since there is a lack of transparency.

There is a small awareness of the nature of EoU programs between consumers in the fashion industry and their education towards this project is unequal compared with other recycling materials activities. Fashion companies should focus more on developing strong marketing strategies and find better solutions to approach consumers than little information on their websites. They need to have long term goals to achieve the preferred awareness of their end of use programs and not to think on a short term period to gain fast results. As it is already mentioned, the marketing strategies can influence the brand equity and their absence will restrict

competitive advantage that end of use programs can create and develop higher brand equity.

Last but not least the overall conclusion is that the importance of end of use program on building strong brand equity is undeniable. The authors believe that companies that are or will be planning in the future to establish that kind of programs should be ready to build and consider those programs as a core value of their strategies in the brand equity framework. Building the competitive advantage that end of use programs can provide, leads a company one step forward from competitors in the eyes of consumers. After all, consumers are the final judge and the reason that brand equity can be strong.

To summarize it is important to mention the conclusions of this paper towards the relation between EoU programs and brand equity:

- lack of a long term marketing strategy to promote EoU programs to the end consumers influence negatively the support of brand equity
- lack in the transparency of the procedures that take place in EoU programs create insufficient questions to consumers
- EoU programs can create important competitive advantage and can be established as a brand asset that differentiates a fashion firm from the competitors.
- the role of EoU programs in establishing high levels of brand equity is critical due to the fact that both managers and consumers consider it an important element of the brand equity.

6.1 Suggestions

The suggestions of this paper is regarding to the authors important to gain attention from professionals and even from consumers. First of all the issue of communication between companies and consumers addressed with details in this paper in a great extend.

Place EoU programs in the core value of a fashion company

As identified in order to create value to consumers regarding a brand that use EoU programs certain aspect play crucial role to achieve that. Before all the other suggestions the first one that overcomes the other is to build those programs inside the core value of a company and make it

irreplaceable part of the overall strategy. Here it is essential to mention that the effectiveness of this suggestion is very valuable especially to companies that are new in the market. For them it will be easier to enhance brand equity through consumers if they establish soon enough EoU programs as a core strategy. For established companies like H&M that started to run lately these programs will have to give more effort regarding the communication that will have to achieve with consumers through strong marketing channels. This leads us to the next suggestion.

Building long term marketing strategies

It was explored the lack of applying a productive marketing strategy from both the managers and consumers in this paper. This inability in creating a good marketing strategy influence the brand equity when it comes to the promotion of EoU programs. Through this research the suggestion that is expressed is that, evaluating what marketing strategy will be followed and adapt those strategy in order to bring results in a long term run is essential. Depending only in short actions of promoting EoU programs can create more problems rather than give solution. This of course can be easier to be achieved through companies that since the beginning had clear environmentally oriented firms. Regarding companies that shift now or will change in their future in order to come closer to environmental issues, the creation of strong and long marketing strategies will be even more necessary in order to successfully achieve convincing consumers about their motivations and goals. In order to achieve this of course, they need clear procedures towards EoU programs, something as discussed is missing in the current situation. The next suggestion is exactly about that issue.

Establish transparent procedure of EoU programs to consumers

As mention in the conclusion chapter the lack of transparency is also an important issue of EoU programs regarding the brand equity. Transparency of these procedures in order to become more understandable and familiar to the consumer is becoming a necessity. Consumers know and understand why to recycle other materials such as plastic or paper but they have a lack of knowledge of the importance of managing textile waste.

Building special channels with consumers is necessary in order to “clear the mystery” behind these procedures is a clear suggestion that authors

strongly support. In order to build strong marketing channels as discussed in the previous suggestion, firms need to take into consideration how clear is the procedures of post purchase management in consumers. Establish clear and transparent channels that will support the familiarity of consumers with EoU programs will bring them closer to the firm. Thus it will be easier for them to gain and understand the knowledge that company will seek to give them about different procedure and this will respond positively to the consumer and overall to the brand equity.

Contribution of the paper to the academic world and professionals

Knowledge behind brand equity is more or less very famous to the researchers all over the world. Famous authors like Aaker or Keller have been writing and analyzing a lot the brand equity issue. EoU programs in textile industry on the other hand is also an issue that nowadays especially started to challenge many academics in order to explore it more in terms of the environmental sustainability which is an interesting and important topic. Throughout this research the authors found many sources and theories behind both brand equity and EoU programs.

Yet throughout a very deep research, authors find out that there was a gap in research so far concerning the relation between EoU programs and brand equity. The contribution of this research from an academic view is that it gives the opportunity to researchers to analyze waste management and investigate its relation with the brand equity of a firm. The researchers have the opportunity to take this study one step forward and take advantage of these results in order to build their own theories consider this paper as a beginning towards the relation of brand equity theory and EoU programs.

Regarding a more professional aspect, the contribution of the paper is also important. Professionals in the area of fashion try to achieve the connection with the consumers in the issue of EoU programs. They struggle to find ways in order to communicate those issues and create value for their firm as it was addressed from the interviews. On the other hand consumers addressed their problematization about the methods that used so far from the companies in order to give to them the right results.

This paper contributes to the professional world regarding the market of Sweden towards these issues and gives clear analysis of the problems, the advantages and suggestions in order to set the rules that can lead to a

strong brand equity. Managers can take into consideration two different views, both from managers and consumers and make their own conclusion.

6.2 Delimitations and future research

It is imperative to distinguish some important limitations that this research paper has in order to set the base for further research in the future.

First and foremost, the research was conducted in Sweden and it corresponds to Swedish market. All of our participants were either Swedish in origin or residents of Sweden with a minimum of one year residence in the country. The companies as well that participated in the interviews were both of them Swedish companies well established in the country and well known between Swedish consumers. It is not easy to comment in what extent these results can be adaptable for other countries of Europe or even more for countries outside Europe since Sweden is a country where recycling activities are familiar between its citizens in their everyday life.

Furthermore, since the research should be completed on a limited time plan it wasn't possible to realize it in a wide range and a bigger sample of companies. Even if focus groups' number ended up to be a satisfactory sample, only two companies participated in the interviews and maybe there would be other important aspects from different companies concerning the investigated topic.

Moreover, EoU programs that researchers took into account for this research are basically those that are connected with consumers' involvement and participation. These programs are basically recycling garments in collecting bins and repairing that some companies use. The concept of EoU programs has more activities that don't demand consumers' participation but since they are so new it was hard to investigate and researchers decided not to take them into account.

Additionally, for the aim of this study it was important to perceive only the aspects that are connected with brand equity and thus are important for its effectiveness for companies in relation with their consumers. Consequently, companies' strategies and financial aspects were not under investigation for this research.

Last but not least, the authors based their theory about brand equity basically on the model that Aaker suggested and has been studied for many years and further researches. Thus, the suggestions concerning

brand equity are particularly based on this model since the results are connected and validated theoretically on this and researchers focused mainly on consumers based equity.

From what someone can derive from the above it is obvious that there is the necessity of further research in the future due to the importance of the topic and the fact that there is a gap in research since end of use programs is a new concept. One first suggestion from the authors would be that since this paper presents a qualitative approach it would be an interesting and important extension to be conducted again in a quantitative approach this time.

Another important dimension of this paper would be to repeat it in a different cultural and national concept. It can be a wider and bigger research in other European countries and maybe it will be interested to be done with consumers that are not highly aware with recycling and eco friendly activities to see a different aspect.

Lastly, a view that this research showed is the importance of brand awareness concerning the end of use programs. It would be very important to investigate in the future how companies that use these programs market themselves and focus to make their customers more aware about their activities. Since brand awareness is a significant dimension of brand equity this research showed the lack of proper marketing in recycling garments but due to its importance it needs to be further investigated.

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APPENDIX 1(interviews with managers)



Master Programs: *Fashion management & Textile value chain management*

Master thesis research: *Do end of use programs affect a company's brand equity?*

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Is there any particular tool or criteria that companies use in order to measure their brand equity?
- As a manager in a company that runs an end of use program with the contribution of consumers titled "Nudie jeans eco cycle" what do you believe that are the most important benefits that a company can have from these programs?
- Why recycling garments is important for fashion companies nowadays?
- How satisfied are you with your recycling program so far?
- From your experience so far, how do you see the consumers' participation and interest in this kind of sustainable efforts (garments recycling and collection)?
- How successful is this program specifically in Scandinavia? (Considering consumers participation and amount of collected garments)
- Are your customers very familiar with your recycling program? (even if they don't participate) Do you believe that they can easily make connections between your brand and these programs?
- The consumers that choose to participate in these recycling programs can be categorized on a specific profile due to their lifestyle or this is something that fashion companies can't control or measure?
- Do you think that through garment collection a company can augment customers' engagement with the brand? Give a short explanation on your answer.
- From your point of view which do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of using the recycling bins in the stores?
- If your company decides to continue this program in your perception is there something that can be improved or change to make it more successful?

APPENDIX 2 (focus groups)



Master Programs: *Fashion management & Textile value chain management*

Master thesis research: *Do end of use programs affect a company's brand equity?*

Focus groups

- What comes to your mind when you hear this phrase “End of Use programs”?
- Is there any company that you can recall for its end of use programs?
- Have you ever notice recycling bins for garments in stores?



- What is your opinion about recycling garments in stores?
- Which do you think are the benefits for a company that runs projects like the one you watched? (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dADI8ASJMZ8> –video presented)
- Did you ever have the curiosity of learning more about a brand's end of use program?



- Can you give a positive and a negative characteristic about recycling garments? (video presented- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fW-rm3Lu3CM>)
- Have you ever leave clothes that you don't need anymore in a bin in a retail store?
- Can you perceive actions like recycling in store and repairing as actions that create competitive advantage to a company?
- Is any of your favourite brands run a recycling program in store?

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