JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY

*Jönköping International
Business School*

"If everyone knew, no one would buy Fast Fashion."

A study on how Swedish Slow Fashion companies promote themselves in order to sustain a competitive advantage.

Bachelor Thesis in Business Administration

Title: "If everyone knew, no one would buy fast fashion"
A study on how Swedish Slow Fashion Companies promote themselves in order to sustain a competitive advantage.

Authors: M. Jonsson & M. Solaja.

Tutor: MaxMikael Wilde Björling

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Abstract

Background: The globalisation of the fashion industry has allowed competition to increase and speed up the production. This has influenced supply chains to give up on ethical factors in order to push sales of cheap, Fast Fashion. The concept of Slow Fashion developed to challenge the unsustainable business models of fast fashion, implementing conscious production. However, it is hard to compete with cheap price and rapid production and therefore the promotion plays a crucial role in the survival of Slow Fashion companies. Even though green marketing and demarketing have been investigated as promotional strategies, no research has been dedicated towards promotion strategies that benefit Slow Fashion business models through keeping the company values.

Purpose: This paper seeks to identify how it is possible to promote the Slow Fashion business model to motivate the customer to choose Slow Fashion.

Method: In order to fulfil the purpose and answer the research question, a qualitative study was implemented through semi-structured, in depth interviews of which the results were compared and analysed with existing research and theories. The interviewees were all selected from their expertise regarding the subject. Participating companies were selected through convenience sampling and the experts participating through snowball sampling

Conclusion: The results shows that providing the consumer with transparency, information and anti-consumption would be a successful way to promote Slow Fashion businesses in order to stay competitive. However, it is uncertain if using one of these strategies leads to a competitive advantage. One has to keep the same message through all elements of the promotion in order to stay true. The proposed promotion strategy ought to be involving the consumer through communities and repair shops and going together as a movement of the whole industry.

Acknowledgements

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1. Introduction

This chapter gives the reader an introduction to the background of the topic, followed by a presentation of the problem formulation, the purpose and research question. At last, key terms are presented.

1.1 Background

The innovation of technologies enables the expansion of globalisation within the fashion industry. This has increased the consumption patterns around the globe due to higher living standards among developed countries (Zamani, Svanström, Peters, & Rydberg, 2015). Looking at the statistics of textile consumption in Sweden during the last two decades, Carlsson, Hemström, Edborg, Stenmarck, & Sörme, L., (2011); Zamani et al., (2015) states that there was a national rise of approximately 40% of apparel consumption at a micro level. Indicating a trend of increasing consumption of textiles (Naturvårdsverket, 2018). Furthermore, the majority of textiles consumed are in the form of clothing and shows steady growth over the last years (Naturvårdsverket, 2018). Studying the consumption patterns of the average Swede, 8 kg of clothes are thrown in the garbage every year, while 2.4 kg are given to a charity (Öbrink, 2016). In 2014, the Swedish fashion industry generated over 260 billion SEK in total sales, increasing 11.4% compared to the previous year (Sternö & Nielsén, 2015). Environmentally, this is stated as negative since the ecological footprint from consumption nationwide is already measured to be almost four times larger than what is considered sustainable over time (WWF, 2016).

When an industry grows it generates positive as well as negative changes, both economically, socially and environmentally. Various authors have demonstrated that the environment is negatively affected by the growth of the fashion industry (Lo, Yeung, & Cheng, 2012; Ekström, Gustafsson, Hjelmgren & Salomonsson, 2012; Joy et al., 2012). Cotton clothing, which accounts for half of textile production, requires vast amounts of fresh water; 10 000 litres to 1 kg of cotton (Miljömålsrådet, 2010; Leahy, 2015; Naturskyddsföreningen, 2017). Over the last 10 years, the demand for trendy, cheap clothing options has increased significantly. However, quality does not follow the same trend due to Fast Fashion business models (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010; Vehmas, Raudaskoski, Heikkilä, Harlin, & Mensonen, 2018).

Fast Fashion is described as an actively responding fashion business model, keeping minimal costs throughout the supply chain and encourages rapid consumption followed by disposal (Joy, Sherry, Venkatesh, Wang, & Chan, 2012; Boone, 2009). Fast Fashion retailers such as Zara and H&M have extended what before was a four seasons fashion industry into launching new fashion collections on a weekly basis. In order to increase revenue, these retailers work with the idea of keeping collections for limited periods of time, and encourages the customers to make frequent shopping sprouts not to miss out. Scarcity, therefore, plays a part in the Fast Fashion ideology (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010; Tokatli, 2008). Fast Fashion companies, in general, have an average profit margin of 16% while companies that do not classify as Fast Fashion (e.g. luxury brands) have a profit margin of 7%. Due to the possibility of doubling the profit margins, many companies follow the Fast Fashion trend, ignoring the sustainability aspect (Sull & Turconi, 2008). Consumers purchase more clothes because of the low prices and rapidly changing trends result in people not wearing all the clothes purchased. An example of this is, in Germany, an average adult has about 18 pieces of clothing that have never been used (Iran & Schrader, 2017).

To challenge the growth of Fast Fashion and disposal consumption, the concept of Slow Fashion emerged. This philosophy was supposedly coined with influence from the Slow Food movement in Italy in the 1980s as opposed to the popularity of Fast Food (Fletcher, 2010; Kahn, 2009; Clark, 2008). Slow Fashion, also known as eco-fashion, (Joy et al., 2012) does not mean slow supply chains and long lead-times, but instead emphasises thoughtful consumption and ethical, sustainable supply chains (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013) with minimal environmental impact (Joergens, 2006; Boone, 2009). This concept encompasses the whole marketing mix (Clark, 2008) and just like other businesses, Slow Fashion companies aim to generate sales and profits from the products or services they offer. However, Slow Fashion companies have a different business model which emphasises balance and sustainability across economic and environmental systems (Fletcher, 2010). Fletcher (2010) states that the sustainability of fashion can not only focus on the producer but also customer purchasing intentions. Consumers are, with the influence of marketing the main factor that Fast Fashion companies sell large quantities of clothes (Iran & Schrader, 2017; Niinimäki, 2010). Companies use promotion to create higher customer demand of their products (Reich & Armstrong Soule, 2016; Peattie & Peattie, 2009) and thereby persuade the customer to make a purchase decision (Grove, Carlson & Dorsch, 2007).

Derived from the newness of the concept of Slow Fashion, insufficient research has been conducted on the promotional aspect and success factors of its business model. Although, companies that fit in the frame of a Slow Fashion company have succeeded with promotional campaigns. The Slow Fashion company Patagonia Inc had an advertising campaign during Black Friday 2011 called "Don't buy this jacket" (Patagonia Inc, 2011; Reich & Soule, 2016). The company encourages consumers to buy less and be more conscious about their purchases and aimed to achieve the opposite effect of traditional marketing known as demarketing (Kim, Ko, & Jin Kim, 2018). Demarketing, as coined by Kotler & Levy in 1971 (Kotler & Armstrong, 2015; Reich & Soule, 2016) has evolved into green demarketing campaigns which aims to encourage "*Reduced overall category consumption for the sake of environmental protection*" (Reich & Soule, 2016) and decrease of consumption to benefit the environment (Lo, Yeung, & Cheng, 2012; Ekström, Gustafsson, Hjelmgren & Salomonsson, 2012; Joy et al., 2012;). Possibly through using green demarketing (Reich & Soule, 2016; Trompf, 2011; Sodhi, 2011). Consequently, Patagonia's Black Friday campaign saw revenues increase by 30% compared to the same day the previous year (Ryan, 2014), giving the opposite effect to that of what the promotional message suggested.

Non-regarding of the efficiency of demarketing strategies, the Swedish Consumer Agency (2018), show that 27% of the Swedes consider the environmental aspect when making purchase decisions regarding apparel, and possibly chooses to consumer green products. However, Statista (2018) show that the market for fashion in Sweden is estimated to continue to grow with the competition. Due to that increasing competition in the fashion industry, it leads to pushing prices and thereby lower production costs. One could argue that Sweden is a good market for investigating how Slow Fashion companies should design their promotional strategies to achieve and/or sustain a competitive advantage - whether it is through marketing or demarketing.

1.2 Problem

The concept of Slow Fashion is relatively new, and no unified definition is stated (Boone, 2009). When the researchers are referring to Slow Fashion, the definition in this paper is accordingly:

"Slow Fashion is a way for businesses to prioritise quality and sustainability through supply chains rather than mass consumption. It minimises negative environmental effects and encourages thoughtful consumption." Slow Fashion is also referred to as conscious fashion or eco-fashion (Joy et al, 2012; Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2014). However, Slow Fashion will be used.

Previous research shows that fashion companies are beginning to construct their business models in a more sustainable and ethical manner (Moisander & Pesonen, 2002), even though the market is somewhat contradictory regarding sustainability between attitudes and behaviour (Joy et al., 2012). Several studies show that awareness of unsustainable consumption of apparel and higher customer willingness to pay for apparel made outside the Fast Fashion industry (Joy et al., 2012; Gam, Cao, Farr, & Heine, 2009; Kahn, 2009; Pookulangara et al., 2011).

Research exist on how to market products in a sustainable manner and/or market sustainable products - green marketing (Groening, Sarkis, & Zhu, 2018) involving manufacturing, processes, positioning and promotion in a way that does not harm the environment (Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch, Sinkovics & Bohlen, 2003). Although, all marketing is somehow encouraging consumption, which has a negative effect on the environment (Lo, Yeung, & Cheng, 2012; Ekström, Gustafsson, Hjelmgren & Salomonsson, 2012). There is existing research on how companies are using green marketing as a marketing tool. However, due to the new concept of Slow Fashion, available research lacks the success factors of how Slow Fashion companies build their marketing strategies. The purpose of promotion is somewhat contradicting the purpose of implementing in a Slow Fashion business model. Hence, it is a complex task to sustain a competitive advantage in the market while dealing with slow consumption.

1.3 Purpose

Due to the lack of research on Slow Fashion promotion, this paper seeks to identify how it is possible to promote the Slow Fashion business model to motivate the customer and create value. Therefore, the research aims to answer the following research question:

How do Swedish Slow Fashion companies promote themselves in order to sustain a competitive advantage?

This study focuses on the promotional perspective of the Slow Fashion model (Business to Consumer). The research aims to find factors and strategies on how to promote sales without encouraging disposal consumption. This may help companies adapt to the Slow Fashion movement, and thereby decrease the negative environmental impact generated by the Fast Fashion industry.

1.4 Target Audience

The target audience for this paper is professionals/students in the area of Business Administration and Business Economics with knowledge within marketing. The researchers of this paper have made an assumption that the reader has the applicable knowledge of understanding the research. Hence, no definitions or explanations regarding marketing related or business-related vocabulary is provided.

1.5 Key Terms

Slow Fashion, Fast Fashion, Competitive Advantage, Promotion Strategy, Green Demarketing, Fashion Promotion, Motivational factors.

2. Literature review

This chapter gives the reader an overview of existing research and literature that are central to this study. This will allow the reader to understand and follow the empirical data and analysis in chapter four and five.

2.1 Literature Collection

Information for the literature review has been gathered from Primo library system, Google Scholar and Web of Science. The key terms stated above were used as search words. To reduce the risk of acquiring outdated information primarily as recent studies as possible were used.

2.2 The Fashion Industry

The fashion industry is associated with short product life cycles, product variety and complex supply chains (Şen, 2008), and thereby the industry has problems keeping up to the sustainability aspect (Bruce & Daly, 2006). In 2004, 75% of all clothes were outsourced to developing countries such as Bangladesh and India where wages are low and then shipped as fast as possible to the west-world countries to minimise costs (Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2014; Bruce & Daly, 2006). Consequently, this is fuelling the globalisation of international fashion retailers, hence the knowledge and willingness to produce the garments have moved away from the western countries (Tokatli, 2008). It is argued that the fashion company Zara had their competitive advantage in the owning of production plants, designers, and all parts of the supply chain, but as competition has risen, the company operations started to spread parts of the production outsourced to low-cost countries. This change is supposedly derived from the trend of the fashion industry, aiming to speed up all processes to provide clothes that mirror the latest fashion trends shown on the catwalks around the globe (Reinach, 2005). It can be supported by the evidence that previously, there were four fashion seasons: Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter. Today most retailers have multiple seasons which pushes further consumption (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). The fashion giant Zara launches new clothing lines twice a week, building their business model on rapid stock turnover (Bruce & Daly, 2006). Another giant, HM, competes with receiving shipments with new styles on a daily basis (Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2014). Further, it is stated that the companies put big money into need creating

promotion of the apparel to encourage customers to buy these new trendy clothes (Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2014).

Klepp & Storm-Mathisen (2005) argues that consumers as individuals have no power to decide on trends as the fashion industry creates attitudes and tastes, which in its turn forms social status. In contrast, other authors believe that consumers have a greater ability to impact production within the industry (Iran & Schrader, 2017; Becker-Leifhold & Iran, 2017; Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). Several studies conclude that fashion helps with portraying social status, gender and class. Even the intimate elements of feeling sensual can supposedly be strengthened by wearing the "right" fashion (Klepp & Storm-Mathisen, 2005). When it comes to social status and fashion, there has always been a contradiction between sustainability attitudes and actual consumer behaviour (Kilbourne & Beckmann, 1998; Székely & Knirsch, 2005; Van Wijk & Persoon, 2006). Finding that customers in general are price sensitive, the prices should be kept low (Joy et al., 2012). However, there is a gap between the claimed consumer attitudes towards sustainability and the actual consumption patterns (Schill & Shaw, 2016; Young, Hwang, Mcdonalds & Oates, 2010; Phipps, Ozanne, Luchs, Subrahmanyan, Kapitan, Catlin, Gau, Naylor, Rose, Simpson & Weaver, 2013). Research done by Ciasullo, Mainone, Torre and Troisi (2017) supports the gap aforementioned, showing that customers are willing to pay 20% more for a product from a sustainable fashion brand. This portrays the consumer ability to impact the trends, opposing to the Klepp & Storm-Mathisen arguments. The gap suggests that Fast Fashion brands aim to sell more low-quality clothes for a low price, rather than to sell high-quality clothes at a higher price. Furthermore, clothes that are trendy are one of the most important aspects of the customer purchase decision, and even though an organic cotton t-shirt can be worn in the daily life, it might not meet the style of other social occasions (Joy et al., 2012).

2.2.1 Fashion Consumption

The consumption patterns in the fashion industry have over decades changed. Nowadays, fashion consumption has increased all over the world and an average adult has in general 95 pieces of clothing in their wardrobe (Iran & Schrader, 2017). Becker-Leifhold & Iran (2017) argue that 30% of clothes that an individual owns has not been worn in the past year and a portion never being worn at all, suggesting that consumption patterns indicate that consumers are buying more clothes than they are going to use. Quantitative studies measure that 83% of the respondents identify their image with their apparel. 33% of the sample focus their

consumption based on quality, whereas 33% focused on status (Ayman & Kaya, 2014). The same study shows that men are more likely to identify with sincere, high-quality brands (Men 60% vs Women 40%), eg. Adidas, while women are more likely to identify with fashion and trendiness which is in line with brands such as Zara and Top-Shop (Men 40% vs Women 60%), which business models are based on a fast fashion strategy. Bhardwaj & Fairhurst (2010) suggests that there is lack of empirical understanding how consumer motivate their purchase decision when buying clothes that need to be investigated, while Becker-Leifhold & Iran (2017) argue the opposite, saying that the research focus should be on sustainability and the life cycle of clothes. All authors agree that consumers are the biggest factor for a future sustainable fashion industry in order to reach sustainability within consumption. (Iran & Schrader, 2017; Becker-Leifhold & Iran, 2017; Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010).

One may then wonder what signifies sustainable consumption. Defining sustainable consumption builds upon complexity between social action and environmental concerns (Phipps et al, 2013). Existing literature suggests that sustainable consumption is related to anti-consumption (Black, 2010; Sharma & Jha, 2017). Black (2010) argues that the most powerful force to not consume lies with the individual consumer. He states the reason why the gap between attitudes and behaviour regarding sustainable products exists is due to anti-consumerism activists who agrees to consumption of green product. However, they are choosing to not even consume green products hence they aim to reuse, reduce and recycle their current possessions. The author proposes that a sustainable community does not necessarily require encouragement of green consumption but may just encourage consuming less.

2.3 The Role of Promotion

Promotion is used by businesses on various occasion in order to reach a specific goal (Rehnman, Yusoff, Zabri, & Ismail, 2017), usually to construct consumption experiences (Grönroos, 2008; Vargo & Lusch, 2004) and win equitable value to the business (Ballantyne, 2004). With increased competition, the need of good promotional strategies for any business has grown stronger (Azad & Hassanjani Roshan, 2014). Fashion consumers both expect and thrive on constantly changing trends. This signifies that fashion companies, none regarding of size, need to understand how to reach out and cut through the noise to get the customers (Tokali, 2008). The interactive relationship evolved through communication helps to create brand value from the consumer perspective (Grönroos, 2004). Ballantyne (2004) argues that the dialogue

with the customer is what makes a business grow due to the creation of consumer trust. What the previous author means is that the response of the customers is the achievement of the open-ended communication and can be measured as feedback, purchase decisions or attitude change. Grönroos (2004) supports this theory by stating that in order to retain a high brand value relationship with the customers, the business needs to plan an open communication strategy with the interaction as its core.

Literature suggests that the consumer motivation which is building up to a purchase decision can be expressed as a linear function: information → concern → action (Ibrahim & Al-Ajlouni, 2017), meaning that the promotion to behavioural change should be persuaded at the informational stage to build concern.

Ibrahim & Al-Ajlouni's Customer Motivation Function
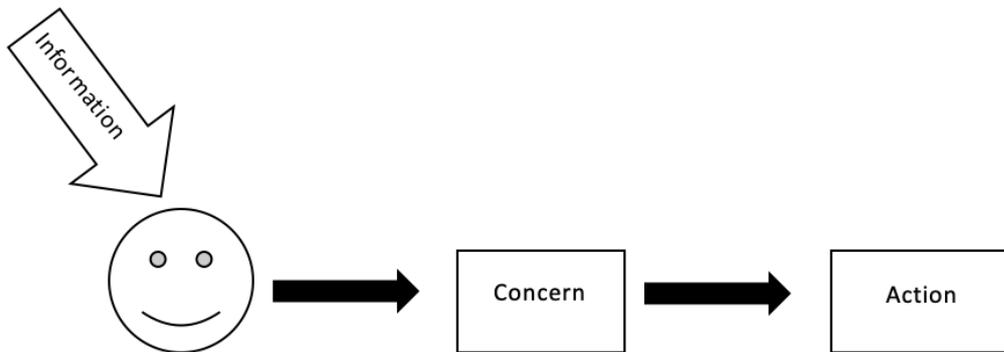
Figure 1. Ibrahim & Al-Ajlouni's Customer Motivation Function

The concern is said to force the consumer to take action (in this case regarding the matter of consumption). Sequentially, it is argued that an obstacle appears when wanting to create awareness about sustainability (Schill & Shaw, 2016). However, according to Pomering & Dolnicar (2009), this can be solved through a good promotional strategy where the brand is showing its ethical and sustainable violation. The communication should portray how changed behaviour will be affecting the long-term environmental impact (Böhm & Pfister, 2005).

2.3.1 Fast Fashion Promotion

Fast Fashion companies promotion strategies build upon a communication strategy with intent to sell and/or increase demand through the tools of advertising, direct marketing, sales promotion and/or public relations (Grönroos, 2004; Sodhi, 2011). Sodhi (2011) argues that the scarcity of resources combined with the global destruction puts a crucial need from the marketer to consider how much consumption consciousness is required in regard to the image in line with the brand values. Although, when promoting Fast Fashion, big money is put in to get the customer to feel that it is okay to consume more than needed (Hammond, 2018).

Companies such as the shoe brand TOMS, use the promotion strategy saying that if a customer buys one item, an equal item will be donated to a person in a developing country (Talpalaru, 2014; Hammond, 2018). The authors point to the unethical practice in promoting unwished gifts since the receiver is expected to show gratitude for commodities when in reality all they wish for are necessities for survival. This portrays a misleading picture for the customer which may influence their attitudes towards the brand and thereby the purchasing decision (Trendel, Mazodier & Vohs, 2018). Frijda & Goldstein (1988) states 11 "Laws of Emotion" which are commonly used as branding strategies. Among these is one law called *The Lightest Load* which is argued to minimise the emotional load of the consumer though aware of the impact of consumption. This emotional "law" makes the consumer feel like they deserve to purchase the product and is beneficially used when referring to promoting a low-involvement product (Frijda & Goldstein, 1988) and is in line with the promotion strategy of companies such as TOMS.

2.3.2 Slow Fashion Promotion

Slow Fashion is a business model built on sustainable and thoughtful consumption (Joy et. al. 2012; Fletcher, 2010), and does not work accordingly with regular advertising goals of increasing demand. A common, more suitable manner of promoting the "slow" brands which create higher value for the customer is through authenticity. This communicates the transparency, genuity and origin of the products (Becker, Wiegand & Reinartz, 2019), giving the customer the choice of thoughtful consumption rather than pushing mass consumption (Buendgens-Kosten, 2014). Even though marketers rely on authenticity as a crucial key factor in advertising, vague research has been concluded on the empirical proof of the impact on consumer behaviour (Becker et. al., 2019). The authors argue that although there is no monetary indicator that this promotion strategy is profitable, it gives the company the chance of

preserving the brand essence, honours the brand heritage and shows a realistic plot through credible communication. This in its turn can be seen as a differentiator hence the honesty is strengthening the company's brand image (Becker et. al., 2019; Beverland, 2005), hence reflecting its core values (Beverland & Luxton, 2005). Supporting this, Shaw, Grehan, Shiu, Hassan & Thomson (2005) highlighted that it is crucial to make the customer aware of the value of ´self-discipline' when making the purchasing decision, hence it is always easier to buy cheap goods from a short-term perspective. A common promotional strategy to overcome this short-term intent is to base promotion on emotional criteria and to play on the guilt aspect of not purchasing the product with the intent to gain sales (Burnett & Lunsford, 1994).

2.3.3 Demarketing

Farquhar & Robson (2016) describes demarketing as the aim of decreasing the demand for an offering and is viewed as an expensive tool (Sodhi, 2011). Grinstein & Nisan (2009) argues that it is not clear if demarketing works well in general. Further, Sodhi (2011) proposes that the fact that is it costly and hard to see the long-term benefits from a business perspective concerns the likelihood to encourage a change of customer purchasing behaviour.

2.3.3.1 Green Demarketing

The concept of green marketing has been a trendy topic of discussion over the last years evolving from the problem of over-consumption and scarce resources, but doubts have grown regarding if encouraging consumption at all can be sustainable in the long-term (Reich & Soule, 2016). On the other hand, most environmental issues identified from consumption focuses the resolutions on taking care of resources in a sustainable manner and decreasing rates of harmful chemicals over the supply chain (Sojin & Jin, 2014; Goodland, 1995; Niinimaki, 2010). However, none of them lifts the aspect of awareness to the consumer through marketing, although it is through promotion that it is possible for companies to communicate messages to persuade customers to consume differently (Soule & Reich, 2015; Peattie & Peattie, 2009; Grove, Carlson & Dorsch, 2007). According to Reich & Soule (2016), green demarketing, is defined as "*a brand's strategic attempt to reduce consumption at a category level through encouraging focal brand purchase, ostensibly out of concern for the environment*". However, it is being stated that the relationship between this concept and the consumer perception of the drivers needs further investigation to realise if this is a sustainable concept.

2.4 The Customer Perception

Research shows that motivational factors impact the value estimation (Ibrahim & Al-Ajlouni, 2017), leading to a customer reaching a purchase decision. These motivational factors or drivers, can range from high product quality to saving money and it is the core of sales promotion to point out these drivers to generate customer value (Rehnman et. al., 2017). From a brand perspective it is suggested that within the industry, customer attractiveness shows from low prices, differentiation and easy access to products (Ellahi, Arshed & Shamoon, 2012). However, the traditional perception that value is created by the attributes or manufacturing of products has been challenged by the theory that customers make their own value estimation in the value generating process (Wikström, 1996; Grönroos, 2006, 2008). Vargo & Lusch (2004) stated that the co-producer of value is the customer, given the role to co-create the value between the brand and the customer based on their perception. Moving away from the one-way mass marketing to a two-way, interactional communication strategy, the purpose of the promotion is therefore ideally to create transparency and trust, leading to higher brand value and decreased costs from being a customer (Grönroos, 2004).

2.4.1 The Customer Purchasing Decision

Tokatli (2008) argues that companies look into consumer behaviour when understanding which trends that are attractive in the industry. Highly responsive communication channels are used into convert information to products. The most crucial aspect of succeeding to sell a product is looking at the need or want of the customer at the design stage (Ellahi et al., 2012) and understand what attributes the target customer values (Shaw et al., 2005; Sharma et al., 2017; Grönroos, 2004).

A customer purchase decision is usually following the 5-step buyer decision-making process of 1. Need recognition 2. Information search 3. Evaluation 4. Purchase 5. Post-Purchase evaluation (Kotler & Armstrong, 2015; Darley, Blankson & Luethge, 2010; Mcgaughey & Mason, 1998).

Kotler's Buyer Decision-Making Process

Need Recognition	Information Search	Evaluation of Alternatives	Purchase Decision	Post-purchase Behaviour
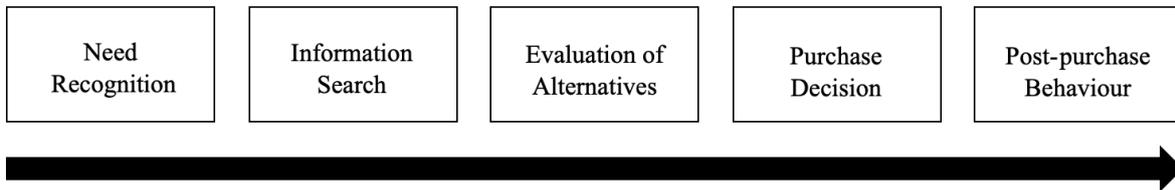
Figure 2. Kotler's buyer decision-making process

The customer is, based on their own values and motivating criteria, going to evaluate the company brand versus the competitors from the product attributes being functional, symbolic or emotional (Dawar & Parker, 1994). It is suggested by some authors that product class knowledge has an impact on the purchase decision of the customer (Ellahi et al., 2012), showing that high product knowledge helps the customer to faster reach a decision (Karimi, 2015). Karimi, Papamichali & Holland (2015) suggest that the promotional design should be adapted to the intensity of the buyer decision-making process. From knowing that low product knowledge makes the customer go through the model in circles before making the decision, it is suggested to present the main concept of the product towards the beginning of the search process to reach a more efficient decision. Other authors argue that the price and the brand name of a product have a high influence on the customer purchase decision non-regarding to the current advertisement (Ahmed, Johnson, Yang, Kheng Fatt, Sack Teng & Chee boon, 2004; Dawar & Parker, 1994). As earlier mentioned, there are several drivers leading up to a purchase decision (Ibrahim & Al-Ajlouni, 2017. The authors show upon previous research giving insight that response-efficiency (decreasing negative environmental impact) and self-efficiency (feeling important in the reduction of pollution from sustainable consumption) increases the consumer willingness to make active purchase decisions, whereas any perceived cost such as money, time or higher inconvenience decrease the purchase intention.

2.5 Competitive Advantage

When a company has a strong market position or has an outcome of their actions (e.g. profitability) that puts them in a favourable position it's called competitive advantage. When sustaining this for a longer time period the company achieve a sustainable competitive advantage (Maury, 2017). Furthermore, Lewis & Hawksley (1990) embraces the importance of differentiation from competitors in order to sustain a competitive advantage and supports what Maury (2017) is explaining. The authors also put the focus on the great importance of understanding the target audience, especially in the fashion industry.

2.5.1 Factors Generating a Sustainable Competitive Advantage

Existing research indicates no unified opinion on what factor that generates a sustainable competitive advantage. As competition is continuously increasing, the products are becoming more and more similar, offering more or less the same attributes (Grönroos, 2004). Therefore, Grönroos (2004) argues that a sustainable competitive advantage needs to be reached on values coming from other qualities of the brand. Based on the motivational factors, if the company does not want to lower the price of the products, only improvements in the service process can give a sustainable competitive advantage. Elliha et al. (2012) also state that if the service quality is good, it will strengthen the brand equity both from the business and the customer perspective. Looking from a corporate perspective, Gupta & Benson (2011) explains that sustainability in the supply chain nowadays creates value for the business rather than being a cost. They also argue that sustainability is a key driver for innovation which is a way to achieving a competitive advantage. However, Kwarteng, Dadzie & Famiyeh (2016) argues in their research that corporate image is an important variable in corporate performance which is some cases, are related to the sustainable actions of a company.

3. Methodology and Method

In chapter three the methodology of the study is presented to the reader. First of being presented is research philosophy, research approach and research strategy. Following this is the sampling process, participants of the study, method of collecting and analysing data. Lastly, the trustworthiness of the study is presented.

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Ontology

Subjectivism is an open-minded assumption on how the world operates and commits and argues there are as many realities in the world as there are individuals (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). Changes in the environment and circumstances are elements that affect decisions, actions and intentions and there are no set rules hence constant change and adaptation to the world (Saunders et al., 2012). The interviewees of this paper are all individual business people within the Slow Fashion industry and therefore have different perspectives on the questions asked. Even though competing in the same market, all companies have slightly different intentions which lead to highlighting different actions to be taken. When analysing underlying factors of success within promotion, one needs to take a subjectivism approach to understand the desired behaviour. Therefore, the research will use the subjectivism approach given the open-minded interpretations of qualitative data through interviews when seeking for themes.

3.1.2 Epistemology

Epistemology regards what is accepted as valid knowledge and involves the relationship between the researchers and the topic being researched (Collis & Hussey, 2014). An individual can view what knowledge is in one way, but this knowledge may or may not be considered as knowledge for another person and therefore subjective. (Saunders et al., 2012).

This paper aims to analyse promotional actions of businesses to seek for underlying success factors. The researchers considered knowledge subjectively in order to take all the information collected into consideration. The aim is to keep biased opinions and/or literature out of the field of research, and therefore a subjective take may be more valid. Regarding the interviews, the knowledge collected primarily will be of the highest importance to understand perceptions of different companies within the same industry. However, since the paper investigates Slow

Fashion companies' promotion strategies, elements of a rather objective take may be used as some information is interpreted and applied in the same way between different interviews.

3.2 Research Philosophy

The interpretivism approach highlights the complexity of understanding that individuals have different social actors and is of the highest importance when analysing behaviours and opinions. Interpretivism involves understanding the *meaning* of phenomena to get deeper knowledge and not the *frequency* of the phenomena which is related to positivism (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Since the purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of how Slow Fashion companies successfully promote themselves in a highly competitive industry, an interpretive approach appropriate to explore answers to the research question. This is due to the interpretation of the interviewee's actions and individual opinions. The interpretivism also suggests qualitative studies to have a relatively small sample size to analyse in-depth (Saunders et al., 2012).

3.3 Research Approach

When conducting research, the researchers have the choices of gathering qualitative data or quantitative data. Qualitative research is done through getting a deeper understanding of a topic or phenomena through interviews or focus groups. Quantitative research is data driven and the purpose of the research is to test a hypothesis (Saunders et al., 2012). Since the purpose of this study is to understand how Slow Fashion companies promote themselves rather than measure it, a qualitative approach was implemented. This enables the study to investigate a deeper understanding regarding the actions and strategies taken by the companies and is of relevance when doing interviews to connect with theories.

3.3.1 Deductive Approach

There are two ways of connecting theory to research. When research is based on existing theory, the paper uses the deductive approach. Opposing this, the inductive approach is used when the researcher lacks knowledge about the topic being researched. In the end, the research conducted is being used to construct a theory (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013). This study is using the deductive approach since the research gathered will be connected to clear theory and try to build an analysis of how the theory is connected to data gathered. Although, the paper will show elements of the inductive approach due to theories used may not cover all the data and

new insights as well as perspectives gathered when conducting the research (Saunders et al., 2012). Due to this, the scope is relatively wide since theories used can evolve or be proved wrong from new data not related to the theory being accepted and evaluated (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013). One might argue that the abductive approach is more suitable, but due to confusion among authors in the field and no clear definitions, the authors of this paper choose to use the deductive approach with influences of an inductive approach.

3.4 Research Strategy

To examine the promotional strategies which may enable Slow Fashion companies to sustain a competitive advantage, one would need to interview people within these companies with appropriate knowledge and experience from the promotional and managerial activities. As for this study, interviews were strategically chosen to collect in-depth opinions and attitudes regarding promotional strategies as it aims to understand *how* Slow Fashion companies can sustain a competitive advantage and *what* success factor(s) there are (Saunders et al., 2012). Due to the mixed research approach (deductive with elements of inductive approaches), the interviews were collected as a multiple case study. Case studies are especially appropriate when trying to understand something within an organisation (Saunders et al., 2012). When comparing similar, individual experiments to test relationships or differences between results of different organisations it is referred to as a multiple case design (Collis & Hussey, 2014). This study aims at reaching a literal replication since the reason of the study is for organisations related to Slow Fashion may learn from it (Collis & Hussey, 2014).

3.5 Method of Data Collection

3.5.1 Semi-structured Interviews

An efficient way of gathering high-quality, primary data when wanting to dig deeper into behaviour is through interviews. When using this method of collecting data one is enabled in-depth understanding and insights of the individual being interviewed. One may read into interpretations based on how he/she is using body language, showing expressions and reacts to certain questions. This information could be useful when analysing the data (Collis & Hussey, 2014). The primary data in this paper was collected through semi-structured interviews. This is one of three forms of having interviews with the other two other forms being structured interviews and unstructured interviews. Using semi-structured interview, the researcher uses different themes and questions that need to cover. Different from structured interviews, semi-

structured interviews give the freedom of adding questions to interview while it is conducted. The flow of the conversation may change the direction of questions because some questions might lead to a different path. This makes it easier for the researcher to adapt to environment and conversation but still avoid running over time and to gather unnecessary information (Saunders et al., 2012).

In the case of understanding how companies work with Slow Fashion semi-structured interview where prepared. It is of highest relevance to ask open questions which are not leading the interviewee in any biased direction to reach valid results. The interviewer's task was to ask question-based on prepared topics and example questions in order to get sufficient answers. For example, when asking "What does Slow Fashion mean to you?" the interviewee has the opportunity to answer freely and the interviewer can later on ask follow up questions. The purpose of the research is to get an understanding of how companies work. The person being interviewed was able to talk freely and the conversation was audio-recorded (with the consent of the interviewee). By doing this we can highlight certain parts of the conversation and go back when writing the empirical findings and analysis (Saunders et al., 2012).

3.5.2 Sampling Method

The companies in this study were selected through convenience sampling, also referred to as natural sampling. This type of technique to collect data is beneficial as one may determine interviewees based on profession or knowledge within the topic investigated. However, it requires time and effort to ask and persuade companies to be a part of the study (Collis & Hussey, 2014). The reason why convenience sampling was used to enable rich, in-depth information that can be analysed in order to provide further understanding regarding promoting Slow Fashion. The negative aspects of the sampling method are the risk of bias in the sampling process. This is something that was taken into consideration since the researchers have knowledge about the majority of the chosen companies (Saunders et al., 2012).

The paper seeks to identify promotional strategies that are beneficial to sustain a competitive advantage in the Slow Fashion business. Hence, two experts within the field were included to gain insight from another perspective than from the companies whom have an economic interest in the business' promotion strategy. To gain access to interviewees, the researchers use their network of contacts. The expert who first was came to mind was not available, but recommended experts in the Slow Fashion field with similar expertise. Hence, the expert

sample was contacted using the snowball sampling method. Bryman & Bell (2011) does express the problem aspect with snowball sampling, arguing that the sample will not be representative of the population. Something that had to be taken into consideration when choosing which expert to contact. As mentioned before, due to a small sample of four companies and two experts were chosen because of relevance to the case study.

3.6 Participating Companies and Interviewees

The four companies interviewed are all operating the fashion industry and use the Slow Fashion philosophy according to their individual interpretation in their businesses. Two of the companies are working with men's' fashion and two are working mainly with women's fashion. The two experts chosen are considered to possess advanced knowledge about Slow Fashion and the fashion industry in general. The participants in this study did not get any compensation for participation. Although, the study gives Slow Fashion companies an understanding of how marketing works in the industry.

3.6.1 Asket AB

Asket was founded in 2015 and is based in Stockholm, Sweden. The company's mission is to end the era of fast consumption. The focus is on basic clothing without logos and has a permanent collection of clothes. The aim is to create garments that are worth investing in. Furthermore, the company offers full transparency on the factories used as well as showing their price strategy. Full Traceability is a project which the goal is to trace every single part of the garment to ensure the quality and fairness of the workers making all the parts. The interviewee representing Asket was August Bard Bringéus who is the CEO of Asket as well as head of market, product and web. He is one of two co-founders and has been with the company since it was only an idea and a desire to create better clothes.

3.6.2 Blankdays AB

Blankdays is a clothing company based in Jönköping, Sweden. The company is founded by Johan Lundell which has been working at both Dressman and Stadium as Head of Design and at Junkyard.com as Head of Purchase. Blankdays goal is to be a sustainable brand and create the best essentials in the world through the choices of materials but also production techniques and ethical working conditions. T-shirts, hoodies and underwear are some of the basic garments that Blankdays offers, completely free from logos.

3.6.3 Company X

Retailer who chose to stay anonymous, is located in Gothenburg, Sweden. The business is based on a Slow Fashion business model. However, the interviewees' interpretation of Slow Fashion is that the design needs to be timeless. Therefore, the company claims not to be completely Slow Fashioned from a design point of view, even though it is incorporated in the business model. The company hand-picks small-scaled, sustainable designer brands to publication in the product line. Due to this participant asked to be anonymous in the paper any reference to this company will be referenced as *Company X*.

3.6.4 Soot Sthlm/Legnology

Legnology & Sootsthlm are two Slow Fashion Companies based in Stockholm, Sweden, founded by Anna Takahashi and Annette Lind. Legnology was founded in 2012 with the mission of providing pantyhoses that fit bodies non-regarding of type, that stay up and that don't break, through sustainable production. In 2016 Soot Sthlm was founded by the same women to provide a minimalistic Slow Fashion garment line for the consumer to wear with the pantyhose. The quest of the two brands is to treasure quality over quantity.

3.6.5 Experts

The experts in this study were acquired by a snowball sampling method through Johanna Nilsson, who is viewed by many as an expert in the Slow Fashion field. She has released the book "Slow fashion - din guide till smart och hållbart mode" as well as being the owner of the blog, www.slowfashion.nu. Johanna was not able to be interviewed but highly recommended two other Slow Fashion experts.

3.6.5.1 Expert Ann-Sofie Bergort

Ann-Sofie is an economist and entrepreneur with more than 10 years of sustainable fashion experience in the fashion industry. Today Ann-Sofie is working at the company Varié that are selling used premium clothes that people send in, Filippa K Collect and Remake Stockholms Stadsmission. With her great knowledge in the industry, Ann-Sofie is today working with developing the business of Varié.

3.6.5.2 Expert Maria Lagerman

Maria has a history of working with Redesign for Stockholm Stadsmissions' fashion brand Remake. After 6.5 years of creative works within the fashion, she just switched positions to

consultant guiding towards sustainable business development within the textile industry. Her primary expertise is focusing on conscious fashion and textiles.

3.7 Empirical Data Collection

3.7.1 Interviews

All the interviews with companies and with experts for this paper was semi-structured. The companies were recruited through convenience sampling and the experts through snowball sampling. When the interviewees agreed on being interviewed a time proposal was given to the participants. Due to most companies and experts being seated in Stockholm or Gothenburg, all interviews were done through video-call on Skype. The only exception is Blankdays that are seated in Jönköping and therefore that interview was held face-to-face.

The interviews were conducted with one researcher holding the interview while the other was taking notes and elaborating deeper insights through occasional follow-up questions. When the interview was conducted the participants were first asked to give consent to use his/her name and company name in the paper as well as recording the interview. All interviews gave consent to be recorded with two devices. Then the interviewer briefly explained what was researched and in what purpose of the research.

To make the participant comfortable the person was asked to explain their who they are and what they do to make the person comfortable. Then the interviewer asked general question divided into four categories: Industry, product, brand and promotion. Since the semi-structured interview approach and open-ended question (Appendix 1), some new question appeared such as "can you elaborate what you mean with that?". This was done to gain a deeper understanding of what the participant was saying. When the interview was done the interviewee was asked if he/she had any questions or comments about what has been discussed. The researcher once again asked for the participants' consent to use their name and company name in the paper. After this, the interviewee was thanked for their participation.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

The ethical aspect when conducting research is highly important to legitimate research and act morally (Saunders et al., 2012). Bryman & Bell (2011) explains four main areas where unethical manner can occur: harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy

and deception. As mentioned earlier in the interview process, the interviewees were asked for consent to share name, company name in the paper (both in beginning and at the end of the interview) as well as to being recorded. This was done to avoid any confusion or trespass privacy. Due to the purpose of this study being to identify promotional success factors in their business models, the participants could share private information that can be harmful to both participants and the company itself. Therefore, the participant was informed that any question may be declined if the interviewee felt it was intriguing. All companies participating except Company X, were either founders or co-founders and all stated that they speak for the company and themselves. The experts were asked to talk about the fashion industry and Slow Fashion, in general. to avoid putting focus on fashion companies.

3.9 Data Reductions

When all primary data was gathered the second step in the process was to transcribe all the data in order to get a bigger picture of what has been collected. Saunders et al. (2012) explain reduction as summarising and simplifying the data making it easier to focus on the more relevant data for the research. When all the interviews were done and transcribed properly the most relevant parts were highlighted, put into themes and then translated from Swedish into English to get a further understanding of what the primary data shows. The themes and connections founded is the result of how the empirical data are presented in the paper.

3.10 Data Analysis

Semi-structured interviews are based on themes rather than set questions as a structured interview is. This gives the researcher more freedom to adapt to the environment and how the participant is behaving (Saunders et al., 2012). Clarke & Braun (2017) describes thematic analysis as "a method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning ('themes') within qualitative data" and is therefore suitable for this study hence looking for a successful promotion. This gives the researchers, not just a straightforward method of analysing but also flexibility around the research question. The four thematic categories *industry, customer, product and promotion* will be based on the themes asked in the semi-structured interviews to analyse the empirical findings correctly and truthfully.

3.11 Trustworthiness

To ensure quality and lower the risk of reaching misleading results Guba and Lincoln (1994) proposed ensuring trustworthiness of the research. This is achieved through credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Since this paper is a qualitative study and the results are difficult to reproduce, this approach was chosen.

Credibility is argued by Bryman & Bell (2011) to be the path that researchers ensure that all aspects of the social world are included. Strategies to obtain credibility can be done through respondent validation or triangulation. This study uses triangulation by using multiple sources of information to gain a deeper knowledge and back up information with different research.

The next part of achieving trustworthiness is transferability which translates to the degree other respondents can be interviewed for another context. Since qualitative research usually uses a small sample group, it can be difficult to transfer results (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In order to achieve transferability, the researchers will use transparency to not limit the research to only Slow Fashion but also to other parts of the industry.

Dependability along with confirmability has an effect on how reliable the research is. Achieving dependability is done through keeping a record of everything accomplished in the research including a record of participants, interview transcripts and decisions of the analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Everything needs to be accessible to ensure the quality of the research. Confirmability, on the other hand, has an impact on the bias and if objectivity of the researchers can be achieved. Bryman & Bell (2011) argues that it is impossible to be completely unbiased in business research. Since research are gathered through semi-structured interviews the risk of subjective questions rises. By ensuring that all information presented is based on what the participants said, the risk of bias reduces heavily (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In this paper, the researchers argue and utilize from theories and methods compared to primary data in order to avoid bias.

4. Empirical Findings

In this section, the findings from the semi-structured interviews will be presented. This will give the reader an understanding what was uncovered in the process of collecting data. Chapter four is the foundation of the analysis and discussion later in the paper.

4.1 Companies And Experts

A table have been conducted together with labels for each company on expert to clarify and make it easier for the reader to follow in the text. Companies are labelled as C1-C4 and expert are labelled as E1-E2.

Label	Name And Occupation	Interview Type	Duration
C1	August Bard Bringéus. CEO and Co-Founder of Asket	Skype	00.33.37
C2	Johan Lundell. Founder of Blankdays.	Face-to-face	00.31.16
C3	Head of Marketing, Company X	Skype	00.42.18
C4	Anna Takahashi and Annette Lind. Founders of Soot Sthlm and Legnology	Skype	00.53.51
E1	Ann-Sofie Bergort. Expert working at Varié.	Skype	00.33.45
E2	Maria Lagerman. Expert working as Sustainable Business Development Consultant	Skype	00.41.40

Table 1. Interview participants

4.2 The Industry

4.2.1 View On The Fashion Industry

In the introduction of the interview, the interviewees were asked to share their view on the fashion industry today. All participants shared the view of the industry exploiting global natural resources and human resources mainly in poor countries. The view that the industry has escalated during the last 50 years is highlighted through several interviews. C1 and C2 agree that not only globalisation influences that companies can manufacture cheap clothing from poor countries, but also that consumers nowadays have little knowledge about the processes of production.

"We have during the last 50 years gone from everyone knowing about quality. Our parents squeezed, felt the fabric and chose carefully when they bought clothes. To the fact that, in step with globalisation, a generally prevailing consumption image. The consumer wants to get everything at any time." - C1

"All areas need improvement. The big companies need to understand what sustainability really means. [...] If everyone knew, no one would buy Fast Fashion." - C2

Interviewee C1 and C2 explain that the business was founded to cover a gap in the available market, which then developed a passion for sustainability when understanding the complexity of the industry.

"It actually started from a rather concrete consumer problem. We as consumers were frustrated about the supply on the market. We had a lot of clothes in our wardrobes but used pretty few of them." - C1

C4 explained that when working with major clothing brands one realises how unsustainable the supply chain is. She felt that she could not support that activity and decided to resign. She and her business partner identified a gap in the market for quality pantyhose which eventually led to starting a business focusing on creating good quality, customized for human of all sizes, fair tights. The big inspiration for C3 is the passion for creating a more sustainable environment. Therefore, C3 expresses the ethical issue of working with a new production of apparel, even if the concept of the business is related to slow fashion. Even though providing

a lot of timeless designs, C3 also admits working with trends and styles which risks clothing to be out of season. E2 expresses that she loves fashion and different styles but that the industry is using resources in a way that will not work in the long-run.

"There are many pantyhose brands, but pantyhose has not developed so much since they were invented" - C4

"If digging deeper within this [fashion], it is still problematic for us to work with new production" - C3

In the end, when talking about the industries all interviewees express that today, the passion for changing the fashion industry is stronger than when they started the business. This is due to the knowledge of the nature and humans are suffering from big companies making a profit.

4.2.2 Consumption of Fashion

In the perspective of fashion consumption, C1 and C2 work with basic men's clothing. Both companies believe in the philosophy of purchasing fewer, more expensive garments lasting over time. C1 expresses that men's basic wardrobe usually is different from women's, indicating that companies selling women's clothes need more variation. C3 provides female apparel and admits to more "fashionable" clothes and tend to change the selection of clothes seasonally. However, they have long lists of what a supplier needs to fulfil in order to take in their clothes and sell in-store or online. C4 base their collections on functionality rather than fashion and the company realised the use of clothing when deciding to offer garments suitable for the workplace as well as the nightclub. Both C2 and C4 express that promoting sale on clothes is irresponsible since having sales encourages more consumption.

A permanent collection means that all our garments should be available forever. We have launched 21 garments in 4 years and nothing has been removed." - C1

"The idea is that no clothing should become an obsolete good. Yellow is a seasonal colour, but the idea is that that it should last a couple of seasons so it sells out and not be on sale to make people buy more." - C2

"There is only one planet and its 50% of us who destroy it. [...] Launching sales is so uncool!" - C4

4.2.3 Slow Fashion As Business Model

The participants were asked if they identify as a Slow Fashion company. The answers were mixed and even if the company base their business model on the philosophy, C1 and C3 express their concern about the actual concept definition. Furthermore, C4 explains that they see themselves working with high-quality clothes but not necessarily fashion since they value functionally more. The company explains that they choose none recycled materials because of its durability and explains that some recycled materials do not offer the quality wanted. Further, it is assured that sustainability may relate to product life. C2, on the other hand, says they fit the frame of Slow Fashion since they create high-quality clothes with organic cotton and carefully manages the whole supply chain accordingly. C2 further explains that some companies use organic cotton and then stop there, while other companies don't use organic cotton but have control over their supply chain and uses the Slow fashion concept.

"It's a bit of a Buzzword I think. We are a little hesitant about using Slow Fashion but we still use it." - C1

"When I think Slow Fashion, I might think more… You know, not necessarily that it should be sustainable with materials such as organic cotton etc. It is more a really timeless garment with high quality." - C3

"It is not possible to only use organic cotton and then you are done. That's what many do." - C2

When the experts were asked what Slow fashion is, E2 explained the complexity of the Slow Fashion in general and that you can't focus too much on a certain material or brand, but on the business as a whole. They are on the same path as C3 putting emphasis on understanding the whole process and not only limit it at fashion. They both indirectly say that it's not just the environment that is affected but the whole society from the producer and consumer. However, based on the consumption patterns of today's consumers, when stating what is sustainable/conscious consumption regarding fashion, E2 emphasises that it does not

necessarily need to be produced as Slow Fashion to be sustainable for the individual as long as you reflect and consume what you are actually wearing.

"What is difficult to define is that, when I think from myself, I think it is a whole. We cannot blind ourselves to individual materials or brands because everything is about a whole life cycle of a product" - E1

"We need to make sure to extend the product lives of what we produce. [...] It is also about what is sustainable for me as an individual. It could be a wardrobe full of new produced apparel that is non-organic, but of which I use all pieces." - E2

As defined by the Experts, and as for this paper, all companies are seen as Slow Fashion companies.

4.3 Customer

4.3.1 Target Audience

The customers are after all the people who decide if a company or a brand is successful. The interviewees were asked who their target customer is and how they think the customer perceives the company/brand. C1, C2, C4 define a broad customer base where the youngest customer is 15 years old and the oldest 80+ years old. Both C1 and C2 explains that they aimed for a particular demographic target audience but since they both have a basic design of clothes they caught the attention from the most environmentally cautious customer to the older men that just want a high-quality garment. C3 explains that the customer base varies depending on if the customer buys in-store or online. Once again, the scope of ages is broad but they see a difference with older women buying in-store and the younger generation online from bigger cities in Sweden. All companies state that it is hard to define a single target customer but have tried to identify a persona for the promotional messages. Further C3 states that when researching the sales related to promotion, the customers did not fit the image of their segmented target and therefore needed to reconsider how to reach the audience. When the experts were asked who the right customer for Slow Fashion is both E1 and E2 argued that it's the person that understands or starts to understand how the industry works and wants to make a change. However, one should keep in mind that the customer is not always the consumer when it comes to clothing, eg. many adults purchase the apparel for their family members.

"I had the idea of the target audience being men 30+. It was the idea and I thought it would be between 25 years and 45 years but seen to the customers I have; it is everything from 16 years to 78-80 years of age." - C2

"Basic colours make the clothes appeal to everyone from hockey kids all the way up to seniors. Our youngest customer is 14 and our oldest customer is 85 according to our latest survey." - C1

4.3.2 Brand Perception

The brand perception of a company varies but the way a company communicate with its customers is argued to have an impact on the perception. C1 expresses that from the beginning, the customer viewed the brand as high-quality clothes to decent prices. But when the brand expanded, sustainability and transparency became central along with the good price and high-quality. C1 argues that is what makes their brand so unique and that no brand in the world that has a similar brand perception. The main idea of C2's brand is that customers should value high quality clothes for their money because his products are superior on the market.

"I can't think of any brand doing the same thing. We have searched globally and in the US for brands that do similar things." - C1

C3 is aware that there may be different perceptions of the brand depending on what the customer values. The main perception of the company is fashion produced sustainable and respectfully towards the environment. C4 argues that women are loyal to their pantyhose brands when they find a pair they like. C4 claims that their brand is perceived as providing superior quality and state that once women try their products they usually become loyal to their brand.

"Instead, there are customers who have been loyal to other brands and then tried ours and understood that our brand is better." - C4

4.4 Product Perception

4.4.1 Functional or Symbolic

When the companies were asked about whether they portray their brand as symbolic or functional, they all had different standpoints. To show the variety of opinions, C1 and C2 argue that customers purchase their products based on the communicated functionality. C3, C4 and E2 all believe it requires both to be successful.

"Since we don't have a visible logotype I would say it's not so much status. For now, it's more about the product." - C1

"I'm just stating what the benefits are and why they are better than competitors." - C2

"I think both are required. For a company to survive long-term, they will have to show a sustainable profile. [...] I think the brand needs to communicate this to be accurate to the consumers and target customer, and through this create a trustworthiness which generates customer relationships." - E2

4.4.2 Pricing Strategy

All companies have a rather premium pricing strategy to prove the quality of the products. When asking E2 about how to motivate the customers to pay more for sustainability she answers that companies can create value through good promotion. E1 uses transparency when showing the price to the customer. In other words, showing the customer what makes a t-shirt cost 350 SEK. This strategy is about showing and inform the customer what it actually costs to make a certain garment as well as explaining the strategy behind it.

"You can create value through attractive communication. Then I believe the customers will pay. If they would actually understand the time it takes to produce certain products - especially if they're made by hand - they wouldn't think the prices are expensive." - E2

"Price transparency is about educating the customer about what it actually costs and at the same time explaining our pricing." - E1

4.4.3 Quality and Sizes

C2 points towards the complexity of product quality and sustainability, and that these attributes are what makes apparel sustainable over time. The company, therefore, focuses on adjusting sizes to fit a person over time through using materials that are durable. C4 is also focusing on communicating differentiation through quality to their target customers. Both companies realise that quality is a high factor in building customer loyalty. If the product is superior to other products, the consumer will love it. C1 has a similar opinion regarding customer loyalty, using a strategy to involve the consumer in the development of products. This makes the consumer feel like they are in on the journey with the brand.

"It's very rare that people can see the difference between a T-shirt and a T-shirt. [...] If you compare with some competitor who takes absolutely beautiful pictures and writes great captions, then I am really bad at it. The marketing part is my Achilles heel. I make really good products." - C2

"This is our greatest issue - we are no salesmen; we are no PR people. We are product nerds." - C4

Further C4 clarifies in a simple sentence:

"Quality is not just about the product itself. Quality starts at the desk" - C4

4.4.4 Design

C1, C4 and E2 want to emphasise the importance of keeping an up-to-date image of sustainability and Slow Fashion design to attract the consumers. They all mentioned the faulty associations that are engraved in people's perceptions, generating a perhaps negative attitude about Slow Fashion. It is important to prove that the design is according to the demanded style even if Slow Fashion does not fully follow the current fashion trends. To summarise what Slow Fashion design is nowadays, C1, C2 and C4 state that Slow Fashion is supposedly a timeless wardrobe of basic apparel, produced in a sustainable manner.

"Historically, sustainable fashion has been associated with brown hemp clothing and it has been stigmatized to a point which is almost bizarre. First of all, we must create a demand around what our products are." - C1

"Eco-friendly used to be a sales argument. It used to be beige and ugly and had nothing in common with fashion. This is not the reality anymore. It is a requirement. We have to make people curious." - C4

C2 also expresses that people in general are becoming overweight is something he has taken into consideration when designing the clothes. So that even though the customer gain weight, the t-shirt has a good fit. Although, E2 mentions that sustainability is based on individual consumption patterns. Therefore, a wardrobe where all clothes are used frequently, even if not produced sustainably, could be seen as slow consumption.

"But what has happened in the last 15 years is that people are getting overweight. Your arm won't become longer instead you get wider. So, my design is shaped very much according to that." - C2

"If you were to google sustainable fashion (at least back in the days), you would get hits on linen products, some huge hemp dress and you would associate woman 60 years of age. Everything was in earth colours. We have to show that it is both high fashion and sustainable at the same time. We have to show ourselves attractively, or else I believe the promotion won't matter. Unfortunately." - E2

4.5 Promotion

4.5.1 Slow Fashion Promotion Today

Looking deeper into the promotion, all companies are focused on online advertising, mainly using social media. There is a shared view that promoting a lifestyle and inspiration through pictures and texts, there will be a greater demand. When asking about the promotion of Slow Fashion, C3 especially highlight the difficulties in competing with big fast fashion brands that launches sustainable fashion lines, because their campaigns reach a much wider audience. E2 agrees on the problematic of competing with bigger brands. They have an economy of scale in all departments, including promotional activities, and are able to influence consumers in a wider audience. The expert mentions the advantage of working together with other brands in the promotion to draw bigger attention to the Slow Fashion market. C3 is acknowledging that there are strategies of pushing instant sales to reach sales goals, and these are extra tempting as

a small business with a tight budget. However, the company is aiming at a brand building promotion strategy. It may be hard to convince shareholders to invest in marketing activities because it is hard to prove an instant financial brand equity growth. She also mentions the importance of being able to measure the promotional impact on sales to be able to realise if the strategy was successful. This is not mentioned by any other respondent and shows how little focus is being budgeted on measuring and planning the promotion strategy within Slow Fashion.

"But there are also more competitors [...] that aren't necessarily 100 % sustainable, but that are starting to take in sustainable brands and who of course have much more money for marketing and has a far wider reach." - C3

"You are competing with big brands that can launch a sustainable capsule collection line, even if it is a per mille of all clothes that they make, they still might get more consumers, so it's a challenge with competing brands. It's important to highlight your own value. [...] Companies should work together to achieve greater results and to find a circular economy or a sustainable business solution, which is hard to manage alone." - E2

Companies C2, C3, and C4 are revealing what the marketing departments are not really prioritised within a small business, while C1 is highlighting the importance of advertising to increase the demand. C2 is aware of the importance of promotion since there are competitors are great at marketing what they produce and therefore reaches sales. C3 emphasises the reconstruction of the promotional activities of the company over the last couple of months. The realisation that the promotion needs to fit the target customer is showing that for them, the most important attributes to communicate may not be the sustainability, but a really cool dress in colours that are trendy more than just one season, and then the sustainable production is just a bonus.

"Without the commercial impulse and demand, we'll never be attractive enough to get anyone's attention" - C1

4.5.2 Promotional Strategies

4.5.2.1 Awareness and Education

All companies including the experts seem to agree on the fact that it is up to the companies to educate the consumers to choose conscious consumption because of the lack of knowledge from the potential consumers. E2, C2 and C4 highlight that the customer is naive and does not realise the process and the meaning of the materials and production. They are all in line with that it is better to inspire than to lecture and shame the consumer. When interviewees were asked about what message to promote in order to keep a competitive advantage, C1, C2, C3 and E1 mean that a combo between selling and educating marketing is what makes the business succeed. At the same time, C4 is convinced that the consumers are too naive to realise the value of Slow Fashion unless you educate them to shop consciously. The interviews revealed the honest complexity of wanting to both educate and sell at the same time. Especially brought up by C2 and C3, was that sales are what makes the business possible to sustain.

"Information and education! People don't possess enough knowledge. People are naive. If it says organic cotton or conscious shopping, then that's enough for them. [...] Then you don't have to think more about it because someone did the thinking for them, and therefore they don't investigate further." - C4

"You can't only push the sales. That's not what I stand for. It has to be a mix of education, inspiration… and selling of course. You have to survive." - C2

"We have two pillars. One is to sell - because we cannot avoid it to survive. the other is to educate the people - to spread knowledge about sustainability related to fashion."
- C3

Even though sales area needed, C3, C4, E1 and E2 claim that no fingers should be pointed, but rather to inspire consumers. Shaming customers will only make them feel inferior. E1 recommends a way of nudging consumers that aren't really there just yet and push them into the right direction through the inspiration of Slow Fashion. One should communicate in a positive tone of voice and mention the possibilities to evoke interest. One way to inspire

mentioned by all interviewees is to teach the consumer how to repair and care for the apparel. This is a way of making the consumer more conscious about the disposal alternatives.

Furthermore, when asked about how to educate the consumers through promotional activities, E2 suggested workshops as a promotional activity to increase the circularity of products and thereby extend the product lives. It also benefits the industry as a community amongst conscious users of clothes.

C1 even started an online platform to communicate individual repair workshops at home. Further ways suggested to educate in garment care is through online platforms and talking to people (WoM).

"It has been proven that aggressive promotion in these kinds of issues has a reverse effect on the consumer. It is interpreted as judgmental and reflects superiority complex." - C3

"We want to inform and inspire without pointing fingers. Instead of shaming, you could mediate knowledge in a fun way, like workshops to learn how to repair." - C4

"It's about inspiring and nudging them to choose sustainable alternatives, but also to make conscious decisions and relate to fashion in a sustainable manner." - E2

"This Black Friday we launched our garment care portal, to educate on how to repair for the apparel to live longer." - C1

4.5.2.2 Transparency

There were a few opinions shining through regarding strategies on how to build customer relationships. Transparency is a topic being raised by several of the interviewees. C1 is building the promotional message around aiming to show 100% where the materials are coming from. The goal is that every single garment will have full traceability including where the garments are produced.

In opposite to C1, E2 is suggesting that transparency will not be enough in the future in a highly competitive market like the fashion industry. When looking into what C1 is actually suggesting, they as well say that it's important to get the customer involved in the product. This leads to

the revealing of the competitive advantage of tribes. When we asked how to generate more value to the consumer C1, C2, C3 and E2 are agreed on the value of creating communities. Currently, C2 is keeping the focus of great products and limits the promotion to Social media platforms but is aiming at building up a community platform. E2 suggests that it's not enough to show transparency to convince consumers that sustainable products have a higher value, and suggests that the competitive advantage may lie within communities rather than sustainability. It seems like all companies are unified in the suggestion of customer loyalty through social communities and feeling of involvement.

"Our business model builds on customer loyalty and recommendations. [...] The customers know they will be asked to provide feedback [...] and we communicate all improvements we have made together with the customer. [...] It is the only way to get followers to build a relation to the brand and feel involved in the journey." - C1

"It's not about showing a product, but a lifestyle. This makes the customer realise the social community and wants to feel part of it. [...] It's not enough to show transparency of production anymore. [...] you need to promote visuals to generate small social communities that make people want to talk about it." - E2

4.5.3 Green Demarketing

All companies including the experts share the thoughts about demarketing presented the way Patagonia used it on Black Friday is a good PR trick and shows that the company brand is taking a stand in the question of consumption. C1, C2, and C4 have taken action according to their own interpretation of the statement, but all interviewees realise it may result in more sales other days. C3 considered closing the webshop on Black Friday, but due to sales related factors, they decided they could not afford to lose a full day's sales. However, the spokesperson for C3 argues that it would have been a great marketing strategy because it would have generated great PR. E1 had an alternative opinion on how to make a stand on Black Friday. The strategy was to higher the prices and donate the excess profit to charity. The motive was to not participate in the hysteria of sales.

"There's a difference between saying "don't buy this jacket" but it's available in the webshop than to actually close down the webshop. [...] It's about positioning and taking a stand." - C1

"If it were to happen, I wouldn't be sad about it. Because then we know people are consuming better products" - C2

*"We did a White Monday blackout. We closed down the webshop and
Instagram on Black Friday as a statement. [...] We don't want to contribute to these kinds of things." - C4*

"I think it is a good message if the consumer reflects over "They're not encouraging me to purchase just anything, but wants to offer what is good for me as an individual". [...] This may add to the credibility that you want something better than contributing to overconsumption in Sweden." - E2

5. Analysis

This section takes the empirical findings from the semi-structured interviews and presents an integrated analysis. It will give the reader a deeper understanding how the empirical findings are linked to what has been presented in the literature review as well as the research question.

5.1 Promotional Strategies

Looking at the differences between how the companies identify with Slow Fashion, it is clear that different promotional activities are needed to succeed with the business. Especially what message needs to be communicated would supposedly be interrelated with the specified target customer. From the interviews, it is agreed that Slow Fashion is more than just a green product, but rather a process starting when the materials are being created. It is understood that from setting rather premium prices, the promotional activities seem to be of high relevance to generate sales. During the interview, it was asked what the most efficient way is to make the customer value sustainability and/or Slow Fashion. When categorising the factors emphasised by the participants, a clear connection with focusing on promotion aimed to persuade the stages of motivation for action suggested by Ibrahim & Al-Ajlouni (2017) was identified. The function shows that informing consumers leads to concern, which further leads to action. Pomering & Donclair (2009) suggest that a promotion strategy stating a company's sustainable and ethical grounds may be a way to persuade consumers to choose the brand in particular. Contradictory, the results prove that ethics and transparency rather than sustainability are key attributes for Slow Fashion companies' promotional messages. The themes found are going to be presented accordingly to the customer motivation function categories and therefore the analysis built on three parts (see Figure 3) to show how Swedish Slow Fashion companies may sustain a competitive advantage.
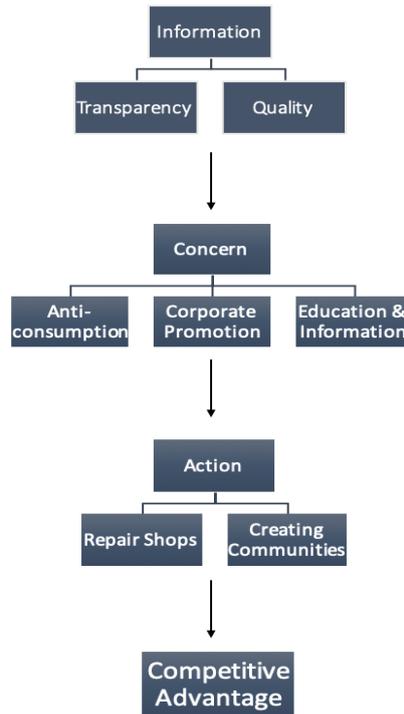
Figure 3. Thematic Analysis Coding Table

5.2 Information

5.2.1 Promoting Sustainability Through Transparency

The majority of the participants presented that promotion of sustainability through transparency is a way to connect with the customers and build relationships, which is accordingly to theories of Grönroos (2004). How to be transparent is presented differently by the participants. Some state that transparency starts all the way up the supply chain, to portray how and where every component is produced. Other means that showing transparency through what factories are producing the clothes as well as where the cotton is picked is enough. One can argue that Slow Fashion companies want to show the customer two major things through transparency. Firstly, that the clothes are made by people getting paid to survive without working extensive hours. Secondly, materials are sourced the right way, both environmentally and socially friendly. According to Becker et al. (2019), Slow Fashion companies tend to communicate transparency in order to create genuity and origin for the products which then results in higher value for the customer. This goes in line with the empirical findings since the interviewees' idea behind transparency might not be sole to state facts on the company's product page to portray the company as environment-friendly but to build a relationship with the customer to make them feel good wearing ethically and well-made clothes. Klepp & Storm-Mathisen (2005) argues

that by wearing the right fashion is the way of portraying social status or class in a short-term perspective. However, when it comes to Slow Fashion it is about wearing high qualitative apparel that will stay in style at point of purchase, as well as after several years. Arguably removing some of the elements Klepp & Storm-Mathisen (2005) presents in their research.

E2 reject traceability as a long-term differentiator since the fashion industry is highly competitive and from now on, more companies will adopt the strategy. It does not necessarily mean that the companies using it now will lose market share. Vargo & Lusch (2004) argues that companies are moving away from one-way mass marketing and instead create value together with the customer. This makes transparency generate high brand value since the customer is helping with building the brand, and thereby becomes loyal (Grönroos, 2004). Looking at this, one may view the promotion of information through transparency as an indicator to the first step in the buyer decision-making process model by Kotler & Armstrong (2015). By making the consumer aware of the problem, a need recognition may appear. Showing transparency does not only help customers understand the processes of the supply chain, but one can argue that it makes them question untransparent companies why they are not sharing information when others do. This result supports Pomering & Donclair (2009)'s theory about promoting ethical violation. One may argue that sustainability is a beneficial strategy to add to the transparency and would, therefore, be fortunate to use in a Slow Fashion promotion strategy.

5.2.2 Promoting Quality

Regarding Slow Fashion, it is seemingly quality that is one of the most important selling points when communicating with the customer regarding Slow Fashion. Most of the participants argue that what makes their products unique is high quality and that paying a higher price gives value over a longer time period. This also one of the biggest reasons that the customer becomes loyal to the brand. However, when asking participants about symbolic vs functional attributes of the products, the participants that only sell men's clothes argue that they focus on communicating functionality attributes and skip logos on their clothes. They argued that their customers focus want plain quality clothing piece in right size rather than a garment that has a big brand on it, indicating social status does not affect their purchase decision. In contrast, the other participants who focus more on women's clothing argue that functional and symbolic attributes are needed to be successful.

Comparing literature to the empirics, Dawar & Parker (1994) argues customers use their values to evaluate a company's brand against competitors being either functional or symbolic. While Karimi (2015) explains high product knowledge results in a faster purchase decision. In general, Slow Fashion companies have high-quality products. By communicating the functionality and quality rather than the symbolic attributes the companies help to inform the customers which later will result in loyalty towards the brand and the products. Fashion companies do use symbolic attributes to promote its brand and products such as Ralph Lauren and are very successful. Therefore, Slow Fashion companies cannot build a brand around social status because of the industry is very competitive and what is being trendy changes monthly if not weekly. Instead of focusing on communicating functionality and quality gives them the advantage in the long-run. Moreover, looking back at Dawar & Parker (1994) Slow Fashion companies need to be clear in their communication towards their customer what type of brand they are mirroring helping the customer to build a perception.

Another strategy suggested by Becker et al., (2019) regarding slow production is showing authenticity, stating the transparency, genuity and origin of the apparel. As stated above, transparency is regarded as an honest approach, whereas the origin of products is seemingly not preferred when it comes to Slow Fashion promotion since many of the interviewees mentioned the importance of showing the customer that the Slow Fashion design is no longer made from beige hemp fabric. However, if one refers to the quality, showing the whole production is genuine and may benefit the customers valuing high quality and honest production.

5.3 Concern

5.3.1 Promoting Anti-consumption

Black (2010) argue that perhaps, the promotion of green product consumption is not of the highest importance, but rather to decrease overall consumption. However, the interpretation of demarketing among the companies are accordingly to Farquhar & Robson (2016) and seem to be known as a beneficial PR strategy which may guide a business towards sustaining a competitive advantage. The same way Patagonia used (green) demarketing as a tool for anti-consumption, resulting in more sales, the participants agree that it is a good promotional tool for taking a stand towards consumption. However, it is clear that there must be a complementary strategy to promote the same message through all channels and that only using

demarketing is not enough to convince the consumer to choose conscious decisions. Demarketing shows the consumer that the company is conscious for the customers to purchase a product that is right for them, not just any product for the sake of sales. This portrays a trustworthy and conscious business with care for the consumers. In opposite to Sodhi (2011), and Grinstein & Nisan (2009), It is clear from the interviews that the participants realise that promoting demarketing will not negatively affect sales in the long run. C3 even highlights that this statement will not show immediate results, which supports Sodhi (2011) regarding the difficulties of motivating paying for promoting fewer sales from a business perspective. Looking at the customer purchase decision function (Ibrahim & Al-Ajlouni, 2017) we argue that when using this strategy, the customer should already be aware of the problematics of the industry and may choose to purchase a more sustainable product further on.

5.3.2 Corporate Promotion

Stated in the literature, promotional activities have the purpose of creating consumption and to make a profit (Grönroos, 2008; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Ballantyne, 2004). However, a cruciality from the empirics suggested by E2 for gaining competitive advantage in the highly competitive fashion industry is to work together with businesses who want to communicate the same message. and works as some sort of categorial promotion instead of product or brand promotion. One would argue that promoting a product/brand as a Slow Fashion company could lead to product/brand cannibalisation, whereas Slow Fashion companies could benefit more from working together. The suggestion supports the theory of Kwarteng et al., (2016) about corporate performance is especially related to sustainability actions. One would interpret the findings as by working together with other companies to promote sustainability, all businesses within the field reach a more attractive position on the market and promotional economies of scale may be reached. By promoting Slow Fashion as a whole, the consumer becomes aware of the alternative to Fast Fashion and its environmental impact. This way the companies may form circularity within business environments and help each other to develop even more sustainable business models.

The importance of making the customer aware of self-discipline when selecting between price or sustainability mentioned by Shaw et al., (2005) could be supported by the corporate promotion of Slow Fashion. One may have a stronger voice to cut through the noise of

competing brands when working together to create awareness and concern, and thereby helps the whole network of Slow Fashion businesses in a more desirable position in the industry.

5.3.3 Promoting Education and Information

When asking the interviewees what message should be promoted from a Slow Fashion point of view, a unified answer to inform and educate the consumers. It is argued that the consumer is naive and does not search for information regarding the environmental impact or responsibility regarding the production. Looking from a buyer decision-making process point of view, as suggested by Kotler & Armstrong (2015), one would argue from the interviews that the consumer often is lazy and relies on the given information, and thereby skips further information search. Through a lack of information, the consumer consequently neglects the search for alternatives. Karimi et al., (2015) suggests that low product knowledge retrain the reaching of a purchase decision, therefore one would argue that the customer may unconsciously ban the environmental concerns due to lack of knowledge regarding the fashion production. If uninformed about the issues, the consumer will not investigate the alternatives to Fast Fashion due to convenience. Due to these concerns, one may argue that the function of customer motivation (Ibrahim & Al-Ajlouni, 2017) is a more effective way of reaching sales of Slow Fashion since it is provoking emotional involvement in the situation and thereby changes the attitudes towards an action stage. The buyer decision-making process is arguably an efficient tool when the customer is already aware of the "need". However, in the fashion industry, many consumers are in denial and choose to neglect the searching for information and evaluation of alternatives. Therefore, information and education should seek out to the audience through different platforms to evoke concern.

One emotional aspect of promotion suggested in the literature (Burnett & Lunsford, 1994) is to provoke a feeling of guilt with the consumer if not making purchasing the product. However, all interviewees stated that this kind of strategy is not effective within the Slow Fashion industry. C3 even emphasises that it has a reverse effect on consumer behaviour since the customer feel so guilty that it avoids making any contributions in the intended direction. A reason may be that the environmental impact is a big deal and consumers feel inferior in the sense that their consumption at all is impacting the industry as a whole. The results of the interviews point towards the importance of informing more people to try and consume consciously rather than a few people radically minimising their consumption. In other words,

consumer behaviour will not change overnight since the fast fashion consumption pattern has existed for a long time. By informing the target audience about what the fashion industry looks like, how to improve the consumption patterns at a micro level and show what changed behaviour can do, consumers will feel concern about fashion production throughout the supply chain and may reach conscious purchase decisions.

5.4 Action

It is understood from the interviews that when promoting towards an action behaviour, the Slow Fashion perspective may not be to promote sales, but rather to get the consumer to take action against disposal or short-term consumption within the fashion industry. Two main activities are suggested to get the consumer to feel involved and may as a factor slow down the purchasing patterns by the majority of the participants of the interviews.

5.4.1 Promoting Repair Shops

Black (2010) and Sharma & Jha (2017) point in the direction that sustainable consumption is related to anti-consumption, and that the consumer has the power to change consumption patterns. Further, Black (2010) states that the gap between attitudes and behaviour towards sustainable purchases may derive from movements who aim to reuse, reduce and recycle. Even if seen to mess with statistical research, all companies suggested the promotion of garment care and education on how to repair clothing to extend the life of the products. By doing so, the company is encouraging circularity within the fashion industry which in its turn is helping the corporate brand equity between Slow Fashion businesses. It is aimed at slowing down the overall fashion consumption and making the consumer take action against fast consumption followed by disposal. This strategy is in line with the demarketing strategy and helps to keep a conscious brand image which in its turn could be seen as promoting the brand as a friend. The customers will feel like the company cares about their economic welfare and simplicity in everyday life, at the same time as the customer and business are creating value together by saving the environment.

5.4.2 Creating Communities

Results show that the majority of the participants suggests creating communities as an effective way to create value for the customers. C1 and E1 especially express that the value lies in the feeling of involvement with the company and being on the journey to make Slow Fashion

expand worldwide. Supporting Ibrahim & Al-Ajlouni (2017) that helping with decreasing environmental destruction, and self-actualization from reducing pollution from consuming sustainably are motivations towards reaching a purchase decision. By creating communities, a chain reaction of these factors may develop through WoM and/or e-WoM. From a company perspective, it generates an honest and clear opinion about the products to enhance quality or design to raise customer satisfaction. Within the community, the company has the opportunity to influence and inspire the whole social group to work together to reach common goals. A community does not necessarily have to benefit the company, but also opinion leaders and even competitors. Similar to the veganism movement where communities build new companies, fuelled research and gave small companies an advantage in the competitive industry. When the bigger companies join in on the trend, the smaller companies have loyalty towards the brand and products. This can be compared to Slow Fashion since the companies interviewed today are in the very front end of the movement, the customers will be loyal when bigger brands try to take market share.

One could argue that creating communities for those who want change will affect the whole decision-making process. As more people are taking action, the informational stages will benefit from the consumers. Even if empirical data states that activist approaches are not beneficial in these matters, communities may help with the post-purchase evaluation of products within the Slow Fashion industry. Through feedback from consumers, not only the consumer loyalty increases, but also the abilities for the companies to develop the quality and fit of their lines in order to increase and possible sustain the competitive advantage.

6. Conclusion

This section the purpose of the study will be fulfilled by answering the research question following by concluding the empirical data and analysis.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify how it is possible to promote Slow Fashion companies to motivate the customer and create value to sustain a competitive advantage. Slow Fashion companies do not necessarily promote the products as individual units, but rather the industry as a whole. This benefits even competitors. However, minorities collaborating with other businesses with shared aim and values will gain market share. The message promoted should primarily be to educate the audience on how the industry works and make the customer feel involved. This can be done through different channels, and most existing companies use social media to do so. The results from the interviews show that noise from Fast Fashion companies with the advantage of economies of scale might drown the Slow Fashion promotional message on such platforms. Therefore, social communities should be created to start a movement for people of the same values and interests. This makes the consumers feel involved and important. The relationship between the customer and business is of high importance since the businesses rely on customer loyalty.

The general conclusion is that Slow Fashion companies in Sweden aim promotion at providing the consumer with transparency, information and anti-consumption to stay competitive. By using the right promotion strategies, the companies can affect customer motivation by providing information, creating concern and thereby persuade the customer take action. This seeks to retain an outcome of the actions which leads to sustaining a competitive advantage from strengthening the market position. It is crucial for Slow Fashion businesses to measure the promotion as well as profiles on the customers because the tone of voice may not be aimed at who is actually making the purchase decision. Following the customer motivation function (Ibrahim & Al-Ajlouni, 2017), an interrelated stage of customer feedback or relationship building seem to be missing to reach a sustainable competitive advantage.

7. Discussion

This chapter will conclude the research paper with discussion of findings, contributions and limitations. Lastly, suggestions for further research will be presented.

7.1 Discussion of Empirical Findings

Referring back to the purpose of this study, empirical findings will be reflected and interpreted. Some insights may exceed or elaborate on the original purpose. Results show importance of creating communities regarding a sustainability movement within fashion. This should be done in an inspiring manner rather than with an activist approach for anyone to feel a sense of belonging. Common reasoning regarding sustainable actions may be that one single persons' action make no difference. By creating tribes, the impact will affect the exploitation of the environment and human resources in a wider scope, leaving a bigger footprint for anyone to follow. It might be hard to change the cultural social status expression through fashion on an individual/consumer level. If the humankind could oversee the profit margin aspect, the restructuring of production would improve the global situation of fashion consumption, as this managerial implication would leave the consumer with no choice but to choose conscious production.

A big emphasis was put on the consumer lack of knowledge regarding sustainability and fashion production. One may question the reason why the consumers are kept uninformed with the situation of today's natural disasters. Customer might prioritise cheap clothes because the effect does not impact them. E.g. lower in-store prices are good for the consumer but affects the salary and working conditions up the supply chain. Another aspect might be companies profit orientation. If the "truth" would be revealed, companies could lose sales. Most Slow Fashion companies realise the importance of educational promotion but still makes it a lower priority in relation to budget and employees.

From the interviews with the companies and experts regarding how to promote Slow Fashion, we as researchers see a bond between gender and simplicity. Women, on the one hand, seem to be more involved with fast fashion due to clothing being a way of expressing identity. Men, on the other hand, are not as involved in expressing identity through clothing. Basic clothing

is usually enough which is indicated by the Slow Fashion companies interviewed in this study are only selling basic coloured clothing. Women seem to be more open to learning about Slow Fashion since they once again are more involved in their clothing purchases. Opposite to men than settle for something that just fits. in the end, one has to keep in mind that oftentimes it is not the consumer who is the customer.

7.2 Contributions

How Slow Fashion companies use marketing and how customers react to marketing is rather unexplored from an academic point of view. This study highlights how, through promotion, these companies can gain market share and affect the industry as well as the environment towards the better. The study fills the empirical gap that was stated in the first chapter and show several strategies to sustain a competitive advantage as a Slow Fashion company. Furthermore, the findings can help to understand why promotion should be used to efficiently generate value.

From a managerial perspective, the empirical findings may serve as guidelines on how to increase value and create loyalty between the company and customers. This can be done through a number of factors, but it may be of interest for markets to create communities and spread information about the brand and industry.

7.3 Limitations

During this study, a few limitations were acknowledged. Due to the concept of Slow Fashion not having a unified definition, the interviewees all have their own interpretation regarding the related business model and how to incorporate it in the management. The interviewees all have different backgrounds and expertise within the apparel industry prior to their current employment. This could lead to more or less insufficient knowledge within some questions. Therefore, one should consider the answers were based on personal attitude and individual knowledge regarding the subject. One should keep in mind that the management and standards regarding Slow Fashion as a concept is still being explored and discovered by businesses and customers around the globe. Many existing studies on the topic of Slow Fashion are investigated by the founder of the concept, which decreases the triangulation possibilities when doing further research.

Further, the small sample size of six interviewees could be seen as a limitation due to the openness of interpretation regarding the business model. However, the researchers wanted experienced people with subject knowledge in order to go in-depth on the topic of Slow Fashion promotion and therefore had a relatively small population to pick from. saw connections and unified opinions after only a few interviews before the research started to repeat the same results.

7.4 Further Research

Due to this study focusing on the business aspect, further research on the topic of Slow Fashion promotion could be to examine the customer perspective. The interviewees do explain that the target audience they aimed at when starting the business was a certain age group. But when running the business, another audience was more interested in the products and it was found that the target audience of Slow Fashion companies is very broad. Further research may investigate how to segment customers more efficiently in order to reach the right audience.

This study reached the result that information and education is beneficial to persuade consumers to take action. However, many consumers feel the sense of inferiority in the matters of taking action and therefore rejects the concerns. Others simply chooses to ignore the matter because it takes effort to change a behaviour. Therefore, we suggest that further research on how customers interpret certain messages and how to persuade this segment of potential consumers who are living in denial.

Another solution to this problem could be starting with the fashion production. Again, looking at the resistance to change due to lack of knowledge or due to the feeling of inferiority regarding fashion consumption behaviour, one may desire further research on how it is possible to motivate companies to produce in line with Slow Fashion to decrease the negative aspects generated by fast production and push strategies. This would benefit all parties because the customer would have no choice but to realise the concept of conscious consumption.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview Questions

Introduction:
1.   Tell us about your role in the company and your value proposition.
2.   What's your view on the fashion industry today?
     - Why do you think the industry looks this way today?
     - What is your view on fashion consumption?
3.   What is Slow fashion to you?
     3.1.   Do you see your business as a slow fashion company?
            - Our definition: a way for businesses to prioritize quality and sustainability through supply chains rather than mass consumption. It minimizes negative environmental effects and encourages thoughtful consumption.
            - Is there anything you would like to change/add with this definition?

     3.2.   What kind of design do you claim to be fashionable over time?
4.   What's the most important contributions to society/environment for you?
5.   Is there a person/theory that inspired you or contributed to the concept that you feel worth mentioning?

Product:

6.   Specify your target customer.
7.   When deciding on your product line, do you look at customer demand or at competitors offerings, or what else inspires you?
     7.1.   How do you choose to design the product? Based on functionality or symbol/social status? HOW DOES FITTING WORK? Sizes.
     7.2.   It is argued that companies are creating a potential value through products or services. How do you argue that value is created?

8.   How is your pricing strategy?
     8.1.   How do you communicate customer value?
9.   How do you differentiate/compete against competitors?
     9.1.   What is your competitive advantage?
10. Why/Why don't do you state the materials of production on your products online.

Brand
11. What do you think customers value about your brand?
12. Tell us what customer relationships mean to you?

Promotion
13. Tell us how you are working with marketing today?
     13.1.   Social media? Do you work with paid advertising?
     13.2.   What is your goal with the promotion?
     13.3.   Do you portray the brand as functional or symbolic?
     13.4.   What do you think is the most efficient way of trying to make the customer value sustainability/slow fashion?
14. Do you make any contributions towards consuming less?
     14.1.   Are you aware of demarketing and green demarketing?
     14.2.   If yes: what are your thoughts? If no: (we present) Now what are your thoughts?