



INTERNATIONELLA HANDELSHÖGSKOLAN
HÖGSKOLAN I JÖNKÖPING

CRM in Fashion Companies for men's wear

Master's Thesis in Business Administration

Author: Joyce Antar
Donya Gholamifar

Tutor: Annika Hall

Jönköping June 2006

Acknowledgements

“A little knowledge that acts is worth infinitely more than much knowledge that is idle.”
- Khalil Gibran.

This thesis brings our studies at Jönköping International Business School to an end. During the process of conducting this research, we have received tremendous help from our tutor Annika Hall. We are very grateful for her support and interest and we strongly believe that the outcome of this thesis would not have been the same without her guidelines and recommendations.

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Joyce Antar & Donya Gholamifar

*“Sometimes our light goes out but is blown into flame by another human being.
Each of us owes deepest thanks to those who have rekindled this light.”*
- Albert Schweitzer.

Master's Thesis in Business Administration

Title:	Customer Relationship Management in Fashion Companies for men's wear
Author:	Joyce Antar, Donya Gholamifar
Tutor:	Annika Hall
Date:	2006-06-07
Subject terms:	Customer relationship management, Fashion management, Customer-supplier relationships, Consumer behavior, Customer satisfaction, Retailing industry

Abstract

Problem: The Fashion industry is a highly discussed issue today, and as it is very competitive, the awareness among consumers, especially male consumers, has increased. Through a preliminary research conducted by the authors, it was evident that creating customer relationships enables Fashion companies to maintain a competitive position in the market. Also, it was believed that since men tend to stay loyal and are hesitant to purchase apparel from new stores, developing and maintaining relationships with them is crucial.

Purpose: The aim of this thesis is to determine what a customer-supplier relationship in Fashion companies for men's wear is and when it exists, in order to identify the most important aspects when developing and maintaining this relationship.

Method: A hermeneutic and an abductive approach have been used throughout this thesis, while a case study was performed. In order to fulfill the purpose of this thesis, five semi-structured interviews were conducted with managers, at different hierarchical levels, and salesclerks of the chosen case company.

Theories: The theoretical areas that were used in this thesis consisted of theories regarding Customer Relationship Management, Fashion management, Customer-supplier relationships, Consumer behavior, Customer satisfaction, Communication in Fashion etc.

Conclusions: The authors came to the conclusion that the existing definitions of relationships do not identify a customer-supplier relationship in Fashion retailing. Therefore, the authors found it necessary to introduce a new definition for a customer-supplier relationship in Fashion companies for men's wear, namely semi-intimate relationships. These relationships are long-term relationships that are characterized by frequent personal interactions, personal information exchange, a shared mode of thinking, two-way commitment and mutual values beyond monetary terms. Moreover, the authors concluded that a semi-intimate relationship exists when the customers are included in the company and interactions are on interpersonal levels. Furthermore, a semi-intimate relationship does not exist through one action; it is rather developed through a series of actions. The authors also determined that a customer focused culture, trust, commitment and loyalty, employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction, adding value through benefits and communicating the brand to the male customer are the most important aspects when developing and maintaining semi-intimate relationships. Finally, the authors found the concept of relational tools misleading in the context of this thesis and therefore, new implications for relational tools were introduced, with the sales force being the most important one, when developing and maintaining semi-intimate relationships.

Magisteruppsats inom Företagsekonomi

Titel:	Customer Relationship Management i modeföretag för män
Författare:	Joyce Antar, Donya Gholamifar
Handledare:	Annika Hall
Datum:	2006-06-07
Ämnesord	Customer relationship management, Fashion management, Relationer mellan konsumenter och återförsäljare, Konsumentbeteende, detaljhandel, kommunikation inom mode

Sammanfattning

Problem: Modeindustrin har varit omtalad under senare tid och eftersom konkurrensen på denna marknad är hög har det lett till en ökad medvetenhet bland konsumenter och speciellt bland manliga konsumenterna. En förundersökning utförd av författarna visade att skapandet av kundrelationer möjliggör för modeföretag att bibehålla en konkurrenskraftig position på marknaden. Undersökningen visade även att eftersom män har en tendens att förbli lojala kunder och tvivlar oftast på att köpa kläder från nya butiker är det viktigt för modeföretag att utveckla och bibehålla relationer med dessa kunder.

Syfte: Syftet med denna uppsats är att avgöra vad en relation mellan konsumenter och återförsäljare är i ett modeföretag för män och när den existerar för att kunna identifiera de viktigaste aspekterna för att utveckla och bibehålla dessa relationer.

Metod: En hermeneutik och en abduktiv ansats har använts genom hela uppsatsen medan en fallstudie har tillämpats. För att kunna uppfylla uppsatsens syfte har författarna gjort fem semi-strukturerade intervjuer. Författarna intervjuade olika chefer med olika hierarkiska positioner och butikspersonal från det valda fallföretaget.

Teorier: De teoretiska områden som har använts i denna uppsats består av teorier angående Customer Relationship Management, Fashion management, relationer mellan konsumenter och återförsäljare, konsumentbeteende, kundtillfredsställelse, kommunikation i mode m.m.

Slutsatser: Författarna har fastställt att de befintliga definitionerna på relationer inte definierar vad en relation mellan konsumenter och återförsäljare är, inom det studerade sammanhanget. Därför fann författarna det lämpligt att introducera en ny definition för relationer mellan konsumenter och återförsäljare i modeföretag för män, nämligen semi-intima relationer. Dessa är långvariga relationer som karaktäriseras av ständiga personliga interaktioner, utbyte av personlig information, ett gemensamt tankesätt, tvåsidig åtagande och ömsesidiga värderingar. Författarna drog även slutsatsen att en semi-intim relation existerar när kunden är inkluderad i företaget och interaktioner är på interpersonella nivåer. En semi-intim relation existerar inte genom en handling utan utvecklas snarare från en rad handlingar. Författarna har även fastställt att en kundfokuserad kultur, förtroende, åtagande och lojalitet, de anställdas tillfredsställelse, kund tillfredsställelse, värde ökande förmåner och kommunikering av varumärket till de manliga kunderna är de viktigaste aspekterna för att utveckla och bibehålla semi-intima relationer med manliga kunder. Slutligen ansåg författarna att koncepten för relationsskapande verktyg är missledande i modeföretags sammanhang och introducerade därför nya implikationer för dessa verktyg. Butikspersonalen identifierades som det viktigaste relationsskapande verktyget i modeföretag som strävar efter att utveckla och bibehålla kundrelationer.

Table of contents

1	INTRODUCTION	1
1.1	BACKGROUND	1
1.2	PROBLEM DISCUSSION	2
1.3	PURPOSE.....	3
1.4	CONTRIBUTION	3
1.5	DELIMITATIONS.....	3
1.6	DEFINITIONS	4
1.7	OUTLINE OF THE THESIS	4
2	METHODOLOGY	5
2.1	THEORY OF SCIENCE.....	5
2.1.1	<i>Paradigm</i>	5
2.1.2	<i>Methodological approach</i>	5
2.1.3	<i>Subjectivity and grounds of facts</i>	6
2.2	METHOD	7
2.2.1	<i>Abductive approach</i>	7
2.2.2	<i>Qualitative research</i>	7
2.2.3	<i>Choice of company</i>	8
2.2.4	<i>Case study</i>	8
2.2.5	<i>Data collection and data compilation</i>	9
2.2.6	<i>Design of the interview guides</i>	11
2.2.7	<i>Choice of literature</i>	12
2.2.8	<i>The development of the study</i>	13
2.3	TRUSTWORTHINESS.....	15
2.4	METHOD CRITICISM	16
3	CRM & FASHION MANAGEMENT.....	17
3.1	CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT	17
3.1.1	<i>Trust, Commitment & loyalty</i>	17
3.1.2	<i>When does a relationship exist?</i>	18
3.1.3	<i>Strategic perspectives in CRM</i>	22
3.1.4	<i>The customer strategy</i>	22
3.1.5	<i>Customer satisfaction in CRM</i>	23
3.2	FASHION MANAGEMENT AND CRM.....	26
3.2.1	<i>Finding a balance through market orientation & key customers</i>	27
3.2.2	<i>Gaining knowledge through close relationships</i>	27
3.2.3	<i>Relational benefits</i>	27
3.2.4	<i>Communication</i>	28
3.2.5	<i>Brand identity</i>	29
3.2.6	<i>Men's consumer behavior</i>	30
4	EMPIRICAL FINDINGS.....	31
4.1	JACK & JONES	31
4.2	IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF CRM IN JACK & JONES	32
4.2.1	<i>Relationships</i>	33
4.2.2	<i>Satisfaction</i>	36
4.2.3	<i>Offering more than products</i>	38
4.2.4	<i>Communication</i>	42
4.2.5	<i>Additional aspects</i>	45
5	ANALYSIS.....	48
5.1	CUSTOMER-SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIP IN FASHION COMPANIES FOR MEN'S WEAR.....	48
5.2	IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF SEMI-INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS IN FASHION COMPANIES FOR MEN'S WEAR	50
5.2.1	<i>Culture</i>	51

5.2.2	<i>Trust, Commitment & Loyalty</i>	52
5.2.3	<i>Employee satisfaction</i>	54
5.2.4	<i>Customer satisfaction</i>	55
5.2.5	<i>Adding value through benefits</i>	56
5.2.6	<i>Communicating the brand to male consumers</i>	58
6	CONCLUSIONS	61
6.1	MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS	63
6.2	SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES	64
	LIST OF REFERENCES	66

Figures

FIGURE 1-1	THE TRANSITION TO RELATIONSHIP MARKETING (PAYNE, 2006)	1
FIGURE 2-1	THE HERMENEUTIC CIRCLE (ERIKSSON & WIEDERHEIM-PAUL, 1999, P. 222), INTERPRETED AND MODIFIED BY THE AUTHORS.	6
FIGURE 2-2	THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE STUDY, CONSTRUCTED BY THE AUTHORS	14
FIGURE 3-1	THE CUSTOMER STRATEGY, CONSTRUCTED BY THE AUTHORS	23
FIGURE 3-2	FACTORS AFFECTING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION, CONSTRUCTED BY THE AUTHORS.	26
FIGURE 4-1	ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF BESTSELLER AND JACK & JONES IN SWEDEN, CONSTRUCTED BY THE AUTHORS.	32
FIGURE 5-1	IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF CRM IN FASHION COMPANIES FOR MEN'S WEAR, CONSTRUCTED BY THE AUTHORS.	51

Appendices

APPENDIX 1	- CONTACT INFORMATION PRELIMINARY RESEARCH	70
APPENDIX 2	- PRELIMINARY RESEARCH	71
APPENDIX 3	- PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS FOR BESTSELLER SWEDEN AB	72
APPENDIX 4	- CONTACT INFORMATION FOR PERSONAL INTERVIEWS	73
APPENDIX 5	- INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR MARKETING MANAGER AT BESTSELLER SWEDEN AB	74
APPENDIX 6	- INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR AREA MANAGER AT BESTSELLER RETAIL	75
APPENDIX 7	- INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR STORE MANAGER AT JACK & JONES	76
APPENDIX 8	- INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SALESCLERKS AT JACK & JONES	77

1 Introduction

This thesis examines Customer Relationship Management in Fashion companies for men and the first chapter introduces the reader to the emergence of CRM. Following that, the importance of CRM in Fashion companies for men is presented and the chapter concludes with a presentation of the purpose, the chosen perspective, delimitations and definitions.

1.1 Background

This thesis studies Customer Relationships Management (CRM) in Fashion companies for men. The business approach CRM arose in the late 1990s from the principles of relationship marketing and it became a well used strategy by managers within all types of industries (Stone, 2004). This strategy contains three main areas; technical solutions, IT and Internet solutions and an approach to manage customer relationships (Payne, 2006). CRM as an approach to manage customer relationships is seen as an attitude and a value that is placed in businesses and relationships between companies and their customers in order to improve customer value, increase profitability and maximize shareholder value (Roberts-Phelps, 2001).

The foundation for CRM, namely relationship marketing, is traced back to the 1980s when the dynamics of the markets were rapidly changing. The need for new strategies in order to maximize sales and increase shareholder value was evident as the growth within many markets had haltered (Ambler, 1996). Philip Kotler, an internationally recognized professor in marketing, introduced a new way to manage organizational success. He extended the traditional marketing approach into a more dynamic one that takes into account the companies relationships to its environment and mainly its customers (Payne, 2006).

"If companies are to compete successfully in domestic and global markets, they must engineer stronger bonds with their stakeholders, including customers, distributors....," Kotler (Cited in Payne, 2006, p 7).

This new paradigm influenced companies in shifting their focus from traditional short term transactions into long term relationship marketing (Ambler, 1996), meaning that companies moved from functionally based marketing strategies into cross-functional marketing where emphasis is put on customer maintenance (Figure 1-1). This means that the organizational culture is customer focused and that the job functions in a company are interconnected as circles with the customers in the centre (Roberts-Phelps, 2001). The relationship based view on organizations also arose as companies were operating in global markets that lead to greater competitiveness. Firms needed to be more aggressive in order to maintain their positions in the markets and the need for unique offers was increasing.

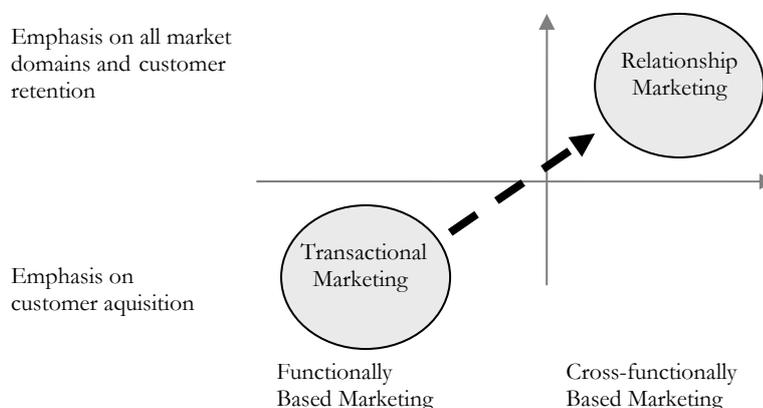


Figure 1-1 The transition to relationship marketing (Payne, 2006).

According to Mooney (2002) companies need to stay close to their customers to build relationships of mutual value. This strategy is essential for all market oriented companies and according to Birtwistle (2004), this goal is also vital for companies within the Fashion industry. As it usually is the case among industries, managing a Fashion company successfully requires close relationships to customers in order to forecast future consumer trends and to develop an offer system that is not only market oriented, but also one that matches the chosen customer segment (Saviolo & Testa, 2002).

Zara is an example of a Fashion multiple chain store that concentrates on developing and maintaining close relationships to its customer. By doing this, the company is able to identify customer preferences that are later used by the design team in order to provide the consumers with products that suit their preferences (Birtwistle, 2004). In a highly recognized Fashion management book by Saviolo & Testa (2002), emphasis is put on improving the level of service offered by Fashion companies. The authors believe that creating relationships with key customers in order to rationalize the offer is one of the critical issues in the Fashion industry.

1.2 Problem discussion

The Fashion industry is a highly discussed issue today according to Saviolo & Testa (2002). The authors believe that the fact that there exist many brands with different styles, the industry is highly competitive, leading to the rise of awareness among consumers. Furthermore, Rocha, Hammond & Hawkins (2005) argue that the Fashion industry for men is expanding more rapidly compared with the one for women or children due to the fact that the awareness and interest for Fashion among men is increasing.

The authors performed a preliminary study in order to determine the importance of customer relationships in Fashion companies and to identify a suitable case company (Appendix 1). The preliminary research involved four Fashion companies and one of these, Gant, an international Fashion retailer for both men and women stated that developing and maintaining relationship with key customers enables the company to maintain a competitive position in the market and increase customer value. Furthermore, according to Sjödel, country manager for Gant Sweden, men have a tendency to remain loyal and regular customers while women change brands more frequently (P. Sjödel, personal communication, 2006-03-15).

The owner of Brothers, a Fashion retailing chain store operating on the Swedish market, agrees with the previous discussion and believes that consumer behavior among men and women differs substantially. This leads to different relationships towards customers depending on gender (C. Friberg, personal communication, 2006-03-15). According to the marketing manager of Bestseller Sweden AB, an international Fashion retailing company, the difference in customer relationships to men and women is the fact that men tend to stay loyal customers and are more hesitant to purchase apparels from a new store. Therefore, creating relationships to male customers is more difficult, compared to women, as men usually continue buying clothes from the same stores without having a need for change (J. Clarin, personal communication 2006-04-26). However, since relationships to male customers is a difficult task, developing and maintaining these relationships is crucial in order to gain loyal and regular male customers. Therefore, the authors found CRM in Fashion companies for men's wear an interesting focus for this thesis.

Given that CRM as an approach to manage customer relationships is an important aspect in the Fashion industry for men, the authors of this thesis were surprised to discover that relatively little research has been made regarding this subject. According to Rienecker

(2004) when a subject is not sufficiently enlightened it is considered to be a possible research area. Therefore, the authors want to determine the meaning of a customer-supplier relationship in Fashion companies for men's wear, when it exists and the most important aspects when developing and maintaining these relationships. Thus, the following questions are examined;

- I. *What is a customer-supplier relationship in Fashion companies for men's wear, and when does it exist?*
- II. *What are the most important aspects for a Fashion company for men's wear, when developing and maintaining relationships to its target customers?*

1.3 Purpose

The aim of this thesis is to determine what a customer-supplier relationship in Fashion companies for men's wear is and when it exists, in order to identify the most important aspects when developing and maintaining this relationship.

1.4 Contribution

This thesis is of great interest for any company within the Fashion industry and particularly for Fashion companies for men that want to gain knowledge about the use of CRM in Fashion management.

Moreover, the outcome of this study can be used throughout the management hierarchy, from top- or middle managers to store managers since the empirical findings have been gathered from different managers and salesclerks, leading to the fact that the results are applicable throughout an organization.

Finally, this thesis will provide a reader with an overview of CRM in Fashion companies and it can therefore be of significance to anyone that is interested in learning more about CRM and Fashion management and how these subjects are related.

1.5 Delimitations

The chosen industry for this thesis is the Fashion retailing industry for men. Moreover, the authors have chosen to conduct this study on one specific multiple chain store that operates on the Swedish market, namely Jack & Jones.

The research is limited to the perspective of the company and the opinions of male consumers have not been taken into account. Thus, it should be mentioned that the discussions regarding male consumers are merely based on opinions of the company and theories.

Furthermore, CRM is considered to have three perspectives;

- CRM as a particular technological solution
- CRM as a wide range of customer-oriented IT and Internet solutions
- CRM as an approach to manage customer relationships in order to create shareholder value (Payne, 2006). This thesis will focus on the third perspective and disregard technological solutions made by the chosen case company.

Finally, as the authors are only interested in the relationships between a Fashion company for men's wear and its target customers, female customers buying apparel from the Fashion company will not be given any notice.

1.6 Definitions

In this thesis the concept CRM is frequently used. However, the authors' definition of CRM is strictly bounded to the view of CRM as an approach to manage customer relationships and other aspects of CRM are not taken into concern.

1.7 Outline of the Thesis

- **Chapter 1 – Introduction.** In Chapter 1 the background of the chosen subject is presented for readers, followed by an extensive problem discussion. The section concludes with a description of the purpose of the thesis, contribution, delimitations and definitions.
- **Chapter 2 – Method.** In the second Chapter of the thesis, firstly, the chosen approach of the thesis is discussed in methodological terms, followed by a description of the methods used throughout the empirical study. Also, methods for analyzing the observations from the empirical part of the thesis are presented, a discussion about trustworthiness is given and finally a method criticism is held.
- **Chapter 3 – Theoretical Framework.** The third Chapter presents theories and models that provide readers with knowledge regarding CRM, relationships and Fashion management, as well as other theoretical information relevant to the purpose. The Chapter acts as a foundation for the collection of empirical data and analysis.
- **Chapter 4 – Empirical Findings.** In this Chapter, the empirical findings are presented. Firstly, a description of the chosen company is given followed by a presentation of the interviews made.
- **Chapter 5 – Analysis.** In Chapter 5 a presentation of the case company is given, followed by a combination of the theories and the empirical observations in order to shed light on and answer the thesis' research questions.
- **Chapter 6 – Conclusions.** In the last Chapter of this thesis, the authors summarize the output of the analysis and provide readers with a number of conclusions. This is done with the aim to explore whether the purpose of the research is fulfilled. Finally, managerial implications are given, and suggestions for further studies are discussed.

2 Methodology

The first part of this Chapter presents the authors scientific view in order to increase the readers' comprehension for the methodological choices made. Following that, the methods used when conducting this study are described.

2.1 Theory of science

According to Molander (1993), science refers to the process of creating new knowledge. The following section describes terms (paradigms) used within scientific research; the conception of reality, human understanding and the conception of knowledge. This will provide readers with greater understanding for the assumptions made throughout this thesis.

2.1.1 Paradigm

When one is attempting to examine and understand the reality, underlying assumptions influence the term conception of reality (Eriksson & Wiedersheim-Paul, 2001). The reality is believed to be subjective and consist of systems where people are in constant interactions, according to Eriksson & Wiedersheim-Paul (1999). The authors share this view on reality and believe that values, norms and actions arise from humans.

Lundahl & Skärvad (1992) discuss actor oriented studies and they claim that these are studies of people within social systems. As this research has studied the interaction between a company and its customers, it is claimed that this is similar to the actor oriented view.

The second paradigm regards the way a person perceives humans and this reflects the researcher's view of the reality as these two are strongly correlated. As there are interactions between the authors of this thesis and the people contributing to it, it is significant for the authors to take a stand regarding the issues in human understanding that can be associated with the study. Starrin & Svensson (1994) argue that when people interact with each other, unaware influence arises and this leads to lost objectivity of a research.

The third paradigm, namely the conception of knowledge is connected to the previous ones and when it is believed that reality is subjective, knowledge is also perceived as subjective. According to Löfberg & Ohlsson (1995), as people are individuals who interpret the meaning of knowledge, they are active in the process of creating meaningful understanding. Therefore, it is believed that every human creates his or her own knowledge.

2.1.2 Methodological approach

There are two main directions when approaching the scientific ideologies, positivism and hermeneutics (Lövblad, 2003). These represent two different views on the world and approaches to life (Andersson, 1982). Although, performing a study while having one pure approach is rare, the authors claim to have a hermeneutic view. This fact is supported by the choices that have been made when conducting the study.

While the positivisms believe that an assumption is only correct when it corresponds to the reality, hermeneutics believe that the interpretation of the reality is the vital aspect. This approach argues that the reality can only be understood from an individual perception since reality is subjective. Furthermore, the hermeneutic view seeks for an understanding of the object that is studied (Eriksson & Wiedersheim-Paul, 1999) and this is in line with the purpose of this thesis.

The basic thoughts in a hermeneutic view are explained in the hermeneutic circle. The message of the figure (Figure 2-1) is that there is no understanding without a pre-understanding and that the understanding of one specific part requires full understanding of the overall picture (Eriksson & Wiederheim-Paul, 1999) and this is in line with the process for conducting this study. A disadvantage with the hermeneutic approach is the assumption that the researcher has to participate in the phenomenon that is studied. This leads to the fact that personal experiences influence the outcome of the study (Lundahl & Skärvad, 1992).

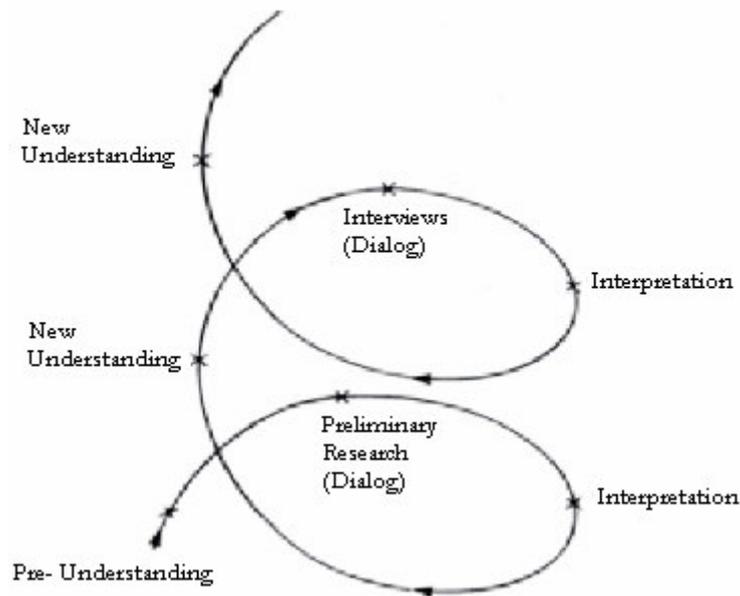


Figure 2-1 The hermeneutic circle (Eriksson & Wiederheim-Paul, 1999, p. 222), interpreted and modified by the authors.

The authors started of with a pre-understanding of the subject which in turn lead to a dialog, namely a preliminary research. From the preliminary research, the authors were able to interpret the chosen subject even more and the problem discussion was formulated while the purpose was stated. This lead to new understanding of the subject and the main dialog was performed; interviews with specific characters from the case company. The interviews were interpreted, new understanding for the subject was gained and a new dialog started etc. (Figure 2-1).

2.1.3 Subjectivity and grounds of facts

Although the discussion regarding objectivity is wide among authors and researchers and even though many agree that a thesis should be characterized with great objectiveness, authors like Lundahl & Skärvad (1992) and Molander (1993) discuss the possibility for achieving maximal objectivity. According to Andersson (1982), the term objectivity in science is used to separate facts from values. In a hermeneutic view, this separation is impossible since values and feelings are regarded to have the ability to mediate the kind of knowledge that can not be reached through common sense (Andersson, 1982).

As stated earlier, the authors of this thesis agree with the hermeneutic school and therefore it is neither a desired nor a possible outcome to perform a neutral research. Values and apprehensions from past experiences influence the objectiveness of this thesis while the study

is still based on facts. According to Lundahl & Skärvad (1992), to base a study on grounds of facts implies that the researcher clearly shows his or her assumptions and perspectives. This is the dominating approach in sociology and the approach that will be used, since, as stated before, objectivity is not a desired effect.

Furthermore, a study is based on grounds of facts when there is little subjectivity. According to Lundahl & Skärvad (1992), subjectivity can decrease through discussions about impressions and perceptions. When there are more authors than one, as the case of this research, opportunities for discussions are evident and subjectivity is reduced. However, Lundahl & Skärvad (1992) further argue that there is no assurance of achieving subjectivity or grounds of facts even with several authors. The essential detail is that the authors should have different backgrounds and experiences. If the authors have similar backgrounds, as is the case in this thesis, the probability for believing that the phenomenon is interpreted correctly and on grounds of facts, even if this is incorrect, is great since several individuals have interpreted the same phenomenon similarly.

2.2 Method

The following section gives a throughout description of the methods used for conducting this thesis. Moreover, argumentations for the authors' choices and the mode of procedure are presented.

2.2.1 Abductive approach

The authors claim that an abductive approach has been used throughout this study as, according to Alvesson & Sköldberg (1994), this approach regards the understanding of a subject. This is in line with this research as it aims at creating understanding for a certain subject. As the abductive approach concerns understanding, it differs from the other approaches, namely inductive and deductive. The hermeneutic circle (Figure 2-1) can be seen as a link to the abductive approach as interpretations are made on facts that one already has an understanding about (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1994).

2.2.2 Qualitative research

There are two methods for gathering data according to Riley, Wood, Clark, Wilkie & Szivas' (2000), namely qualitative and quantitative. The difference between the two methods is that the qualitative techniques are dependent on the researcher's ability to act as interviewer or observer when gathering data. Moreover, the method for data collection is affected by the number of respondents and the personal involvement in the process. It is better to collect data by using qualitative methods when the level of involvement of the researcher/s is high and information is better obtained by participant observation (Riley et al., 2000).

In order to accomplish the purpose of this research and as the researchers' approach is the hermeneutical view, qualitative methods have been used. The data was collected by using personal involvement as a group of respondents were interviewed. This technique helps the researcher in achieving in-depth understanding for the subject. There are different techniques when performing qualitative research, one of them being case study (Holme & Solvang, 1991).

2.2.3 Choice of company

The authors of this thesis were not interested in CRM as a technical - or an Internet solution as it is acknowledged that CRM will only be used with its full potential when it is seen as an approach to manage customer relationship (Payne, 2006). Moreover, conducting a research in order to examine technical aspects of CRM in a company is neither in the frame of the authors' interest nor in the field of the authors knowledge and therefore, the authors have chosen to examine the strategic aspects of CRM when managing customer relationships.

The industry chosen for conducting this research is the Fashion industry. According to Macintosh & Lockshin (1997), this industry has a high level of personal contact between suppliers and consumers and therefore relational benefits can be achieved. Furthermore, Fashion companies can gain customer loyalty by offering consumers benefits through the close relationships.

The authors performed a preliminary research to find a suitable case company for this study and to determine whether the chosen subject is accurate. The research consisted of email send outs and short telephone interviews with four Fashion companies (for further information, see Appendix 1 & 2). Since the results showed an obvious difference in consumer behavior between men and women, and the time period for this thesis was limited, the authors narrowed down the scope of the thesis and studied Fashion companies for men's wear. As the preliminary research showed that men have a tendency to remain loyal and regular customers, while women change brands more frequently and are therefore hard to establish relationships with, the first mentioned group was chosen for this study.

Finally, looking at Fashion companies concentrating on men's wear on the Swedish market, four main actors were identified. From these four companies, two were disregarded as they did not have the time or resources to participate in this research. From the two remaining companies, namely Dressman and Jack & Jones, the later one was chosen as Dressman did not find reason to participate in the study and Jack & Jones stated in the preliminary research that CRM is a vital aspect of their strategy and that it is seen as the primary tool for gaining long term success (Appendix 1). Finally, the authors have contacts, an employee in the Jack & Jones store in Jönköping¹ and a former franchiser of Jack & Jones, who both enabled assistance for further contacts.

2.2.4 Case study

The authors chose to conduct a case study on a specific company, namely Jack & Jones. When conducting a case study contacts with specific key persons within the chosen company are important and the researcher can get in touch with the key persons more than once in order to deepen the understanding for particular details. According to Lekvall & Wahlbin (1993), the results from a qualitative study can not be generalized to other similar cases or companies. However, as stated before in this thesis, the authors' intention was not to draw any conclusions based on statistical evidence, rather to create understanding for the chosen subject through analyzing a case company. According to Merriam (1998), although qualitative research can not be generalized in the same way as quantitative research, it does not mean that it can not be generalized at all. The author argues that many authors conducting qualitative research state that it is possible to draw analytical generalizations.

¹ Jönköping is a city with approximately 120 000 residents in Sweden.

This leads to the fact that the outcome of this research can be applied by other companies, resembling the chosen case company.

According to Holme & Solvang (1991), difficulties can arise when external researchers study an organization without any previous knowledge or experience from the firm. These difficulties may regard information interpretation. To solve this problem, researcher should gain deeper insight of the company before conducting the study. Deeper insight of Jack & Jones was gained by examining the company's website and preliminary questions were sent out to the headquarters (Appendix 2). The findings from the preliminary questions created the foundation for outlining interview guides. According to Holme & Solvang (1991), when conducting a case study, the chosen company should be studied during a longer period of time. This will give the researcher a chance to create a better overall view of the company. The authors of this study claim to have gained a correct understanding of the chosen company through the careful preliminary research before conducting any interviews. Furthermore, all the information received from the case study was interpreted and later approved by the respondents.

2.2.5 Data collection and data compilation

When conducting this research, the authors have used both primary and secondary data. Secondary data is data that already exists and that has been collected for another purpose (Churchill, 1996) and in this thesis it has consisted of articles and books. The secondary data was used to create a frame of reference which has been the basis for the collection of primary data. Primary data is information collected specifically for the problem investigated by the researcher (Churchill, 1996), and in this thesis it consists of data that was collected with the help of e-mail send-outs, telephone interviews (preliminary research) and personal interviews (empirical research).

Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson & Wängnerud (2002), separates two main methods for data collection; informant investigation and respondent investigation. The first mentioned method is applicable when the researcher gains knowledge about a specific occurrence from the interviewees without any regard taken to the personal opinions. The interviewee is regarded as a witness retelling a certain event. A respondent investigation is on the other hand applicable when examining an occurrence and taking into account the interviewees own opinions regarding the subject that is studied.

As the aim of this thesis is to *"...determine what a customer-supplier relationship in Fashion companies for men's wear is and when it exists, in order to identify the most important aspects when developing and maintaining this relationship."* The second mentioned method, namely respondent investigation, is the most appropriate approach when performing personal interviews. However, according to Esaiasson et al. (2002) only a few numbers of researches are classified as purely informant- or respondent investigation. Even though the authors claim to have used the respondent investigation method, it must be noted that the interviewees have been asked to retell events and therefore it can be argued that a part of this investigation contains informant methods as well.

Five interviews were performed; three with managers of different hierarchical positions and two with salesclerks (see Appendix 4). The interviews were approximately one to one and a half hours long. No more than five interviews were conducted as the authors believed that enough data had been gathered from the respondents. Moreover, the outcome from the interviews was similar in many ways and the authors believed that conducting further interviews had not facilitated greater fulfillment of the purpose. The first participant was the marketing manager of Bestseller Sweden AB, Jessica Clarin. Bestseller Sweden AB is a

group of affiliated companies that Jack & Jones is included in (See section 4-1 for a further description of the organizational structure of Jack & Jones). Since Clarin is in charge of the marketing activities in Sweden, the authors found it suitable to perform the first interview with her in order to gain an overview of CRM in Jack & Jones. During the interview, Clarin's assistant Beatrice Flink was present and supplemented when necessary.

The later interviews were performed with one of Bestseller Retail's area managers, responsible for Östergötland² and Gothenburg, and one of Bestseller Retail Europe's store managers, responsible for the Jack & Jones in Jönköping, Anna Bjernebag (See section 4-1). In order to facilitate the diverse perspectives of managers with different positions, these two managers were considered as both being appropriate for this research. The authors wished to follow a hierarchical chain within Jack & Jones, starting with the marketing manager, followed by an area manager and finally, concluding with a store manager and his or her sales-clerks. The desired store to be studied was supposed to be a store operating in the same geographical area as the area manager. However, the Jack & Jones store in Jönköping was chosen for several reasons. Firstly, as the store is located in the same city where this thesis was written, both time and resources were used sparingly. Moreover, factors like having contacts in the store (See section 2.2.3) and knowing that (through key customers of the store) the store encourages customer relationships influenced the authors' choice of the store. Nevertheless, the desired hierarchical chain could not be accomplished as the area manager responsible for the store in Jönköping was very reluctant to participate and showed a strong negative attitude towards the interview. At this point, the authors had to choose between the wished hierarchical chain and a reliable and open-minded participant for the interview. The later alternative was chosen as the authors realized the importance of receiving correct answers from a voluntary participant in order to maintain the trustworthiness of the thesis. This choice concluded in an interview with Bestseller Retail's area manager, Mattias Johansson.

The last two interviews were conducted with two salesclerks from the Jack & Jones store in Jönköping; Daniel Lindman and Joseph Kourieh. Performing two interviews with two salesclerks from the same store as the store manager was a conscious choice as the purpose was to reveal the most important aspects of CRM and therefore in-depth knowledge was more necessary than an overview of different stores. By examining one Jack & Jones store, in addition to the chosen managers, in-depth knowledge about the practice of CRM is gained, customer-supplier relationships are examined and the most important aspects when developing and maintaining customer relationships are exposed. Moreover, the authors found the respondents suitable for this thesis as examination of the hierarchical differences in conducting CRM provided different views on the chosen subject.

According to Yin (2003), the purpose of a case study is to isolate one special phenomenon; in this case it is Jack & Jones, in order to gain deeper understanding for it. Furthermore, the author argues that when questions like "how" or/and "why" are the source of the problem, an isolated phenomenon is necessary.

There are two types of interview structures. The first one is when the interview is structured and the interviewer uses the same interview questions for all the respondents. Furthermore, the rank of the questions is strictly followed and no room is given for additional questions. The second type of interviews is the unstructured one and it is performed by using interview questions as guidelines for creating conversations. According to Arksey & Knight (1999), unstructured interviews are appropriate when conducting qualitative re-

² Östergötland is a province in the lower east-side of Sweden.

search since it enables in-depth examinations of the chosen subject. However, even though this study is a qualitative research and the authors wanted to create a conversation with the interviewees, there was still a need to have a questionnaire in order to retain the interviewees in the frame of the subject studied. According to Jacobsen (1993), when there is a need for a questionnaire to keep the interviewee within the subject, a semi-structured interview is in place. The semi-structured interview is a combination of a structured- and an unstructured interview and it allows for an open discussion with broad questions while the interview follows a specific structure.

For the preliminary research however, a more standardized form of interview was used, meaning that the same questions were asked to each participating company (See Appendix 2). According to Svensson & Starrin (2000), when the outcomes from the interviews are compared, a standardized interview is suitable. As the purpose of the preliminary research was to partly compare the different companies in order to find an appropriate case company, this method was used.

As semi structured interviews were performed in the empirical research and the need for an open discussion was evident, all the performed interviews were recorded. This enabled the authors to concentrate on the answers provided by the interviewee while a sequence of questions was conceived. Moreover, open discussions could be held and attention could be put on the interviewee's body language and expression as there was no need to take notes. By recording the interviews the authors claim that the empirical findings are accurate as all the recordings were listened to carefully while printed on paper. After the interviews were printed, the authors contacted some of the participants when a lack of information regarding a specific question was evident in order to clarify the answers.

When the data collection was completed, the authors examined the written down interviews very carefully with the intention of discovering common trends in the answers given by the interviewees. The findings were written down in different themes and these are presented in Chapter 4.

2.2.6 Design of the interview guides

Except for the two salesclerks who were given the same questions, different interview questions were outlined for the different participants. However, a resemblance between the questions was a deliberate choice in order to obtain different perspectives of certain areas within the chosen subject. The research questions are presented in Appendix 5, 6, 7 and 8.

In order to include the right kind of questions in the interviews, a guideline constructed by McDaniels & Gates (2005) was used. The authors believe that the interviewer should firstly decide which kind of questions that should be asked, in this case open questions (See section 2.2.5). The second step was to construct the questions. The authors argue that when doing so, the starting point in every question should be the purpose and the problem discussion of the thesis. As the aim of this thesis is to determine what a customer-supplier relationship in Fashion companies for men's wear is and when it exists, in order to identify the most important aspects when developing and maintaining this relationship, some of the questions were formed with regards to the theories concerning the three main subjects. Thus, the questions were designed through a combination of the purpose and theories.

After constructing the questions, one must examine the choice of words and the rank order of the questions. The language has to be clear and unusual expression should be avoided. Also, the questions should be ranked so that the first questions are interesting for the interviewee in order to catch their attention (McDaniels & Gates, 2005). According to

McDaniels & Gates (2005), well constructed questions with the correct rank order and language increases the trustworthiness of the answers. The authors claim that these instructions have been followed when designing the questions. In order to capture the participants' interests, the authors started the interviews by explaining the aim of the thesis in detail. Moreover, an introduction question was presented to each participant to catch their interests. Finally, the sequence of questions was used in order to encourage the interviewee to give a more detailed and in-depth answers.

Before every interview, the questions were sent out to the interviewees in order for them to understand and be able to prepare for the subjects (Daniel Lindman, a salesclerk at Jack & Jones Jönköping, did not receive the questions before since he was not interested in reading and preparing in advanced). One of the reasons for sending out the questions in advance was to let the interviewees reflect upon the CRM related aspects in their organization/store. Also, according to Svensson & Starrin (2000), by sending out the questions in advance the trustworthiness of the thesis is increased. Since the interviewees have read through the questions before, time has been spent on reflecting over the answers and therefore the answers are more reliable.

Finally, it should be mentioned that in the email send-outs of the interview guides, the interviewees were told that the authors prefer an open discussion and that emphasis would be put on broader discussions. Furthermore, the interviewees were informed that a brief description of the thesis will be given at the beginning of the interview.

2.2.7 Choice of literature

According to Antar, Gholamifar & Viberg (2005), writing a thesis does not start when something is put on paper, it is rather a process that starts long before. In the case of this thesis the authors' knowledge about CRM, relationships and Fashion management was not sufficient, thus, it was necessary to treat the subjects with tolerance of where to find additional relevant knowledge.

In order to create a frame of reference, in-depth knowledge about the chosen subject was needed (Figure 2-2). Therefore, literatures concerning Customer Relationship Management, Fashion management, relationships, consumer behavior, customer satisfaction, communication, relationships, relationship marketing etc. were studied.

Textbooks, Internet web pages, other research theses, articles, and databases were used in order to find relevant information to create the theoretical Chapter. According to Ejvegård (2003), search words that are used to find the relevant information is an essential part of writing a thesis since those words have a great impact on the results presented. The search words used most regularly during the literature study of this thesis are the following: CRM, Customer Relationship marketing, customer-supplier relationships, relationships, relationship marketing, Fashion management, consumer behavior, men and Fashion, Fashion for men, CRM in Fashion companies, etc. The most used databases were *Ebrary*, *Emerald Insight* and *Jstor*. Ebrary is an electronic library where a large collection of books are stored. Emerald Insight contains the world's largest range of journals within management and Jstor is a database containing business journals. *Julia* and *Diva* are other databases that were used when creating the frame of references. Most of the information was found in the library of Jönköping University.

2.2.8 The development of the study

A summary of the development of this thesis is presented in Figure 2-2. The two highlighted squares are the ones who have been carefully discussed throughout this chapter. The Figure shows that the authors started this research by reading relevant theories regarding the chosen subject in order to form the background for this thesis. Following that, a preliminary research was performed to narrow down the chosen subject, outline research questions and determine the purpose of the thesis. The background was also modified while these tasks were completed. Naturally, the research followed by establishing the methodological approach and the methods needed to perform the empirical research. Furthermore, in-depth knowledge about the chosen subject was gained by reading further relevant literature. Interviews were performed and when the empirical research was done, the analysis began by comparing empirical findings with literature in order to give answers to the research questions. The last task of this research was to draw conclusions regarding the chosen subject and fulfill the purpose of this thesis. Furthermore, the authors could provide managers with implications and suggest further studies within similar fields were presented.

Methodology

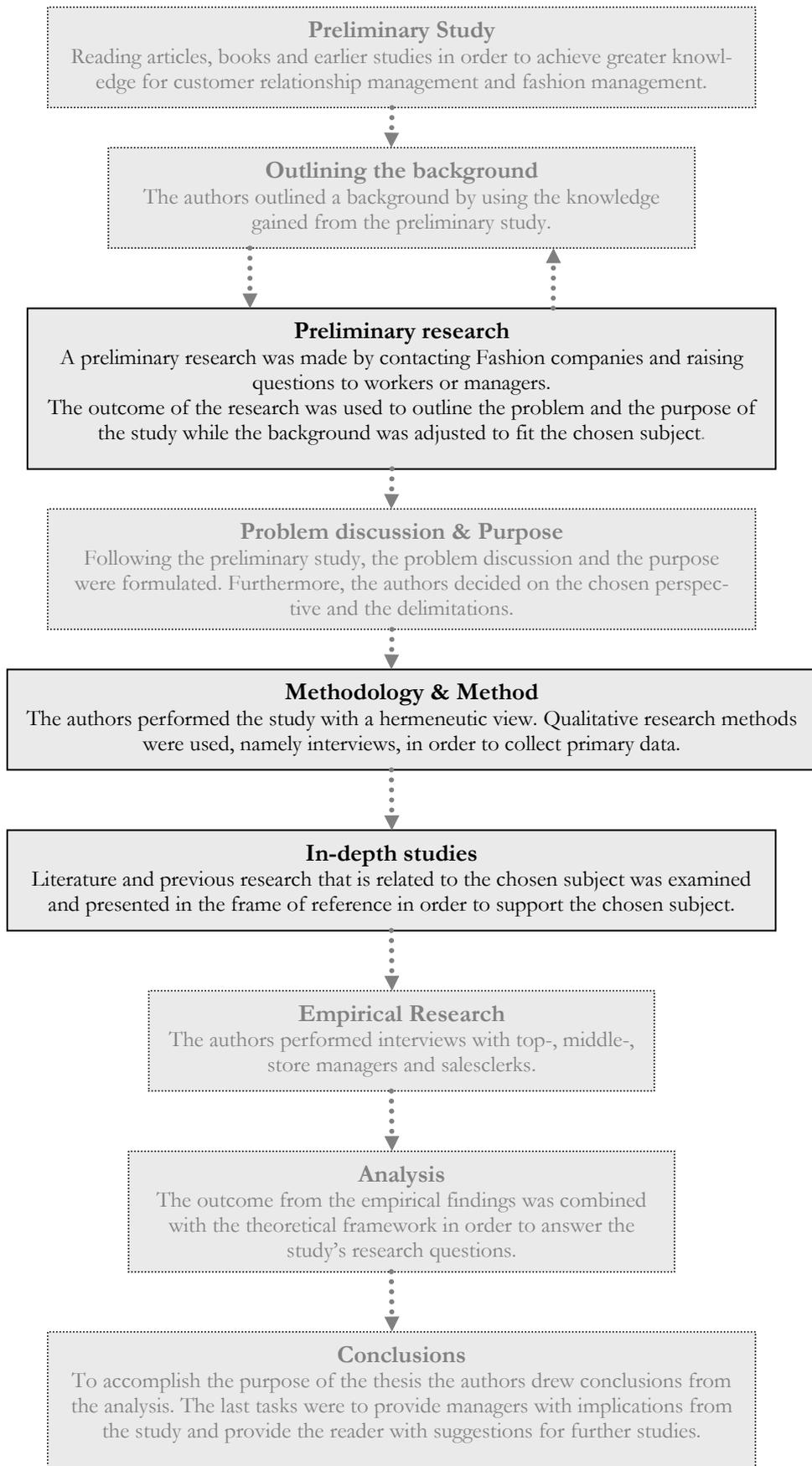


Figure 2-2 The development of the study, constructed by the authors.

2.3 Trustworthiness

All methods have advantages and disadvantages, no matter how well they suit the purpose of a thesis or the methodological approach of the researchers. Qualitative research is often criticized since many believe that it is a far too subjective method to use. Critics towards the qualitative method argue that the empirical findings are often built upon the researchers' own perception about the subject examined. Furthermore, qualitative methods are criticized for their unstructured nature and it is argued that because of this fact, the research is hard to replicate (Bryman, 2001). The authors agree with the previous argument, and believe that the analysis of this research is most likely hard to replicate. Merriam (1998) and Yin (2003) both discuss the reliability of a qualitative research and they argue that, if the same case study is conducted by other researchers who use the exact same methods, the outcome of the two theses should be similar. The authors of this thesis do not agree with the previous statement, and argue that since a hermeneutic approach has been used, and therefore, the research has an interpretative nature, the same or similar outcome is not possible if the research would be replicated. Thus, this thesis aims at high level of trustworthiness, and the authors argue that this has been achieved through continues explanations about how the study has been conducted, factors behind the researchers' opinions and conclusions and the authors efforts for interpreting the empirical finding from several different angles.

The trustworthiness of a qualitative study is not only connected to the empirical research, rather to the entire thesis. However, to increase the empirical findings' trustworthiness, profound pre-understanding of the subject is necessary, so that correct interpretations can be made by the researchers (Patel & Davidson, 2003). The authors claim that the pre-understanding of the subjects in this research was sufficient when the empirical findings were collected. Both authors have academic knowledge about the subjects, before writing this thesis, and further understandings were gained through in-depth studies (See Figure 2-2).

As discussed in Section 2.2.6, in order to collect correct data during the empirical research, the interview questions were designed to indicate the purpose and the problem of the thesis. Furthermore, the interview guides were sent out before the interviews were conducted so that the participants had a chance to prepare for the subjects in question. The authors believe that these factors increase the trustworthiness of the empirical findings as they make sure that the answers reveal the reality that is being examined. Finally, it must be mentioned that even though the researchers guided the interviews, so that the discussions were held within the frame of the subjects, the authors claim that they avoided asking questions which would encourage the participants to provide desired answers. Taking the previous discussion into account, the authors believe that neutrality was gained from the interviews.

The aim of this thesis is to “...*determine what a customer-supplier relationship in Fashion companies for men's wear is and when it exists, in order to identify the most important aspects when developing and maintaining this relationship.*” In order to carry this out, in-depth knowledge about CRM and Fashion management was gained and Jack & Jones was examined. Thus, the analysis of this thesis is connected with a specific situation. Therefore, it is in the authors' beliefs that the results from this research can not be generalized in a statistical point of view. However, this does not mean that others can not employ the conclusions of this thesis or that the results can not be generalized at all, only that the users should make sure that the results of this thesis can be applicable on the situation in question. This argument is in line with Merriam (1998) and means that it is the users' responsibility to ensure that the new situation has resemblance with the case company.

2.4 Method criticism

The authors believe that the methods chosen for conducting this thesis were the most appropriate approaches in order to fulfill the purpose of this study. However, there are some criticisms that ought to be presented. Firstly, the fact that the hierarchical chain that was desired (See Section 2.2.5) could not be achieved, has affected the outcome of the thesis. The authors believe that if the area manager for the store in Jönköping had been included in the study, the results would have been better as they would present a chain of managers' apprehension of CRM in Fashion companies for men's wear and also, greater understanding for the chosen store would have been gained. However, the authors claim that even though the hierarchical chain was lost, more trustworthiness and relevant empirical data was received by excluding the desired area manager.

Another fact that should be given attention in this section is the difference between CRM in Fashion companies in large versus small cities. The authors believe that by only studying one store in a small city, some of the outcomes of this thesis may not be applicable for Fashion companies in larger cities. The authors were aware of their choice of store throughout this paper, but the consequences of this choice became clear during the interview where the size of the city in question became a well discussed subject. It must be pointed out that this factor was never discussed in any of the literatures that were studied. However, the authors claim that even if this factor would have been discovered in advance, due to the time limitation and the scope of this thesis, the authors could not have included both large and small cities.

The final fact that the authors would like to discuss in this section is the theories regarding men's consumer behavior within Fashion retailing. The authors assure that a lot of research was done in order to find theories about this subject, but hardly anything was found. The authors are aware of the fact that Section 3.2.6 has flaws and may not be completely in line with the subjects examined in this thesis. However, as stated before, since rarely anything was found concerning the men's consumer behavior, the authors choose to include the characteristics that were found, even if all of them are not significant for the purpose of this thesis.

3 CRM & Fashion management

The following section describes relevant theories that are used in order to analyze the empirical findings. These theories regard important aspects of CRM and Fashion management.

3.1 Customer Relationship Management

There are many different definitions of CRM. Many believe that the concept is a computer system that companies use to store customer information in order to provide customers with customized offers, while others believe that it is a strategy to manage customer relationships in order to create shareholder value (Payne, 2006). As stated earlier in the delimitation section, this thesis will focus on the later perspective and disregard CRM for technological solutions and IT/Internet solutions. The technological perspectives involve for example databases and WebPages in order to improve customer service.

According to Payne (2006), CRM is a business approach that seeks to improve a company's customer value and profitability by developing and maintaining relationships with customers that are carefully targeted in order to increase shareholder value. Other writers, such as Peppers & Rogers (1999), refer to CRM as the process of integrating the idea of customer focus in marketing, service, sales, production, logistics, and economy; in other words, the entire company's organization and activities. Swift (2001) suggests that CRM is the effort that a company makes in order to understand and influence customer behavior through meaningful communication. The author believes that the purpose of this strategy is to improve customer retention, customer loyalty, and customer profitability. Also, this author stresses the fact that the effort has to embrace the entire organization and not just parts of it. According to Eichorn (2004), CRM is a holistic approach that integrates internal leadership, culture, organizational structure, business processes and information systems with external customer touch points. Finally, Björnberg (2000) believes that CRM is entirely about knowing a customer very well, so that his or her needs and desires can be fulfilled. He argues that every company's goal should be to have satisfied customers so that they remain loyal.

The main and central concept, irrespective of which definition one chooses, is the customer. The most important goal with CRM is to create better relationships with customers and through these relationships, respond better to their needs and desires. Also, by developing and maintaining these relationships, better profitability and revenues will be accomplished while trust, commitment and loyalty are gained (Payne, 2006).

3.1.1 Trust, Commitment & Loyalty.

For decades, when predicting consumer behavior and consumer decision making, measurements of overall customer satisfaction have been used (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999). However, the paradigm shift from a traditional marketing mix into relationship marketing has increased the list of factors that affect consumer behavior. These factors are terms as trust (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), commitment (Dwyer, Schurr & Oh, 1987; Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and loyalty. According to Garbarino & Johnson (1999), trust, commitment and loyalty can be identified separately and these aspects interact in a different way for different types of customers.

In order for relationships to be successful, trust is a vital aspect that needs to be considered. Trust is defined as;

"...a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence" (Morrman, Deshpandé & Zaltman, 1993, p. 82).

According to Morgan & Hunt (1994), trust is the awareness of confidence in the exchange partners integrity and reliability. Garbarino & Johnson (1999), argue that these definitions of trust both stress the importance of reliability and confidence. Many researches have described trust in market-related situations as trust being when customers have confidence in the honesty of the other part, for example a salesperson (Crosby, Evans & Cowles, 1990). Other researcher have the same definition of trust and Gwinner, Gremler & Bitner (1998), argue that psychological benefits that arise from trust are even more vital than the special treatment that consumers gain from close relationships to service firms.

Comparable with trust, literature concerning customer relationships always discusses the terms loyalty and commitment. According to Morgan & Hunt (1994), commitment is a continuing relationship that is so important that it calls for maximum efforts for maintenance. Furthermore, this relationship involves strong emotional and behavioral dedication to the company. Commitment in relationship marketing often deals with consumer - and employee commitment. When defining consumer commitment, organizational theories and models that discuss employee commitment can be applied (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). According to the literature regarding employee commitment, there are different factors defining commitment such as: psychological attachments, personal identification with the firm and loyalty (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999). Commitment is often used to signify customers' emotional preferences and the term loyalty refers to repeated support (Odekerken-Schröder, 1999). Another definition of loyalty is given by Oliver (1997) who state that loyalty is commitment that is deeply held and it enables customers to frequently purchase products or services time after time. This causes cyclical purchasing of the same brand regardless of pressure by situational influences or marketing efforts. The development of a relationship should strive for loyalty and according to Grönroos, a highly recognized professor of Service and Relationship Marketing, loyalty is not only about the customer being loyal to a firm but a firm should stay loyal to its customers as well in order for a relationship to exist (Grönroos, 2000).

Although literature regarding CRM discusses factors that affect relationships, few definitions are given regarding what a relationship really is (Barnes, 2000). The authors of this thesis found it highly important to truly understand the meaning of a relationship between a company and its customers, before examining further aspects of CRM. Therefore, the following section will shed light on the concept of relationships within business contexts.

3.1.2 When does a relationship exist?

When defining a relationship, according to Grönroos (2000), firms might look at the number of times a customer makes purchases from the company. If the customer keeps returning to the same store and buys products frequently, it can be said that a relationship is established. However, this method is not applicable without taking other aspects into account. For example, a customer might purchase products from the same store a number of times because of low prices. This can be a sign of that the customer does not have a relationship to the firm and he or she is going back to the company because of the low prices and might change company if a competitor would lower the prices even more. Another reason for buyers returning is convenient location. Example of such firms is a supermarket that a buyer might shop from as it is close to his or her home (Grönroos, 2000). Barnes' (2000) discussion regarding relationships is in line with Grönroos and Barnes adds that although a customer may purchase products from the same store for years and know the

staff members of the store, it does not mean that a relationship exist as it can be an indication of convenience.

According to Fournier, Dobscha & Mick (1998), the term relationship marketing has lost its meaning as marketers pay little notice to what a true relationship really is and instead focus is only put on getting close to customers. This issue is more obvious when it comes to the use of customer databases where data about customers is stored and little concern is given to privacy and intimacy (Barnes, 2000). Focusing primary on database marketing does not help a company reflect upon the concept of a relationship. A firm might believe it is providing customers with the right services when sending out tailor-made e-mails or offering memberships of a loyalty club, but customers might not feel the same. These services do not affect the customers' apprehension of the company or improve an image of uninterested staff members. In many cases customers might gain benefits from a loyalty club, however this is definitely not relationship marketing and it does not mean that there exist any relationship between the firm and its customers (Grönroos, 2000).

Loyalty, emotions and a positive mindset to someone or something are implications of a relationship (Barnes, 2000) and a relationship is linked to an attitude and the people involved in a relationship feels there is a tie connecting them with the other participant. This tie should not be easy to break and it does not grow out of nothing rather the firm has to earn the relationship and this is achieved through relationship marketing. Therefore companies need to create communication- and interaction processes in order to develop and maintain relationships. Moreover, these firms should remember that in the end it is the customer who decides if a relationship has developed. Companies engaging in CRM need to keep in mind something that should be obvious to them, but in practice it is not; although a firm might think it is doing everything right when practicing CRM, in practice customers might not think the same. In other words, firms need to make sure that a customer think there is a relationship and they should not only base facts on their own marketing efforts (Grönroos, 2000).

A relationship is about two-way commitment and a shared mode of thinking where organizations need to understand their customers and show this through actions. Relationships develop over time and so does the mutual-way of thinking and the improvements are made through interactions and communication between the firm and its customers. Interactions refer to all contact that appears between a firm and its customers. For example, exchanges of goods, services or information are regarded as interactions. Communication is a part of the interaction and furthermore communication involves advertising, direct mail, etc. A relationship develops only when interactions and communication processes continue over time and form a procedure for relationship creation. According to Grönroos (2000), determining whether a relationship exists or not by using these indications is not an easy task but as there are no ideal measurements for a relationships existence, this is an instrument that is applicable and provides close results. Grönroos' definition of a relationship is the following;

“A relationship has developed when a customer perceives that a mutual way of thinking exists between customer and supplier or service provider” (Grönroos, 2000, p. 33).

The best way in order to understand relationships in a business context is, according to Barnes (2000), to examine the foundation of interpersonal relationship. Steve Duck, a professor of psychology and communications, has written many books and articles about interpersonal relationships and Barnes (2000), discovered that the principles regarding managing relationships between two people can be used for relationships between a company

and its customers as well. Moreover, Barnes states that, it is not enough for a company that wants to manage close relationships with its customers to provide them with attractive incentives. These activities are actually opposite to the core of a real interpersonal relationship.

3.1.2.1 Interpersonal Relationships

According to Barnes (2000), interpersonal relationships determine whether customer satisfaction is achieved or not. Firms that interact with customers at an interpersonal level are affecting them on a personal level and can therefore add to customer satisfaction. Focus is on how the customers feel while advanced technical services and improved products is not sufficient. Firms that have insight in how interpersonal relationships function gain knowledge about how to develop customer relationships. A lot of research made within CRM concludes that interpersonal relationships are vital when improving customer satisfaction (Czepiel, 1990; Berry 1983). Companies need to provide good service and interpersonal interactions between the staff members and consumers, in addition to the products (Czepiel & Gilmore, 1987). A study made by Gremler & Brown (1996) examine whether customer loyalty is actually improved when firms engage in creating interpersonal relationship. The outcome of the study suggest that firms can develop and maintain relationships with customers because customers' desire to stay increases, when focus is on creating interpersonal relationships. These relationships are developed when managers make it possible for the creation of friendship between employees and customers and by decreasing employee turnover so that knowledge about customers is not lost. Interpersonal relationships are reinforced by managers if personnel are given good training and new staff members are selected carefully (Gremler & Brown, 1996). To facilitate greater value for customers, firms need to create value for the employees as these will as a result deliver interpersonal services to the consumers (Barnes, 2000).

Although Barnes (2000) states that interpersonal relationships are what firms need to create with their customers, he concludes his discussion by extending the definition of relationships even more, by arguing that;

"...the greatest value is added when the company is able to create an environment where there is a strong emotional connection between the company and its customers; in other words, a genuine relationship," (Barnes, 2000, p. 92).

3.1.2.2 Relationships defined by consumers

According to Barnes (2000), the word relationship has a unique meaning for most people and it is used in context of emotional connection between two or more people. Barnes performed a study where consumers were asked to describe companies they enjoy interacting with frequently. The participants did not have any problems with describing the companies that they have true relationships with and these companies appeared to be smaller firms. The customers have been dealing with these firms for longer times and he or she is addressed by name and feels special when interacting with the firm.

When the participants were asked to describe companies they do not enjoy interacting with, firms were easily named and the reason for the consumers' dissatisfaction did not regard the purchased products, services or because of the prices charged. The consumers had a negative impression of the interaction with these companies because of the way they feel they are treated and because of the interaction with the employees and the company (Barnes, 2000).

When the participants in the study were asked to describe the relationships they have to others, the words friends, family and neighbors were mentioned. These relationships are closer relationships. In a business environment the word relationships was also used by the consumers, although its use was limited. Retail and service providers such as hairdressers, grocery stores, drugstores and health care professionals were examples of the firms mentioned (Barnes, 2000).

Many of the consumers in the study stated that they did not have relationships with larger companies such as major retail chains, electrical utilities, banks and telephone utilities. The participants claimed that the relationship is one-sided and therefore not a real relationship. However, according to Barnes (2000), this is an indication of that consumers do admit having relationships with companies but the word relationship is only used when these relationships are close and the consumers interact with firms they trust and when they receive something special from the relations. These firms can develop and maintain long term relationships with loyal customers. The consumers are loyal because they feel satisfied in an emotional way and not because of financial reasons.

3.1.2.3 Customer-supplier relationships on different levels

Barnes (2000) states that there are four different levels of relationships in business contexts; brand-, distant-, face-to-face and intimate customer relationships. Brand customer relationships are when customers do not even have direct contact with a company or its staff members. These relationships exist for all consumers. An example is that one might be a consumer of Pepsi-Cola, but one may never meet staff members from the company and instead purchases are made from retailers and distributors of Pepsi-Cola. This is considered to be a relationship although physical contact is not established as the important aspect is the customers' connection to the brand. Distant customer relationships do not involve much physical meetings or interactions and instead they are established through technology. E-mailing and telephone conversations are examples of tools used in distant customer relationships. Face-to-face relationships describe interactions in retailing where there is a wide range of exchanges. Customer might be well known by retail clerks, receptionist and bank employees. Face-to-face relationships are different from the intimate relationships as they involve less personal information sharing and are therefore less personal. Intimate relationships are the closest ones and are seen as relationships that include sharing of personal information. Examples of such relationship are when the consumer has trust in the firm and there can be physical contact like with a doctor, dentist or hairdresser. These relationships are close and personal and are associated with the common definition of relationships. When intimate- and face-to-face customer relationships exist, these have already been developed (Barnes, 2000). However, how should a firm maintain relationships with its customers?

When a relationship has developed, customers must be treated as customers on a regular basis and this should not be affected by whether they buy products or not. In other words, firms need to understand the importance of this fact and when a firm acts upon this it is treating its customers as relational customers. Relational customers are valued customers that are important to a company and if a firm does not take this into account it does not show an aim for creating relationship and this is highly important in CRM (Grönroos, 2000).

Maintaining a relationship also means creating a win-win situation where both parties benefit from the relationship over time. A relationship will not continue if the firm or the customer do not feel that they are constantly gaining extra benefits that they can not get any where else (Gummesson, 2000). In order for this to work in practice, firms need to per-

ceive customers as partners and not as an outsider who must be convinced into buying products or services. A firm conducting CRM needs to do activities with or for the customer and not to the customer. Grönroos (2000) argues that firms can achieve this by developing a total service offering.

3.1.3 Strategic perspectives in CRM

Grönroos argues that customers do not only buy goods and services anymore, they buy the benefits that are provided to them through the purchase. Later on, the author takes the statement one step further and claims that no matter what a customer buys, it should function as a service for him or her. This service can differ from one customer to another. Some may find the service in a low price, while others may find it in the image that the purchase provides. However, no matter where it is found, the service is crucial for developing and maintaining relationships with target customers. Therefore, when a firm is choosing strategic perspectives, the target customers should be carefully examined in order to find out the value-creating factors (Grönroos, 2000).

According to Grönroos (2000), there are four main strategic perspectives and a firm can choose any of the four perspectives when developing a strategic approach. However, this does not mean that the other perspectives are disregarded; it will only determine the direction of the firm's resources and competencies.

The core product perspective is when competitive advantage is gained through the quality of the core solution. In these cases, service is important when developing and maintaining customer relationships, but it does not have a strategic role. The second strategic perspective is the price perspective, where the firm's main mean of competition is the low price. According to the author, this is only a possible approach for firms that can have a sustainable cost advantage and know how to maintain it. The third perspective is the imaginary values perspective that firms create in addition to the value of the core product. In order to conduct this approach, there has to be an attractive and functioning core product and heavy resources must be put on marketing strategies. If the firm fails to continuously reinforce the investments in marketing communication, the product will lose its attractiveness (Grönroos, 2000).

The last strategic perspective is the service perspective, where the roles of the service components that are put in the customer relationships are seen as strategic approaches. Within this approach it is simply not enough to have an excellent core product or a good image, the firm has to offer its customers a total service offering with physical products, services, information, personal attention, advice, invoicing and other components that are important for the customer relationship. Grönroos (2000) refers to this situation as service competition and argues that firms in this position do not compete with their core product; they compete with their total service offering containing the core product. Once the author has established the importance of this fact, the question is asked on how companies can successfully compete in service competition.

3.1.4 The customer strategy

According to Brown (2000), in order to practice CRM in a successful way, it is not enough for an organization to only have an overall service strategy. The author believes that an organization conducting CRM needs strategies for interacting with the customers. Brown (2000) stresses the importance of identifying the organization's key customers and embrac-

ing them with the customer strategies of the company so that competitors and others have difficulties getting through (See Figure 3-1).

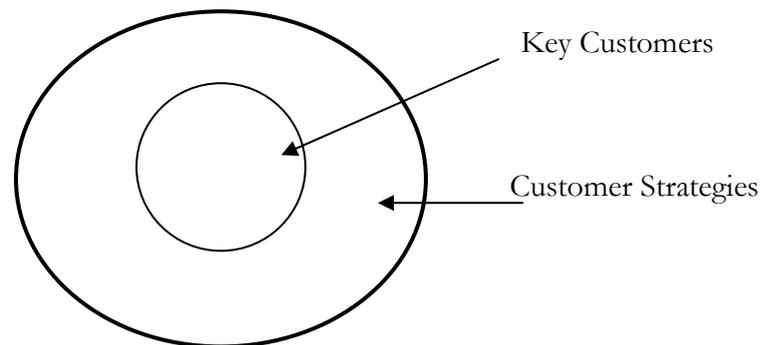


Figure 3-1 The customer strategy, constructed by the authors.

Also, by identifying key customers, the company has the opportunity to develop deeper relationship with them (Brown, 2000). According to Greenberg (2004), once key customers have been identified, the customer strategies must be developed according to their preferences. Through this strategy, the author believes that the company will gain loyal customers who will increase the profitability the organization. Loyal customers buy more products or services, are often not time consuming for the company, are not price sensitive and finally, they often recommend others through the word of mouth. By considering these customers as a strategic asset for the company, which there is a lack of on the market, the organization will understand the importance of developing and maintaining relationships with them.

According to Swift (2001), when the key customers have been identified and the customer strategies are developed, the organization can easily communicate with the right customer, at the right time, through the right channels and, with the right offers in order to maximize the customer satisfaction.

3.1.5 Customer satisfaction in CRM

There are many definitions and theories regarding customer satisfaction and according to Grönroos (2000), the subject is vital for companies conducting CRM. The authors of this thesis have decided to use Lele & Sheth's (1988) theories since according to them, the main four factors that influences customer satisfaction, namely sales activities, the product, after sales services and activities and, the organization culture are according to Grönroos (2000) all central in CRM. It is important to remember that the satisfaction does not arise when the customer is pleased with one or two of the four factors; it is rather a combination of the four that creates customer satisfaction. Furthermore, in line with Söderlund's (1997) discussion, the different factors influence satisfaction at different levels and a negative experience will affect the customer more that a positive one.

3.1.5.1 The product

According to theories about customer satisfaction and CRM, the product is an essential part of organizations conducting CRM (Grönroos, 2000; Söderlund, 1997). One of the most important aspects within CRM is to stay close to the customers in order to find their preferences and behavior so that desired products can be produced (Grönroos, 2000). According to Lele & Sheth (1988) and Söderlund (1997), the product affects the satisfaction of the customer. If a company has close relationships to its customer, and through this re-

lationship can produce the right products for them, customer satisfaction is achieved (Lele & Sheth, 1988, Grönroos, 2000). However, to achieve this process, a constant dialog between the company and the customers is necessary (Grönroos, 2000), so that feedback can be used effectively in order for the customer to feel included in the relationship (Lele & Sheth, 1988). The authors argue that the design of the products signals the values practiced in the organization and the values is a reflection of the way the organization look upon its customers. Therefore, when creating products after customers' preferences, an indication of the importance of the customer is given, leading to customer satisfaction.

3.1.5.2 Sales activities

The second factor influencing customer satisfaction is the sales activities that the consumer receives during the in-store interactions (Lele & Sheth, 1988). For a company practicing CRM, the in-store interactions are very important since it gives the employees an opportunity to create or develop customer relationships. It is during these meetings the customers can be confirmed that they are a part of the organization and feel included and important (Payne, 2006). Lele & Sheth (1988) argue that when a customer feels included and important during the sales activities, customer satisfaction is achieved. Gehlhar (2005), the author of a highly prestige's Fashion book, believes that customers appreciate support in the store and if companies are not willing to build relationship and offer services upon this, they might lose their customers. Furthermore, Gehlhar argues that;

"...personal connection results in customer loyalty. Make them feel special and they will come back for more." (Gehlhar, 2005, p. 131),

Furthermore, the authors discuss the importance of the sales activities between the company and its distributors. It is crucial for a CRM company to work with distributors that also conduct this strategy in order to satisfy customers (Grönroos, 2000). If, for example, the feedback is not utilized in the best way by the distributor (Peppers & Rogers, 1999), the consumer will not feel included and important, leading to a negative experience (Lele & Sheth, 1988).

3.1.5.3 After sales services and activities

According to Lele & Sheth (1988), there are many after sales services and activities that organizations can offer their customers in order to keep them satisfied and loyal. However, not all services or activities should be practiced by all organizations. The authors argue that the managers must take a careful look at the organization and decide which services or activities that will create value for their target customers. A dialog between the staff and the consumer after the sale, on the other hand, is recommended for every organization conducting CRM, since through this dialog the relationship is developed and maintained even though no purchase is taking place (Eichorn, 2004), leading to difficulties for the consumers to leave the company.

It is important to prioritize some customers over others when providing after sales services, according to theories about CRM. According to Peppers & Rogers (1999), it is impossible for an organization to provide every customer with after sales services, and therefore, the strategic value, which is the value of the total profits that an organization would have if they concentrated on one specific customer, of each customer should be recognized in the organization in order to find out which customers that are key customers. Regarding customer satisfaction, ranking customers is not a desired strategy since the ones that are not ranked as key customers will not be satisfied and therefore, they will have a negative image of the company. Moreover, they can more easily change to another organization

since they will not feel that a real relationship exists. However, these customers may be aware of the fact that they are not key customers and accept the fact that the company does not provide them with special services and keep purchasing product anyway.

3.1.5.4 Organization culture

According to Lele & Sheth (1988), the previous three factors are all developed and affected by the culture that is practice in the organization. The authors define organization culture as the values, norms and strategies that are used in the organization, that is, culture in both formal symbols and informal systems. Furthermore, the authors argue that customer satisfaction can not be achieved until the entire organization is filled with a customer prioritized culture.

Firms need to start from the bottom of their organization and make the changes internally in order to successfully practice the strategy. According to Eichorn (2004), customer relationships and some parts of the technology used to implement it, is all that the external environment can see. Like an iceberg, the most significant parts are under the surface. Eichorn's model clearly shows that the first and most important part is leadership, culture and attitudes, as they are the foundation of the iceberg. But then in further up in the iceberg it is also important that the organization culture supports each part of the iceberg. CRM will fail if a company is not ready or capable of changing its business processes and culture to focus on the customer (Coffee, 2002).

Eichorn (2004) points out that time and size of the organization has an impact on the culture and larger and more established organizations will have more difficulties changing the attitudes and norms of the employees. However, especially in larger companies, the leaders have to "Walk the Talk" and communicate instead of giving directives about the culture. This is why leadership and culture are both included in the first step. Moreover, the author emphasis the importance of the fact that the organization culture should be driven from the organization's purpose in order to create a coherent picture for the employees.

Cross functionality, which is also included in Eichorn's (2004) iceberg, is pointed out as the second foundation for CRM. Cross-functionality helps the external environment to get a coherent picture of the company, no matter what part of it the external viewer is communicating with and to achieve this, a strong culture and good leadership is vital.

However, to achieve any of these foundations for CRM, employee satisfaction is necessary (Eichorn, 2004). Rogg, Schmidt, Shull, & Schmitt's (2001) research shows that the internal practices; including culture and leadership, and the climate of an organization directly affects the performance of the employees. According to Eichorn (2004), there are many studies that show that employee satisfaction correlates with customer satisfaction. After all, the employees are the ones that must ensure customer satisfaction and show commitment to make the customers not only wanting to interact with the organization, but also to be supporters of the company (Barnes, 2000). Again, communication with the employees will become the key point as Barnes (2000) argues that the first step in making the employees committed to customer satisfaction is employee satisfaction. Moreover, to know whether or not the employees are satisfied, one must start by researching internal satisfaction, climate, culture, relationships and attitudes. The thought is that employees should develop the same close and natural relationship with each other as with the customers (Eichorn, 2004). According to Barnes (2000) the objective is to achieve a shareholder value chain, where employee satisfaction leads to customer satisfaction which leads to shareholder satisfaction.

Finally, both Eichorn (2004) and Grönroos (2000) argue that CRM should be looked upon as a culture that has to be implemented throughout the entire organization so that the importance of customer relationship and customer focus is embedded in the employees values and norms. As Lele & Sheth (1988) believe that the first three factors for customer satisfaction (the product, sales activities and after sales service and activities) are dependent on the organization culture, in an organization conducting CRM, these factors will be achieved, leading to customer satisfaction (Figure 3-2).

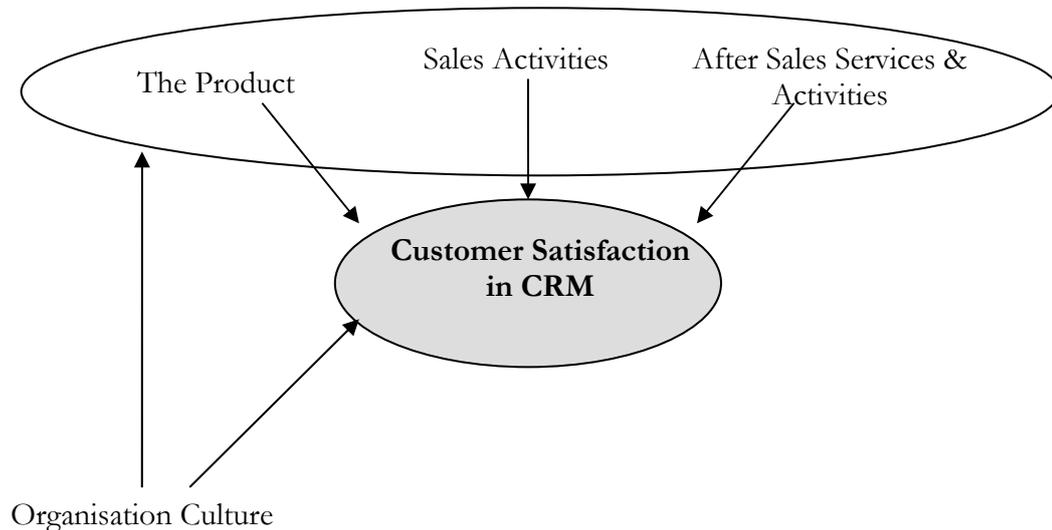


Figure 3-2 Factors affecting Customer Satisfaction, constructed by the authors.

3.2 Fashion Management and CRM

Looking at successful brands in the Fashion industry, one can see that there is a pattern of couples where one member is classified to be the creative one and the other member is the manager. Examples of such Fashion people are Giorgio Armani and Sergio Galeotti, Gianni and Santo Versace, Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé etc (Saviolo & Testa, 2002).

“Fashion is inspiration, creativity and intuition. But it is also organization, strategy and management. These two apparently contrasting sets of elements have to come together to ensure the success of a business idea.” - Renzo Rosso, President of Diesel, (Saviolo & Testa, 2002, p. 6).

All firms need creativity to gain success but firms that have production based on an artistic ability are different from other companies. Fashion firms are a typical example of such companies as they sell a creative product. Products offered by Fashion companies are developed by bringing together an artistic vision, craftsmanship and strategic management (Saviolo & Testa, 2002).

New products or product lines are to some extent always unique comparing to previous ones. The reason for this is simple; Fashion products are outcomes of creative activity that is always renewing itself. Creativity, change and innovation are crucial for Fashion companies as they need to serve demands that are always changing (Saviolo & Testa, 2002).

Predicting future consumer needs is a very complex task. However, there are methods for inspiring and guiding creative people in Fashion companies to come up with new ideas that consumers will like (Saviolo & Testa, 2002).

Thus, Fashion firms are constantly dependent on two different groups of people, namely the creative people (the emotional spirit) and the managers (the rational spirit); the managers need to have the ability to lead the innovation process and an understanding of the language and the culture of creative people. Most of all, they must bare in mind the basic rule in the Fashion industry:

“It is not enough in Fashion to offer the market what it wants today, as this would already be an old product” (Saviolo & Testa, 2002, p. 32).

3.2.1 Finding a balance through market orientation & key customers

In order to create good integration between the managerial and the creative departments in a Fashion company, one need to find a balance between market needs and commercial views. The company can not only design products that meet customers’ needs as the consumer wants to be surprised. Hence, creativity without limitations does not provide sustainable profit. For instance, creative people believe that an earlier successful product has to be completely changed for a new season while commercial beliefs is about keeping products that have a history of success (Saviolo & Testa, 2002).

To find a balanced direction, Fashion companies need to create an approach for market orientation that has its base in knowledge of customers and their preferences. To achieve greater knowledge for customer preferences, Fashion companies should focus on key customers. Key customers are customers that contribute to a large amount of sales and focusing on them is considered to be another vital aspect of the Fashion industry. This strategy helps Fashion companies to deliver a collection that is perfectly suited for its segment (Saviolo & Testa, 2002).

3.2.2 Gaining knowledge through close relationships

Collaboration between the managers, designers and the sales force is needed to increase the knowledge about key customers. According to Saviolo & Testa (2002), Fashion companies should have a sell-out logic, meaning that the focus should be on the end consumers. Sales forces need to create close relationships towards customers to increase the knowledge of their preferences. These relationships are essential for developing collections that are market oriented and match the commercial policies for the chosen customer segment (Saviolo & Testa, 2002). Han, Wilson & Dant (1993) state that the relationships between companies and customers must generate mutual benefits. Both the company and the buyers have to feel the relationship is contributing to greater benefits, for the relationship to remain strong.

3.2.3 Relational benefits

Marzo-Navarro, Pedraja-Iglesias & Riviera-Tores (2004), published an article in the Journal of Fashion marketing and management where the benefits of close relationships for both consumers and Fashion retailers were discussed. The authors stated that, besides gaining knowledge of customer preferences, a Fashion company engaging in close customer relationships gains customers that are loyal in the long run and this helps firms to develop sustainable competitive advantages.

Furthermore, customer loyalty enables a company to increase prices without taking big risks and it generates barriers to market entry. This fact is suited for companies that have been in a mature market for many years where the growth is stable. According to Sirohi,

Mclaughlin & Wittink (1998), the Fashion industry is such a market as it is signified by low growth, high competition and the need to keep existing consumers.

In order to achieve customer loyalty, a firm needs to understand the aspects that consumers perceive as benefits from the relationship. The customer has to be satisfied to remain loyal towards the firm (Marzo-Navarro et. al, 2004).

The benefits that consumers gain through a close relationship to a Fashion company are economic advantage in terms of discounts, greater efficiency, personal advice etc. When deciding on the clothes to buy, the customer can get fast and suitable guidelines from the sales force in a store as they probably know the customers preferences (Marzo-Navarro et. al, 2004).

3.2.4 Communication

According to Saviolo & Testa (2002), communication is a metaphorical spread of a mental representation between a sender and a recipient. Communication exists when common verbal and/or non-verbal codes are shared in a particular situation. The message that the sender wants the recipient to receive has to use symbols that have the same meaning for both parties so that the recipient understands the sender's purpose. When it comes to communication in business, firms need to understand that brand identity is something that is created in the mind of the consumer and it can not be created by the organization.

The most common difference between communications on different levels is between internal and external communication. Internal communication aims at creating information exchange between employees, shareholders, suppliers, the sales force etc, in order for the different participants in the firm to work with common goals. External communication is communication with the final customer and communication with transitional customers and suppliers. In other words, it is communication with external subjects that the firm operates with (Saviolo & Testa, 2002).

Communication is also divided into external marketing communication, internal communication, economic and social communication and institutional communication. Integrating and coordinating these levels of communication should be done with consistency at the organizational level. For this to work, communication in an organization needs to develop into a process that grips the whole firm. Communication tools such as public relations, press offices and communication agencies should have the same vision of the firm when communicating the brand. According to Saviolo & Testa (2002), the perception of a brand becomes stronger and more accurate when all the internal and external communication messages are delivered with consistency.

3.2.4.1 Communication in Fashion

As fashion products are personal tools used by consumers for demonstrating a lifestyle or an attitude, Fashion itself is defined as a visual language and therefore communicating fashion products is not the same as communication other consumer goods. Fashion products change every sixth month, the main focus for successful communication is to focus on communicating the brand and this is often done by fashion companies that offer products like jeans wear, sportswear or other basic products. Fashion is already a sort of communication as fashion always uses tools for communication. These tools are visual tools like shows, photographs, models, videos etc and are suitable for fashion items as symbolic elements are more essential in fashion products than functionality. The main problem with

communication through visual tools is to have consistency between brand identity and visual identity (Saviolo & Testa, 2002).

3.2.4.2 Communication tools

Communication tools in the fashion industry is divided into three categories; seasonal-, relational- and institutional communication tools. Seasonal communication tools are catalogues, fashion shows and fairs. Catalogues are the most traditional tools in the fashion industry, fashion shows are the most important tools and fairs are tools for business to business communication³. Relational communication tools are tools like the internet (a company's website), direct marketing (e-mails), relational marketing etc. According to Saviolo & Testa (2002) the internet should be used more by fashion companies so that information regarding customers and contacts with them is increased. But companies need to remember that material on the internet should be updated on a frequent basis.

Institutional communication tools include the brand, the headquarters, shops, and sponsorship and business magazines. Communicating the brand identity of a fashion firm is about communicating the firm's vision about the expected position in the market.

As the relationships between fashion companies and fashion consumers have changed, the focus on shops and sales points is increasing. The sales point has become a place for interacting with emotions, instead of being a place for monetary exchange and sales of products. Dealing with consumers in a sales point is about creating relationships rather than marketing a product, according to many sociologists (Saviolo & Testa, 2002).

"The sales point is the theatre in which brand strategies are acted out, it is the perfect environment (just because it is a physical space) for creating and transferring an atmosphere, and it is the ideal place for a multiple relationship with the consumer..." (Saviolo & Testa, 2002 p. 238).

3.2.5 Brand identity

By looking at a fashion company's store, one can discover the lack of consistency in brand identity by the management. Today's layout in the stores is an aim to combine purchasing with a cultural event, so that consumers' visit to a store is maximized with an experience of the company's brand identity (Saviolo & Testa, 2002).

In order to understand what constitutes the brand identity of a Fashion company, one need to understand the true meaning of the term "brand." The definition that is suitable for the competitive Fashion industry is, according to Saviolo & Testa (2002), comprised by two elements, namely the material- and the intangible elements. The material element refers to everything that is related to the signs that communicates the brand (advertising songs, logos, colors and names) while the intangible element is related to the associations that the brand evokes in the mind of the consumer.

According to an expert in brand management, Kapferer (1992), brand identity starts when an insignificant word is connected with a product. Moreover, during time, this word gains a meaning that is defined by the products and communication that has earlier been used by the firm.

³ Business to business communication is communication with intermediate consumers and suppliers (Saviolo & Testa, 2002).

3.2.6 Men's consumer behavior

Consumer behavior is a broad discussed area that refers to the way different types of consumers behave (Meyers-Levy & Maheswaran, 1991). However, in this section, only relevant differences in men's and women's consumer behaviors are presented. There are many factors that influence consumers when deciding upon which products to purchase. For the producer, it is crucial to understand consumers in order to provide them with the right product, but also to market in a correct way. Consumer behavior is said to differ between men and women as their needs are different from each other, and therefore, their attitudes towards products vary.

According to Meyers-Levy & Maheswaran (1991), since advertising is often aimed at one of the genders, it is interesting to study the difference in handling information between the two. It has been shown that men and women gather information in different ways, and also, they tend to examine the information differently. Women demand more detailed and thorough information, while men prefer information that is easily gathered and tend to not care for complicated information (Sneath, Kennett & Megehee, 2002). This provides the advertiser the opportunity to design the message and information in different ways.

In an article presented by Sanjay (2001), it is argued that advertises to male customers should be within one theme and simple, while the ones aimed to women is preferred to include more important writings. Furthermore, as women process detailed information better than men, they are more sensitive for the content. Therefore, it is not only the advertisement itself, but also the content of it that influences the way it is perceived by male respectively female.

According to Yaccato (2003), it is statistically proven that advertising is more important to women than men. Also, the author believes that since men do not care to investigate the information that an advertisement contains, it is important for companies to find other ways than the traditional advertising strategies in order to reach them. Moreover, when a company knows the consumers' preferences and behavior, marketing efforts should be put on connecting with them on the preferred level, meaning that companies should not invest in expensive multi-theme, long advertises containing lots of information for their male consumers.

However, knowing the consumers' behavior is not only helpful when advertising, but rather for all communication that the company has with the consumer, namely, face-to-face interactions, offers, consumer-supplier relationships etc. Yaccato (2003) also argues that firms that have realized the importance of the fact that male and female customer have different consumer behaviors, have achieved better revenues and profits. The reason for this, according to the author, is that firms put lots of money and resources in communication tools in order to reach the customer while, in many cases, the customer does not perceives the message as it is not formulated in the preferred way or send through the right channels.

4 Empirical Findings

This chapter starts with a brief description of the chosen company. Following that, the empirical findings from the performed interviews are presented.

4.1 Jack & Jones

Jack & Jones is owned by Bestseller, a family company that was founded in Denmark by Troels Holch Povlsen in 1975. The company's vision is "One world, one philosophy, one family," and it reflects the culture at Bestseller (Bestseller.com). Freedom under responsibility is applied at Bestseller meaning that the main strategies are set by the top managers while the different store managers and owners have freedom to develop their own areas, as long as they maintain within the company frames (Marketing manager in Sweden, personal communication, 2006-04-26).

Bestseller manufactured only women's wear until 1987 when children wears were launched and following that, in 1989, men's wear were launched as well. Today Bestseller has fourteen different brands; Jack & Jones, Vero Moda, Only, Selected, Exit, Vila, tdk, Pink Industries, Pieces By Bestseller, Mama Licious, Gosha, PH industries, Object Collectors Item and Name it newborn. These brands are sold in twenty-two countries in over 8 000 retail shops and around 1 000 franchises (Bestseller.com).

The Jack & Jones brand is sold in 14 different countries by wholesalers, franchisers and 2 300 retail shops. Jack & Jones' vision is to be a leading jeans brand, while keeping a high quality and a fashion style. The company's goal is to offer the right collection for the right price, at the right time. The main product is cool and trendy jeans with an international attitude and the target group is men in the age group of 18-30 years (Appendix 3).

In Sweden there are 55 Jack & Jones Stores and some are franchised while others are owned by Bestseller Retail Europe and Bestseller Retail. These two companies are sister subsidiaries of Bestseller Denmark. The head office in Sweden, Bestseller Sweden AB, is in charge for all Bestsellers brands in Sweden, including Jack & Jones. Bestseller Sweden AB gives directions to the two sister subsidiaries and the franchisers. The stores owned by the two sister subsidiaries are divided after their geographical location into smaller groups and area managers are in charge for different geographical areas. Furthermore, each store that is owned by the sister subsidiaries has their own store manager who is in charge for the store and the salesclerks working in the shop.

To facilitate greater understanding for the organizational structure of Bestseller, and in particular for Bestseller Sweden AB and Jack & Jones, the reader is strongly recommended to see Figure 4-1. As stated earlier in Chapter 2, the authors performed five interviews with the following key persons; the marketing manager of Bestseller Sweden AB, an area manager of Bestseller Retail, a store manager of Bestseller Retail Europe and two salesclerks. These key persons are highlighted in Figure 4-1 while other departments and managers are not given any consideration in this thesis.

Empirical Findings

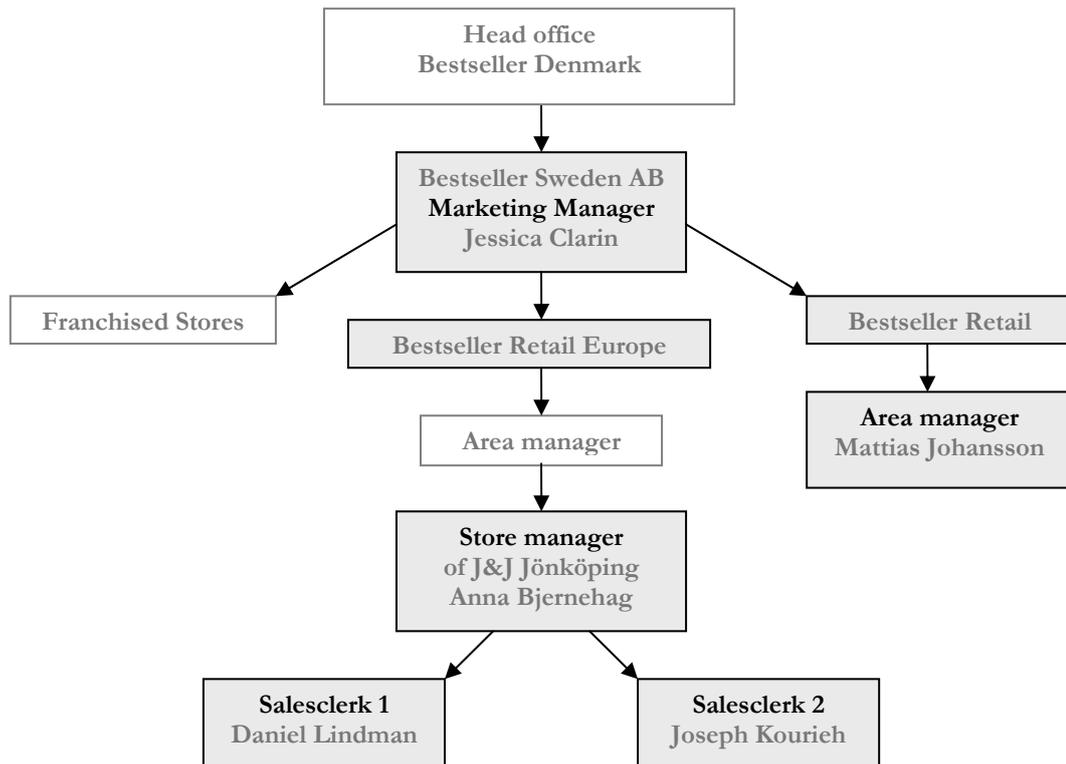


Figure 4-1 Organizational structure of Bestseller and Jack & Jones in Sweden, constructed by the authors.

4.2 Important aspects of CRM in Jack & Jones

The marketing manager argued that it is incredibly important with CRM as close customer relationships ensure that the customers remain loyal and less focus can be put on the competitors while more effort can be put on customers. According to the area manager,

“CRM is the most important strategy within Jack & Jones as customer relationships are what keep the company in business.”

Everything a company is built upon is based on customer relationships and developing and maintaining these relationships is Jack & Jones’ daily task according to the store manager.

In the following section, the authors have compiled the findings into different themes in order to recognize the most important topics that were discussed during the interviews. To facilitate greater understanding for the reader, names of the respondents are not used and instead the respondents are referred to by their respective position in the organization. The two salesclerks are referred to as salesclerk 1 (Daniel Lindman) and salesclerk 2 (Joseph Kourieh). Further information regarding the participants is presented in Appendix 4.

In addition, it should be pointed out that the authors have tried their best to present the empirical findings in the same order as the hierarchical positions of the respondents, during each theme. This means that the top manager’s answers are presented first and following that the area manager’s answers are presented etc.

4.2.1 Relationships

During the interviews, the term relationship was one of the main discussed areas. The authors have divided the empirical finding regarding this topic into customer relationships to men, channels to develop and maintain customer relationships and internal relationships.

4.2.1.1 Customer Relationships to men

According to the marketing manager, a good relationship to customers is more than just offering a plastic card, it is rather about providing customers with services that makes them feel close to the company so that loyalty and commitment are gained. This will lead to repeated purchasing. Furthermore, it is more difficult to establish a relationship to a male customer, compared to a female one. Men are more skeptical concerning the benefits gained through the relationship. However, when a relationship is created with male customers, developing and maintaining them are easier than with women as male customers are more loyal and have different consumer behavior.

The area manager also believes that a good relationship is more than joining a loyalty club and receiving a plastic card. He argued that as we are all overloaded with commercial activities everyday, in order to develop relationships to customers the company aims at affecting the consumer by creating close relationships to them. Jack & Jones wants to affect the consumers' apprehension of the card so that customers associate the card with good service and do not only see it as a monetary tool. A customer- supplier relationship is when consumers feel included in the organization and not as a guest in the store. Moreover, the area manager believes that relationships to customers differ depending on the geographical location of the store and its customers. The area manager explained that in a small town it is easier to create close relationships to customers as there is a smaller circle of customers and therefore, developing and maintaining relationships with these is easier.

According to the store manager, a store is built upon the relationships to its customers. It is however important to remember that these relationship are difficult to handle as they are ;

“more than an exchange of money for goods, but less than a real friendship.”

When working in a store, one needs to create an atmosphere of honesty and trust. The store manager frequently compliments her customers with honest opinions as she explained that as a customer, it is easy to understand when the compliments are not real. She believes that honesty is the base of every relationship and the customer-supplier relationship is about having a close relationship while keeping in mind that it is not a true friendship. As a female working with male customers, the store manager argued that the attitude towards men is more rough compared with women. For example, you can not approach a female customer or children and give them a tap on the shoulder and welcome them into the store. Furthermore, relationships to male customers are more relaxed as they often know what they are looking for and when the selection is presented for them, one product is often chosen while a girl would ask if the apparel exists in more colors or fabrics. The loosen up relationship is taken out of the store by my male customers.

“Even when I am not working, for example when I am out shopping, customers recognize me and greet me by my name.”

This shows that the customers feel a belonging to the store and many times customers show their appreciation of the relationship that exists. One example is when one of the regular customer recorded a CD for the store to show his appreciation of the service. The store manager puts a lot of focus on developing and maintaining close relationships to the

Empirical Findings

customers and she believes that: *“a person can easily forget where one went shopping, but never how one has been treated.”*

According to salesclerk 1, the customer should not feel that one only want to sell products and that a relationship is desired from the company's side to increase sales. He has been working in the store during three years and from his experience he feels that relationships are developed through his knowledge about the core products while they are maintained through a combination of this knowledge and the learning preferences of different customers. Salesclerk 1 makes sure he shows interest for his customers and he argues that;

“Showing interest for the customer does not only regard the clothes, but also making the customer feels comfortable in the store so that he keeps coming back.”

The most important aspect in customer relationships is, according to salesclerk 1, honesty. He believed that by being honest to customers, a relationship is developed on true terms and it is then easier to truly understand the customers' preferences. This enables him to provide customers with the correct advices concerning an outfit and customers are offered special treatment. Salesclerk 1 recognizes the differences between having close relationships to male- and female customers. In line with the store manager, he believes that male customers are easier to serve as they often know what kind of clothes they want. Moreover, he argued that consumer behavior among male customers is different in a way that men can enter a store, look around and leave without noticing any clothes and therefore it is important to take contact and create relationships to male customers. Salesclerk 1 further stated that he usually does this in order to make them feel comfortable and provide service. Furthermore, salesclerk 1 benefits from the relationships that are developed with his customers as he feels that they give him a sort of satisfaction since he feels his help is appreciated. He also believed that some customers can be treated in a certain way.

“For example, I can ask some customers to wait if it is crowded in the store, without them being offended. This is the result of developed relationships.”

However, although the relationship are between a salesclerk and the customers of the store, salesclerk 1 stated that as he is no more than human, relationships with customers can develop into friendship in some cases when similar interests are discovered.

Salesclerk 2 believed that as the Jack & Jones store in Jönköping is rather small, it is easier to develop relationships to the customers. Ever since he started working, he discovered the importance of getting to know the customers and believes that this is the most important strategy for the company. Also, he stated that customer relationships and customer focus are the two factors that have resulted in success for the store.

“Developing relationships to customers is about treating them in the same way as one wants to be treated when entering a store.”

Salesclerk 2 is encouraged to act upon his instincts and provide customers with the attention and service that is needed in order to make them feel included in the store. He makes sure he compliments his customers in order to show interest and if a customer buys a pair of jeans one day, the next time he is in the store he will hear something in line with;

“are you looking for something that suits with the jeans you bought a couple of days ago?”

He believes that the relationships with his customers have developed into more than just a regular relationship between a customer and a supplier. The customers often recognize him outside of his work. Moreover, he finds it rather easy to provide customers with new arrivals that suits their preferences. By having close relationships to his customers, salesclerk 2

believes that the customers trust his judgment and similar to salesclerk 1, he feels fulfillment as he has the opportunity to provide the customers with good service. Finally, according to salesclerk 2, when a customer- supplier relationship has developed, focus should be put on the maintenance. He believes that one way of maintaining the relationship is by informing a customer about upcoming apparels, which he knows will suit the specific customer due to the developed relationship.

“It is all about keeping their interest on the top so that they keep returning.”

4.2.1.2 Channels to develop and maintain customer relationships

During the interviews, the participants were asked to identify the most important channel when developing and maintaining customer relationships. Examples like the company’s catalogues, in-store interactions, loyalty clubs etc were proposed as options.

A majority of the participants agreed on that the salesclerks interactions with the customers are the most important channel.

“A company can spend lots of money on marketing but if it does not have competent personnel who can develop relationships to customers, desired results are not achieved,” according to the area manager.

The store manager believed that her staff members are definitely the most important channel as they interact with customers on a daily basis. She stated that the sales would decrease if the staff members in the store did not make the effort to maintain customer relationships. Among the salesclerks, two different opinions were discovered. While salesclerk 2 argued that relationships are mainly developed through in-store interactions, meaning that the salesclerks are the most important channel in order to develop relationships, salesclerk 1 believed that creating a good reputation of the store is more important than the in-store interactions.

The most notable deviation among the answers for this question was the answer provided by the marketing manager. She strongly believed that no channel can be pointed out as more important than another and that it is rather a combination of, catalogues, in-store interactions, loyalty clubs and activities.

4.2.1.3 Internal relationships

The internal relationships in Jack & Jones were another well discussed topic. Internal relationships can be divided into three main sections, namely relationships between managers in different hierarchical positions, between different stores and between staff members in a store.

Regarding relationships between managers in different hierarchical positions, the findings from the empirical research showed no evidence of a relationship between the marketing manager and the store manager. On the other hand, the area manager is the link between these two managers. The area manager also stated that he has close relationships with the staff of the stores that he is in charge of. This opinion was shared by the store manager as well.

The stores that are owned by either Bestseller Retail Europe or Bestseller Retail have close relationships with each other, according to the area manager. There are frequent interactions and a continuous exchange of ideas and experiences. Through activities that bring the different store managers together, the internal relationships are improved. During the interview with the store manager, it appeared that the store managers are invited to meetings and gatherings by the head office of Bestseller Retail Europe. These gatherings include

trips to Stockholm, London, or just a get-together in order to discuss improvements that can be made and create better relationships.

The most important internal relationships are, according to the store manager, the relation among staff members of the store. She is very dedicated when it comes to integrating the staff members of her store. Activities are frequently planned so that the staff members can develop good relationships to each other. The store manager believed that if there is a close connection among the staff members so that they feel they can discuss everything, then everyone will enjoy their work. This will lead to a good atmosphere in the store and according to the area manager this is contagious on the customers entering the store. Therefore the store manager believes that a good relationship in the store is vital in order to develop and maintain customer relationships;

“If you enjoy your job then you smile outwards and your smile will make the customers happy.”

The salesclerks both value the activities that the store manager arranges and feel these enhance the relationships among them. Moreover, salesclerk 1 states that he feels comfortable when communicating with different managers since the difference in the job positions does not affect the relationships in Jack & Jones. This is further strengthened by the company’s vision, namely *“One world, one philosophy, one family,”* and the marketing manager’s belief that the personnel of Bestseller Sweden AB are a team. Employees are on the same level, regardless of whether one is the CEO or from the administration office according to the marketing manager.

4.2.2 Satisfaction

Even though it is almost impossible for a manager or a salesclerk to determine whether the customers are satisfied or not, this theme was repeatedly discussed during the interviews. When the participants discussed the importance of customer relationships, they were all anxious to discuss the efforts made in order to achieve customer satisfaction. Furthermore, as satisfaction is an important aspect of CRM, every participant was asked to describe what customer satisfaction means to her or him.

4.2.2.1 Customer satisfaction through service

According to the marketing manager, customer satisfaction is when the customer returns to the store and is satisfied with the product and the service. Also, it is when the customer tells others about his or her great experience in the store. This is something that Jack & Jones strive at accomplishing by having close relationship.

The area manager stressed the importance of showing interest in a customer, even if the customer does not purchase anything from the store. He believes that the customer must feel that he is receiving the maximal service from the visit and when this feeling appears a positive experience is gained and the customer will return. Moreover, customer satisfaction is when the customer receives a good treatment from the beginning of his visit to the store until he exits the store.

“The staff members of the store should have eye contact, a good welcoming phrase and an excellent closure.”

Finally, the area manager discussed the importance of frequent purchase from their suppliers in order to maximize customer satisfaction. He pointed out that when purchasing products on a regular basis, customers are offered products that are in-fashion. Jack & Jones has increased its purchasing from their suppliers from two times per year to six times and ac-

According to the area manager this has shown positive result on customer satisfaction. The goal is to increase the number of purchases to twelve per year.

Customer satisfaction is to offer a combination of good products, offers and good service, according to the store manager. She also agreed with the area manager and added that

“when the customers return, we know we have done a good job in satisfying him.”

Salesclerk 1 believed that honesty and trust increases customer satisfaction and when a customer is satisfied by the service that was offered, he returns to the store more frequently. When customers return, salesclerk 1 feels that he is offering the right services. Salesclerk 2 argued that key customers and big spenders are very important and that they have to be satisfied in order to return.

“It is our job to make sure that the customer is satisfied and to remember that we work for the customer.”

Furthermore, salesclerk 1 argued that according to his experience, male customers are more sensitive about asking for opinions or advice. It is important for a salesclerk to realize this behavior among men so that they can approach the customer. He believed that in order to achieve customer satisfaction in a store for men’s wear, taking the first step and approaching them is vital.

Salesclerk 2 agreed with the other participants regarding the fact that customers are satisfied when they return to the store, but also he stated that the best and the only formal indication of customer satisfaction has to be the sales figures. As a final point, salesclerk 2 argued that the store does everything in order to increase customer satisfaction and that Jack & Jones, taken as a whole, focuses on increasing customer satisfaction by increasing the quality of the products and keeping the prices low.

4.2.2.2 Employee satisfaction through motivation

The marketing manager believed that satisfying the employees is an important aspect when discussing customer relationships.

“If employees are satisfied with their work then this satisfaction will lead to customer satisfaction which results in increased sales.”

According to the marketing manager, employee satisfaction is achieved by giving employees a certain amount of flexibility so that they can make their own decisions and feel important in the organization. Also, Jack & Jones arranges sale competitions between stores so that the store that increases its sales the most, comparing to its own index, wins a dinner or a trip. This is believed to increase the motivation and satisfaction among the staff members of the store.

The area manager stated that employee education, provided by Bestseller Academy⁴, is the most important tool for increasing motivation among the staff. It is important for the staff members to get involved in activities outside the store. Moreover, he argues that when a customer is satisfied and returns to the store, and the staff notice this, the employee satisfaction increases.

“Having a good spirit in the store and making sure that the staff is happy, increases CRM.”

⁴ Bestseller Academy organises retail workshops and education for area managers, store managers, retail apprentices, and store staff (Bestseller.com).

Employee satisfaction is discussed by the store manager in relation to the activities that are made in order to improve the relationships among the staff members. This is evidently something that the store manager believes is the foundation for creating high satisfaction among the employees and also to improve CRM. During the interview with the store manager, a lot of emphasis was put on the ability of the store manager to achieve employee satisfaction. She believed that by being easy-going and in a good mood with her staff employee satisfaction is maximized. Furthermore, it is crucial to keep in mind that not all people are suited for all work tasks and as a result, the store manager should assign the right staff with the right tasks so that employee satisfaction is maximized. In addition, the store manager strongly believes in including her staff members in the outcome from their efforts, meaning that they are provided with actual results from the sales.

During the interviews with the salesclerks, both stated that they are satisfied with their job environment and that they believe that this satisfaction leads to customer satisfaction since according to salesclerk 2;

“When an employee is satisfied with his work, he or she is more open and confident and therefore interacting with customers is easier.”

4.2.3 Offering more than products

“A customer that is a member of one loyalty club of a Fashion company today is a member of all loyalty clubs, as they all offer the same benefits. Therefore, companies need to think beyond the traditional frames and offer customers more than what they pay for in order to gain brand loyalty,” according to the marketing manager.

Today, as the competition increases, it is important to make sure that customers do not spend their money on competing products. It is like a war where the winner is the one with the best service.

4.2.3.1 Loyalty club and customer benefits

According to the marketing manager, for the moment Jack & Jones does not have a national loyalty club and the stores have their own individual clubs where membership is offered to key customers. Some stores offer their members first priority to sales or free entrance to clubs, while other may have local cooperation with cafeterias or restaurants.

The marketing manager stated that when the head office is designing national campaigns, competitions or activities, great consideration is given to the fact that these are aimed for male customers. For example, Jack & Jones usually cooperates with movie theaters so that customers are offered to compete for tickets to certain movies that are seen as “guy” movies. Also, CD records and additional “male” products that can be related to the movies in question are included in the competitions.

In some stores in Sweden, the stores managers have decided to divide their customers into three categories depending on how much money they spend in the store. Through this division, customers have been offered gold-, silver-, or bronze membership. By being a member of the gold club the customer receives more services and benefits than a member of the silver club. According to the marketing manager, it is important for these stores to remember that a bronze customer might as well become a gold member if he only receives the right treatment.

The marketing manager discussed the release of a new national loyalty club that is currently being implemented in Jack & Jones. This club will not offer customers discounts depend-

Empirical Findings

ing on the amount of money spent, it will rather provide customers with benefits such as activities, offers and services. In other words, a customer purchasing apparels for 100 crowns will receive the same benefits as a customer who spends 1000 crowns. When designing the loyalty club, great concern has been given to the fact that the target customers are men in the age group of 18-30. The marketing manager strongly believed that it is more difficult to attract male customers into a loyalty club. Moreover, she stated that as men buy clothes less frequently than female customers, they are not satisfied through, for example, a simple bonus check for 50 crowns. This is something that Jack & Jones focuses on, and therefore the company aims at offering additional benefits that attract male customers. Some examples of these benefits are priority to tickets for sports arrangements or access to download music online for free.

In contrast to the marketing manager's discussion, the area manager argued that no consideration is given to the fact that the target customers are men, when designing activities or extra benefits. The extra benefits that are offered by Jack & Jones are for example national campaigns. The company tries to present at least two offers per month. The area manager strongly believed that the new national loyalty club will improve CRM in Jack & Jones as long as it is being used with its full potentials by the company. He does not believe in creating databases without using them to improve the personal contacts with the customers in the stores. The area manager stated the following;

"We do not want to invest in plastic cards, we invest in close customer relationships so that the customers realize the value embedded in the card and associate it with great service."

The area manager believed that a customer does not become a member of a loyalty club for the few crowns that he/she will gain, it is rather about feeling included and appreciated by the company. Furthermore, he argued that the stores in his area invest in activities and according to him;

"...a customer wants to be spoiled."

Finally, during the discussion regarding activities, the area manager suggested that some activities are more appropriate in smaller towns compared with larger cities. One example given was V.I.P. evenings where key customers are invited to purchase apparels to either a lower price than normal or with additional benefits. Activities are believed to be more successful in smaller towns as the relationships to customers are closer than in big cities. This fact is further supported by the store manager who believed that the great success the activities have resulted in is due to the fact that Jönköping is a rather small city where relationships to customers can easier be developed and maintained.

When discussing extra benefits, the store manager explained that her store has had a bonus card that allowed customers to collect stamps for each purchase over 450 crowns. After six stamps, the customer received a 20% discount, and she believes that this encouraged customers to return more often. However, right now these cards are not in use as the stores are waiting to implement the new national loyalty club. The store manager explained that no new cards will be handed out, but the cards that are already in the hands of the customers will be stamped. The area manager believed that one can clearly notice that:

"...the customers miss the bonus cards and that without them, they do not feel the same belonging to the stores."

The most discussed topic during the interview with the store manager was the activities and extra benefits that are offered to customers. The activities are specially designed for the target customers as the store manager believes that these activities should communicate with

Empirical Findings

male customers in *“their own language.”* Moreover, she argued that activities are one of the most important tools when developing and maintaining customer relationships.

Some of the activities that have been conducted in the store were not only aimed for the target customers, rather to everyone interested in participating in the activity. One of these was when the store celebrated two years. The store was decorated with balloons, and people were invited to eat a Jack & Jones cake that was baked by the staff members. During two hours of this evening, customers were offered a 20% discount.

Other activities such as Christmas celebrations in the store and human mannequins in the shop window have also attracted the attention of people. The store manager strongly believes in frequent activities that are in line with Jack & Jones image, namely trendy and cool. Moreover, the store manager organized a show in the store where a circus artist throwing “fire” poles performed in order to entertain customers. Also, the store once offered customers, purchasing for more than 500 crowns, and a free haircut in the shop window. One of Sweden’s “top 5” hairdressers was invited to the store in order to give the customers cool and trendy haircuts. This activity would not be suitable for female customers or children, according to the store manager. “

“Obviously, women would not be comfortable with receiving a haircut in the shop window by an unfamiliar hairdresser, while the line up with male customers for this activity was stacked.”

According to the store manager, this was such a success since it was the right activity for male customers, and because of the great outcome, other Jack & Jones stores were inspired and therefore the idea was used in other cities as well.

In the future, the store manager plans on taking the Fashion store a step further and differentiate it from other by for example replacing a traditional sale with an auction. She believed that it is a good way for turning a traditional sale that can be found in every store, to a fun interacting activity, which will contribute to closer customer relationships. Also, the store manager believed that;

“The fact that Jack & Jones is a Fashion company enables us to create a wide range of activities, with few or no limitations.”

Finally, another activity that the store manager is planning to organize is to bring in a graffiti painter who can design a motif after the customers’ request, on jeans that are not selling well. Such activity goes well with the cool and trendy image of Jack & Jones.

When there are no activities planned, the store still makes sure to offer customers extra benefits. The store manager, together with her staff, can for example decide on giving customers who purchase for more than a certain amount of money, a small gift. This gift can be a pair of stocking or a keychain. The idea behind the gifts is to give the customer something that he can associate with good service in the Jack & Jones store so that he feels special and returns to the store.

According to salesclerk 1, the activities that are made in the store are important so that customers feel special and associate the store with the values that are shared within Jack & Jones. Therefore, it is important to remember that all activities should not be connected to monetary values, since Jack & Jones’ values are about more than money. Finally, salesclerk 1 agrees with the saying;

“...little drops of water makes a mighty ocean,”

meaning that small efforts lead to the existence of great relationships.

Salesclerk 2 argued that while activities are important for customer relationships, the service that is offered in the store is just as significant. It is all about making the customer feel important and noticed in the store. Although in some cases, this can be achieved through discussing mutual interests, many customers need extra service and benefits in order to feel special and included in the company. Salesclerk 2 also discussed the advantage of working in a Jack & Jones store that is located in a smaller city. He believed that it is easier to offer extra services and benefits since the store is rather small and often, knowing the customers preferences is a less complicated task.

4.2.3.2 Additional benefits

Throughout the discussion regarding benefits that are offered to customers, the authors noticed benefits that can be classified as additional ones since they are very special to Jack & Jones and might not be offered by other Fashion companies.

The additional benefits were discussed by the marketing manager who explained that Jack & Jones' customers can request certain products and that the company will in fact manufacture these. The area manager held the same discussion and he believes that due to the fact that the stores have developed close relationships to their customers, feedback regarding products and services are often provided to the company. When there is a number of customers who request similar products, for example striped t-shirt or sweaters, the head office in Sweden check with stores across the country to make sure that there is a demand for the product. If this is the case, a delivery of the desired products is made within six weeks from the request.

An additional benefit that was discussed by the store manager was once when customers could participate in a competition to win Ericsson's latest cellular. The store cooperated with a cell phone retailer, namely the store 3 G, and customers who purchased products were offered to sign up on a list where one customer was later picked as the winner. Cooperating with a cell phone retailer was a conscious decision made by the store manager as she believes that offering the target customers benefits that are of technical nature is well suited for men. According to the store manager, customers appreciated this extra benefit and although the sales increased during this period, the main intention behind this activity was not monetary reasons,

"...it was about making the customers keep in mind that there are always new and cool things going on in the store, so that the image of the store is maintained."

As a final point, the close relationships between Jack & Jones and its customers enable the company to offer products, services and benefits that are well suited for the target customers' preferences and demands. According to the marketing manager, this creates a win-win situation which enables development of relationships.

4.2.3.3 Key customer benefits

As focusing on key customers was an important aspect according to the frame of reference of this thesis, the authors chose to examine whether key customers are treated differently than other customers, in the chosen store. Therefore questions regarding key customers were presented to the participants and this was another well discussed topic.

The store manager explained that the store has many customers that are perceived as key customers as they are recognized by the staff members of the store and since these customers are loyal and return on regular basis. Furthermore, the store manager keeps a register of the names and contact information of these customers and this list is used to invite

customers to V.I.P. evenings, parties and other activities. Not all customers are invited at once and instead the store randomly picks out some of the customers. The invitations can either be sent through mail or in some cases the store can contact customers over the telephone. Also, key customers have been given Christmas gifts that are well suited for men, such as a book called “A styling guide for men” that gives guidance in how to dress, knot a tie and other Fashion tips to men.

The store manager further discussed that the key customers may be treated differently as they might receive gifts or compliments. These compliments do not necessarily regard apparels that are bought from Jack & Jones as the store manager believes in honesty. However, treating key customers differently is not a deliberate action according to the store manager. She argued that it is difficult not to treat them differently, since as they are key customers interactions are on a frequent basis and therefore close relationships are established. Finally, the store manager stated that treating key customers correctly is vital as they are the ones who create the reputation of the store through the word of mouth.

According to salesclerk 1, key customers are treated differently as he might spend extra time on chatting with them. For example, if he knows about a certain interest of a specific customer, he might bring this up in the conversation to show extra interest.

Salesclerk 2 argued that key customer are very important for the store as through the close relationships with them, knowledge regarding improvements that can be made concerning products and services are gained. Therefore, he believes that making sure that key customers are satisfied and that they will return is a very important in-store task.

Although salesclerk 2 argued that key customers are vital to the success of the store, comparing to salesclerk 1, he stated that he does not treat them differently as he believes that all customers should have the right to the same service and attention.

4.2.4 Communication

Communication was the last main area discussed during the interviews. The authors were aware that communication is important no matter which aspect of business or management that is being discussed. However, the empirical research aimed at discovering the most important aspects when conducting CRM and communication turned out to be one of these aspects. Therefore, the following section will present communication aiming at developing and maintaining customer relationships within Jack & Jones, and not the importance of communication in overall business contexts.

“It is through interactions and communication that a company can truly develop relationships to its customers and therefore it is crucial to do this in the right way,” according to salesclerk 2.

4.2.4.1 Internal communication

The marketing manager stated that internal communication is an important factor that affects customer relationships. The head office of Jack & Jones in Denmark arranges courses for store managers twice a year where the importance of customers, how to obtain customer loyalty and strategies for developing and maintaining customer relationships, are discussed. This creates internal communication that allows participants to share knowledge and experience regarding customer satisfaction. According to the marketing manager, activities that are implemented in some stores and that results in success are often communicated to others so that ideas are shared and improvements can be made in all stores. The marketing manager believed that the internal communication in Jack & Jones is effective both upwards and downwards in the hierarchy. Moreover, many of the stores work closely

with each other and she pointed out that the geographical location of the stores is not an obstacle for communication. The marketing manager also stated that each store has frequent meeting with the staff members where discussions regarding development is held. The outcome from these meeting is presented to area managers who forward the information to the head office. In addition, she stated that even though cross border communication is a problem for many companies, Jack & Jones has found a good strategy to make this work. The stores in different countries report to their head office that analyses the information and sends the relevant ones to the head office in Denmark. The head office in Denmark makes sure that all stores around the world receive relevant information. Finally, the store manager points out that area managers from Bestseller Retail Europe and Bestseller Retail arrange meetings that are used to improve the internal sharing of knowledge.

The area manager believed that it is important for the store manager to have responsibility and although he receives information regarding major problems in the stores, many occurrences are handled without his involvement. However, the results of the incidents are always communicated so that everyone within the company is aware of the problems.

According to the store manager, she does not get her ideas regarding activities approved by the head office before implementing them in the store. She believes that as long as the sales increases, customers are satisfied and no complaints are received, she can do her own thing in the store that she knows best. However, she makes sure to share her ideas regarding successful activities to other stores within Bestseller Retail Europe so that the communication between these stores improves the daily work. The store managers within Bestseller Retail Europe communicate on a daily basis through telephone contact or e-mail. The internal communication within her store is the most important one, according to her.

“As long as my staff members are all aware of their responsibilities and feel that they can communicate about everything, internal relationships are created and this results in better external relationships with the customers.”

Salesclerk 1 argued that the internal communication between the stores is very efficient because of constant e-mailing. Everybody can speak to each other and no hierarchical differences are noticed during discussions. Both salesclerk 1 and 2 stated that the internal communication upwards in the hierarchical positions is assumed to function well. However, they both communicate with the area manager who is in charge of their store, without really knowing whether the information is forwarded to the head office or not. Nevertheless, salesclerk 1 argued that the head office should be keener on taking into account the opinions of the salesclerks and others even more so that relationships to customers can be improved.

4.2.4.2 Communicating with male customers

The marketing manager argued that Jack & Jones' communication with its customer will improve radically when the new loyalty club is introduced. The company will be able to reach out to customers throughout the country with the help of a simple database containing contact information of the customers. Send outs by e-mails, SMS and mail will be used but she believes that the most effective tool is SMS as today people carry their mobile wherever they are.

According to the area manager, the most important aspect of communicating with customers is dealt with in the store. Personal communication with the customer starts the moment he enters the store and is vital throughout the stay in the store. The staff members of a store should welcome the customer and conclude the visit with a friendly good bye phrase. This kind of communication makes the customer feel included in the store and it improves

customer relationships. Another important aspect to be considered when communicating with the customer is when communicating with an unhappy customer. According to the area manager, it is not always possible to compensate a customer with monetary objects and in most cases, it is important to be able to communicate with the customer so that he leaves the store with a smile.

The store manager does not believe in marketing efforts such as advertisement and other commercial tools. She prefers personal communication with customers and she stated that this strategy turns into marketing through the word of mouth, which according to her is the most efficient tool. This opinion is further strengthened by salesclerk 1 who believed that the reputation of the store is the most efficient communication tool since advertising is not as efficient as it used to be. Salesclerk 2 argues that in order to develop and maintain relationships, the ability to communicate with customers through personal interaction is crucial.

4.2.4.3 Brand communication to men

Brand communication is, according to the marketing manager, one of the most important parts of Jack & Jones' communication. In order to communicate the Jack & Jones brand, the head office sends out a Jack & Jones Magazine four times per year. This magazine is placed in each store for interested customer to take for free. Some stores however mail the magazine to their gold members (See section 4-2-3-1) as relationships with these are seen as the most important ones, while others mail the magazine to all members as an extra benefit. The marketing manager stated that they try to design the magazine so that it contains a bit of everything; Fashion, music artists, movies, cars, lightly dressed women, and sports. It is important to have in mind that it is Jack & Jones' target group, namely men in the age group of 18-30, who will read the magazine and therefore it should include topics that attract their interest.

According to the store manager, it is important to make use of the Jack & Jones magazine in the right way and ensure that it communicates the brand in correctly. Moreover, the company focuses on handing out the magazine in the right way, to the right customer. The store in Jönköping does not mail the magazine to customers and instead it is handed out in the store as an extra benefit, in order to make customers feel special and develop relationships.

The store manager strongly believes that the store should be embraced by the Jack & Jones brand and she uses music to communicate the brand to her customers. She argues that there is a clear difference in the type of music that can be played in a store for men's wear, comparing to stores for women's wear. As the Jack & Jones brand is associated with trendy and cool apparels, she selects music very carefully. The music played in the store has to be in fashion and appropriate for the target customers. The store manager also believed that the fact that she is working in a Fashion company facilitate communication of the brand as the company can use visual communication such as magazines, music videos and human mannequins in order to communicate the brand identity of Jack & Jones. Finally, according to the store manager, since every store has its own manager, it is crucial to retain good communication between the stores, in order to achieve brand consistency.

According to salesclerk 2, communicating the brand of Jack & Jones also involves technological aspects such as the company's website. He argued that as the target customers are male in the age group of 18-30, the company should put more efforts in improving the website as the target customers most likely use it to obtain information regarding the brand. When the customers is doing so, it is important for him to receive a positive impres-

sion of the website and to feel that the efforts that are made in the stores by salesclerks to develop and maintain relationships are reflected in the company's website.

Moreover, many customers of the store have requested a proper loyalty club and salesclerk 2 believed that the implementation of the new national club will improve the communication of the brand and better relationships can be developed.

The area manager believed that the card that will be handed out to customers that are members of the new national loyalty club should also be used for communicating with customers. He believed that through benefits that are received from the card, the brand identity of Jack & Jones is further strengthened. But in order for this to work in practice, the area manager states that,

“...it is not enough to hand out the card, the company must use the card to communicate with customers and develop relationships with them.”

4.2.5 Additional aspects

During the empirical examination, additional themes that are important when discussing CRM in Jack & Jones were recognized. As these aspects can be seen as factors that contribute to the overall strategy of CRM, these have not been included in the previous discussion and instead they are presented in the following sections.

4.2.5.1 Culture

According to the marketing manager, the culture at Jack & Jones is very much based on the vision that has been mentioned earlier in this thesis, namely *“One world, one philosophy, one family.”* The goal is for this vision to reach the consumers so that they feel included in the family. The culture at Jack & Jones is about being a team no matter what position one has in the company. According to the marketing manager, the brand identity of Jack & Jones is affected by the organization culture and as the company aims at having a relaxed culture that enables a team spirit, the brand is perceived as cool and trendy. The culture in the stores is perceived as customer focused and in line with the brand identity, according to the marketing manager. Salesclerk 2 stated that, as the culture is customer focused, the development of relationships with customers is easier since they are an important part of the culture.

The culture within the Jack & Jones store in Jönköping is, according to the store manager, identical with the culture for the whole company. The staff members are often invited to activities so closer relationships are built. The store manager believes that this enables a culture within the store that is based on the common values and norms of the Jack & Jones brand.

Salesclerk 1 discussed the importance of confirming to customers that staff members of Jack & Jones really are like a family that shares the same philosophy. One way of doing so is to proudly represent the brand, both during working hours and during spare time. Salesclerk 1 points out that the culture at Jack & Jones demands staff members of the stores to wear clothes by Bestseller's brands. In other words, men working in Jack & Jones are required to wear clothes by the brand while women are required to wear other Bestseller brands that are suited for them. According to salesclerk 2, this is a logical strategy by Bestseller as it increases the trustworthiness of the company in the eyes of the customers. If customers see that a salesclerk is wearing, for example, jeans from another brand, the culture, the credibility and the brand of Jack & Jones will be questioned. Salesclerk 2 argued that;

“A customer will not be able to identify with the Jack & Jones brand and feel included in the family, if the own personnel do not represent the brand in the best way possible.”

Regarding the representation of the brand in the best way possible, salesclerk 1 pointed out that the organization culture encourages staff members to maintain the honesty that is provided to customers in the store outside the work as well. This means that staff members of Jack & Jones have a responsibility towards the brand during their free time too. The culture promotes that the same behavior in the store is maintained on the outside as well so that customers feel that the relationships developed in the store exist beyond the business interactions.

4.2.5.2 Personality

The area manager discussed the importance of employing the right people into the company. He strongly believes that, as the personal interaction with customers is the most important aspect of developing customer relationships, it is crucial to have a staff with the right personality. He argued that, if people with inappropriate personality, attitude or values are employed, the relationships within the store and the ones with customers are easily destroyed. The employees at Jack & Jones must be able to identify with the company's brand identity and philosophy.

According to the area manager;

“...one can not learn social skills, it is something you are born with and since we value customer relationships and good service, we focus on employing people with good social skills.”

The store manager agrees with the previous discussion and furthermore, she pointed out the importance of the personality of store managers. People working in a store should be outgoing and social. Store managers should also have confidence in their own ability to make improvements and dare to think beyond traditional frames of marketing, according to the store manager.

Salesclerk 1 believes that the most important characteristics of an employee who is aiming at developing and maintaining relationships are honesty. Furthermore, he stated that working as a salesclerk has enabled him to become more social and that his personality has grown through the relationships to customers.

Salesclerk 2 argued that being a social person is an obvious fact that is needed when discussing relationships to customers as shy persons might not be able to take contact with customers in the same way.

4.2.5.3 Consistency

According to the marketing manager, today some of Jack & Jones partners are better in creating activities than others. However, all stores have clear guidelines for the types of activities that can be implemented. Since Jack & Jones has multiple stores, it is important to have similar activities no matter the location of the store. However, stores are given some freedom to implement their own ideas. In some cases, where the activities have been a success, they have been implemented in other store as well. The marketing manager stressed the importance of discussing the ideas with the head office in Denmark as they have to approve. This leads to the fact that the head office in Denmark receives an overview of activities implemented in different countries and these can be shared across borders so that they do not have to start from scratch if they believe that it is a good activity for the stores

in Sweden. However, she strongly believes that the new national loyalty club will improve the consistency of managing customer relationships in Jack & Jones.

The area manager pointed out that, although the stores are expected to work within certain frames, there is a clear difference in practicing CRM. He discussed the effect of geographical location of the stores on customer relationships.

The store manager believed that even though consistency within CRM is not fully evident in all the stores around the country, the results are admirable, and according to her, it is the results that count. Nevertheless, the store manager suggested that more stores should organize activities in order to improve customer relationships. She strongly believed that this will strengthen the apprehension of Jack & Jones as a trendy and cool brand around the country.

4.2.5.4 Maintaining relationships through feedback

The empirical research showed that Jack & Jones receives feedback through close relationships to the customers, and by using this feedback in the correct way, these relationships are developed and maintained.

The marketing manager states that sufficient feedback from customers is received through the staffs' interaction with the customer. This feedback regard both positive and negative aspects of the products, services etc. The feedback is used to improve customer relationship by satisfying customers and offer them custom made products and services. According to the marketing manager, efficient use of the feedback is gained through open dialogs between customers, staff members and managers.

The area manager explained that through close customer relationships, more and better feedback is received. He also argued that it is important to develop relationships as these will assure that the company receives accurate feedback that is used in order to increase customers' satisfaction. Also, the area manager believed that the feedback that the customers provide to the staff is of great importance as the positive comments increases the motivation among the staff, while the negative feedback allows them to realize improvements that can be made. According to salesclerk 2, receiving feedback from customers does not only improve customer relationships, it also helps the company to realize improvements that can be made in other stores.

4.2.5.5 Consumer behavior among men

During the empirical research, consumer behavior among men was naturally discussed as it is an aspect that influences the strategies taken by the company when managing CRM. However, the authors decided that it is not a theme for the empirical research as it can not be regarded as an important aspect of how to develop and maintaining customer relationships in Jack & Jones. Nevertheless, it is a crucial factor to take into account when discussing all the important aspects. This was evident throughout the interviews as the participants' answers were put in relation to the fact that the target customers are men. Therefore, the authors have presented the findings regarding consumer behavior among men in enclosure with the presentation of the themes.

5 Analysis

This section analyzes the empirical findings with the help of the theories presented earlier in this thesis, in order to provide greater understanding for the chosen subject.

5.1 Customer-supplier relationship in Fashion companies for men's wear

In the theories presented in Chapter 3, many definitions were given to the concept of relationships. However, after examining the empirical findings, the authors noticed that none of the definitions can truly describe a customer-supplier relationship in Fashion companies for men's wear.

Grönroos (2000) believes that a relationship is about two-way commitment and a shared mode of thinking, while Barnes (2000) states that firms can only understand the meaning of relationships with customers when focus is put on creating interpersonal relationships and furthermore, he argues that;

"...the greatest value is added when the company is able to create...a strong emotional connection between the company and its customers; in other words, a genuine relationship," (Barnes, 2000, p. 92).

During the empirical research, the authors recognized that the case company focuses on creating emotional bonds with customers. The area manager believed that a relationship is about making the consumers feel included in the firm and when both parties are committed to each other. Moreover, the store manager stated that relationships are;

"...more than an exchange of money for goods, but less than a real friendship."

The store manager believes that relationships to customers, in Fashion retailing, is about having a close relationship while keeping in mind that it is not a true friendship. The authors recognized that this statement is not in line with Barnes' discussion as he believes that companies should create genuine relationships to their customers. The empirical research showed that although genuine relationships, such as friendships, can be created between the sales force⁵ and customers, they are not the desired outcome. Salesclerk 1 believed that true friendships can be created when, for example, mutual interests are discovered through the emotional bonds and two-way commitment. Therefore, according to the authors, a customer-supplier relationship is in line with Grönroos' (2000) definition, namely that it is a two-way commitment and a shared mode of thinking. However, the definition does not include the importance of relationships in Fashion retailing, and therefore, it does not give a complete description.

Barnes (2000) states that there are different levels of customer-supplier relationships. Face-to-face relationships are interactions in retailing while intimate relationships are between customers and, for example, hairdressers or doctors. Moreover, Barnes states that intimate relationships involve trust and physical contact between the participants. The authors claim that in the context of Fashion retailing, a customer-supplier relationship is more likely to be classified as an intimate- than a face-to-face relationship. This is strengthened by Saviolo & Testa's (2002) definition of Fashion products, namely that they are personal tools, used by consumers, to express a certain lifestyle or an attitude. The authors believe that, although the information one shares with a doctor is more personal than the information that is

⁵ The sales force refers to the store manager and the two salesclerks who were interviewed in the empirical research.

shared with a salesclerk, when entering a store and needing help to find apparels, one is still sharing personal information. Moreover, the empirical research showed that men are more hesitant when asking for help and sharing information regarding their preferences. Salesclerk 1 argued that it is important to take contact with men, create trust and make them feel that they can share their preferences, or else they will leave without noticing any clothes. Therefore, the authors claim that a relationship between a salesclerk of a Fashion store and a male consumer involves personal interactions and personal information sharing. Without this information sharing, a salesclerk will not be able to provide consumers with clothes that fit their preferences.

This leads to the conclusion that Barnes' (2000) definitions do not reflect the meaning of the relationship in question either as the authors state that a customer-supplier relationship within Fashion retailing is more than a face-to-face relationship. The relationship leans towards the intimate classification, as there exist personal information exchange and trust between the participants. However, as no physical contact exist between the participants, the authors find it appropriate to introduce a new definition that suits the chosen context. The authors suggest that customer-supplier relationships within Fashion companies for men's wear should be classified as semi-intimate.

Semi-intimate relationships are, according to the authors, the best classification of customer-supplier relationships within Fashion retailing for men as they are closer than face-to-face- but not as close as intimate relationships. They are characterized by frequent personal interactions and personal information exchange. The parties develop greater understanding for a certain area, namely attitudes and preferences within Fashion. Semi-intimate relationships are also long-term relationships as men tend to become loyal customers. Moreover, semi-intimate relationships include a shared mode of thinking between the parties, a two-way commitment and trust. Finally, these relationships contribute to mutual value for the parties involved. Mutual value refers to a win-win situation where the parties involved in a relationship achieve satisfaction. Both parties gain intrinsic value, a feeling of appreciation beyond monetary terms.

Throughout the remaining parts of this thesis, the definition semi-intimate relationship is the one used when discussing customer-supplier relationships.

When does a semi-intimate relationship exist with the male customer?

In the background discussion it was mentioned that CRM is an attitude and a value that is placed in businesses and relationships between companies and their customers (Roberts-Phelps, 2001). The marketing manager argued that relationships exist when customers are offered extra services so that they feel close to the company. However, the authors disagree with this statement and argue that focus should be put on building relationships that generates mutual value (Mooney, 2002; Han et al., 1993). If companies focus on only offering services, customers might not benefit from these, and therefore relationships can not exist (Grönroos, 2000). The authors believe that it is not enough to offer services or benefits, a Fashion company should also make sure that the relationship contributes to mutual value, especially as men are skeptical concerning the benefits gained, according to the marketing manager.

The area manager realized the importance of offering customers more than just extra benefits and membership to a loyalty club. He stated that a relationship exists when value is added to the services and benefits and a common attitude is shared between the company and its customers. According to the authors, in order for a relationship to exist, the offering and the benefits should reflect the common attitude and values that are recognized by

the company and its customers. This is in line with Barnes' (2000) discussion that a relationship exists when there is an attitude connecting the participants to each other.

In line with Grönroos (2000) and Barnes (2000), the empirical findings showed that a relationship does not exist only when consumers return to the store on a frequent basis. This is only an indication of customer satisfaction, which is the base for developing relationships, but not evidence for its existence. Moreover, Grönroos (2000) argue that, for a relationship to exist, firms need to consider customers as partners and not as outsiders who interact with the company only when a purchase is taking place. This is an evident factor in the case company as focus is on making the customer feel included in the company and, according to salesclerk 1, customers should never feel that a relationship is desired only to increase sales. Furthermore, according to the study made by Barnes (2000), where customers were asked to describe relationships with firms, the consumers stated that a relationship exists when they receive special treatment from the company. The authors argue that special treatment does not involve benefits and that it is rather about treating customers' right, in order to create value. Moreover, as discussed in the previous section, men are more hesitant to ask for help in a store and therefore the authors believe that a crucial factor, for a semi-intimate relationship to exist, is for salesclerks to take contact with male consumers and offer special treatment to create value.

When salesclerks offer their advices and consumers purchase products accordingly, the salesclerks feel satisfied, mutual value is created and a relationship exists, according to the authors. The theories presented discuss mutual value, but the exact meaning of this concept was discovered through the empirical research that showed the importance of satisfaction among the sales force. The staff members of a store feel accomplishment when their advices are appreciated by the consumer. This is in line with Barnes' (2000) statement that a relationship exists when firms interact with their customers on an interpersonal level, and the interactions contain mutual benefits for both partners.

In conclusion, the authors believe that more focus should be put on Mooney's (2002) discussion and, in line with Grönroos (2000) and Han et al. (1993), a relationship exists only when mutual value is evident and not when companies offer good services and benefits. It is about adding value to these offerings and it is important that these values reflect the common attitudes that are placed in relationships. These characteristics are in line with the ones presented for semi-intimate relationships, according to the authors. Moreover, a relationship is evident when it is on an interpersonal level (Barnes, 2002) and therefore, customers must be included in the company. The authors also believe that as the target group is male consumers, for a relationship to exist in Fashion retailing, importance should be put on taking contact with these consumers as the empirical findings showed that men do not take contact with salesclerks as easily as women. Finally, for a relationship to exist in Fashion retailing, firms need to remember that it is just as important for the salesclerks to realize fulfillment from the relationships as it is for the customers, in other words, mutual values must be realized by both parties. It should also be pointed out that a successful in-store interaction that leads to mutual value during this occasion does not lead to the existence of a semi-intimate relationship. The authors rather believe that relationships are not created through one action, they are developed and maintained through a series of actions.

5.2 Important aspects of semi-intimate relationships in Fashion companies for men's wear

As presented in the problem discussion, the preliminary research conducted by the authors showed that male consumers have a tendency to remain loyal and regular customers (P.

Sjödell, country manager, Gant). Thus, creating relationships to these customers is difficult (J. Clarin, marketing manager, Bestseller Sweden AB) and therefore developing and maintaining these relationships to male consumers is crucial in order to gain loyal and regular customers and this was evident from the empirical research as well.

The authors have recognized the most important aspects of developing and maintaining semi-intimate relationships in Fashion companies for men's wear, according to the knowledge gained through this study. These are presented in Figure 5-1 and discussed in the following sections. Although the authors have recognized five important aspects, it should be mentioned that these aspects are highly interconnected and discussing them in separate sections was a complex task. However, the authors found this structure for the analysis to be the most appropriate one. Finally, although the aspects influence each other, this has not been taken into consideration in Figure 5-1, as it would have resulted in a complicated figure that would confuse readers, rather than give an overview of the analysis' structure.

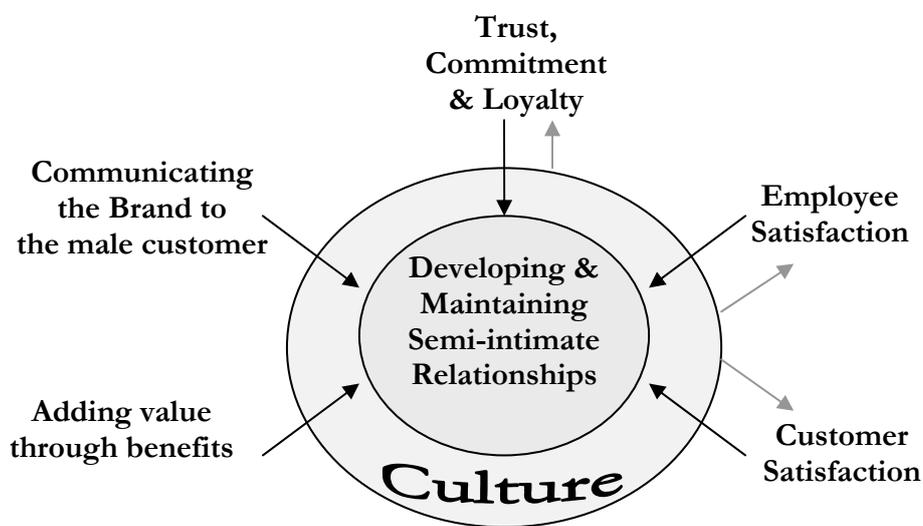


Figure 5-1 Important aspects of CRM in Fashion companies for men's wear, constructed by the authors.

5.2.1 Culture

Although culture was presented as a component of customer satisfaction in Chapter 3, the authors claim that it is much more in the context of developing and maintaining semi-intimate relationships. This fact is based on Roberts-Phelps' (2001) statement, namely that developing and maintaining relationships is an attitude and a value that is placed in businesses and relationships between companies and their customers. As attitudes and values arise from the organization culture, the authors argue that through the knowledge gained while conducting this study, it is evident that culture is a factor influencing all the important aspects of developing and maintaining relationships to customers, but mostly the first three. Moreover, the authors argue that a semi-intimate relationship requires two-way commitment, trust, common attitudes and a shared mode of thinking and these factors strive from the culture. Therefore, the authors believe that organization culture should surround the strategy for developing and maintaining semi-intimate relationships. Thus, a discussion about culture is held before analyzing the important aspects. In line with Lele & Sheth (1988), Coffee (2002) and Eichorn (2004), the authors argue that in order for companies to develop and maintain relationships with customers, the customers must be embedded deeply in the culture, meaning that the culture must be customer focused and surround the development and maintenance of semi-intimate relationships (See Figure 5-1).

Nevertheless, the authors do not agree with Eichorn's (2004) statement; that culture, leadership and attitudes are the foundation for any companies conducting CRM. The authors claim that this is not the case for Fashion companies and argue that culture and leadership are the base for creating the right attitude among staff members which in turn, generates successful CRM in Fashion companies. In other words, it is important for leaders to employ staff with the attitudes needed within Fashion. Furthermore, leaders should be able to create a connection between the culture and the attitudes. This is evident from the empirical findings which showed that the case company uses the company's vision that is embedded in the culture to create common values and attitudes among the staff members. The authors argue that since in Fashion retailing, factors like personal information sharing, advice and honesty are important, attitudes are more considerable, and therefore, they can not be compiled together with culture and leadership.

Since this thesis aims at providing the most important aspects when developing and maintaining relationships, and leadership was not considered as an important aspect, the authors can not determine the importance of it. Culture however, as stated before, is regarded as an important component of Fashion companies both in theories, according to the empirical finding and the authors' beliefs. Nevertheless, the authors claim that as culture has been separated from attitudes, and is now regarded as a base for generating the correct attitudes in Fashion companies (which is a crucial factor); it gains an even more significant meaning in the context.

In line with Eichorn (2004) and Grönroos (2000), the marketing manager stated that the company aims at having a culture that streams through the entire organization, down to the sales points and into customer relationships. According to Saviolo & Testa (2002);

"The sales point is the theatre in which brand strategies are acted out, it is the perfect environment...for creating and transferring an atmosphere, and it is the ideal place for a multiple relationship with the consumer..."(Saviolo & Testa, 2002 p. 238).

The empirical findings strengthen the fact that the case company uses the sales points to communicate the company's culture as one of the main guidelines for the sales force is to wear clothes designed by the company. Furthermore, the culture of the company encourages staff members to maintain the same behavior, values, and norms that are promoted inside the store, on the outside as well. This enables customers to feel that the relationships are based on common values and norms that are true even beyond the in-store interactions. The authors agree with salesclerk's 2 statement that;

"A customer will not be able to identify with the...brand and feel included in the family, if the own personnel do not represent the brand in the best way possible."

Implementing guidelines such as the ones mentioned, for the sales force is an important part of a Fashion company's culture, according to the authors, as the in-store interactions have a direct effect on the relationships towards customers (Saviolo & Testa, 2002). Moreover, the authors believe that when discussing culture in Fashion companies, Eichorn's (2004) statement, namely "Walk the Talk," should be taken one step further. The authors claim that, in Fashion companies, as salesclerks are vital for customer satisfaction, they should also "Walk the Talk" and represent the culture of the organization.

5.2.2 Trust, Commitment & Loyalty

Although trust, commitment and loyalty were not classified as a "theme" in the empirical findings, these factors were discussed in Chapter 3 and throughout the interviews. There-

fore, the authors have claim that they are the foundation for developing and maintaining the studied relationships. According to Morrman et al. (1993), trust is a vital aspect of every relationship and by examining the empirical findings, understanding for the meaning of trust in Fashion retailing was achieved. The empirical research showed that the case company realizes the importance of trust and the sales force are encouraged to be honest about their opinions towards customers. In Fashion retailing, this means that, although honestly might prevent a customer from purchasing certain apparels, a salesclerk should still provide consumers with honest opinions, as this will create semi-intimate relationships.

Garbarino & Johnson (1999) argue that trust reinforces reliability and confidence in relationships. Moreover, regarding trust in market-related relationships, trust is when consumers have confidence in the honesty of a salesperson. The empirical findings showed that the sales force believe that the customers have confidence in them and that this is achieved through the honesty that is embedded in the values and the culture of the case company. As the target customers are men, and the preliminary research and the empirical findings indicated that male customers are more dependent on in-store assistance, honesty is crucial when providing assistance.

Keeping in mind that Fashion apparels reflect attitudes and values, the authors believe that trust between a salesclerk within Fashion retailing and a consumer has a direct affect on whether a relationship is developed or not. Providing consumers with honest and real advice is crucial as the consumer reveals personal information regarding his lifestyle and therefore salesclerks need to value this information sharing by being honest in return.

Commitment is seen as a fusion of customer commitment and employee commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The authors believe that throughout the empirical discussion, it was obvious that the sales force are committed to their work and this has clearly resulted in relationships to their customers. When close relationships are developed, emotional bonds are evident (Barnes, 2000), and when these bonds exist, customers are committed to the company (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). An example of this procedure is when salesclerk 2 retold the strategies he uses in order to develop relationships. According to the authors, he is committed to his work and determined to increase customer commitment through keeping customers' interest on the top. By doing this, he believes that customers will return to the store and remain committed, leading to developed and maintained relationships. When this cycle is in process, it is an indication of customer loyalty as repeated purchase is in place (Grönroos, 2000). Customer loyalty within the Fashion industry is, according to McLaughlin & Wittink (1998), highly important as this industry is signified with low growth, high competition and a need to keep existing consumers.

The case company is well aware of the fact that men tend to be more loyal and therefore, it is believed that creating a foundation of trust and commitment is important in order to gain loyal customers. The authors argue that since male customers are loyal, it is important to reveal the needs that enable the loyalty so that these can be satisfied. Furthermore, the authors claim that the case company achieves customer loyalty through for example implementing a national loyalty club with offers beyond monetary values that are designed for male customers.

Moreover, throughout the empirical findings, a discussion regarding trust, commitment and loyalty was held. Evidently, these are important factors for the case company and for the store in question. Nevertheless, a majority of the participants discussed the fact that developing relationships with customers in small cities is easier than in larger cities. Therefore, the authors can not help but reflect upon the fact that achieving customer loyalty and commitment must be easier in small cities as well. The authors argue that this depends on

the fact that interactions are on a more interpersonal level and, as the area manager pointed out, there is a smaller circle of customers in smaller cities. However, the authors claim that stores located in larger cities should strive more for customer commitment and make sure that when this is gained, relationships are built on trust and loyalty as these factors ensure a stable foundation for the relationship. Finally, the authors believe that this strategy is important in smaller cities as well, as customers who are perceived as committed customers can be committed to competitors if the relationships are not built on trust and loyalty.

5.2.3 Employee satisfaction

As discussed in Chapter 3, employee satisfaction is a foundation for customer satisfaction (Eichorn, 2004). In the empirical research, the case company showed that effort is put on increasing employee satisfaction by improving internal relationships. Meetings and activities are frequently held in order for the staff members to feel included in the organization and to achieve friendly relationships. This is believed to have a direct impact on customer satisfaction and according to the store manager;

“If you enjoy your job then you smile outwards and your smile will make the customers happy.”

This statement is in line with Eichorn's (2004) belief, that employees should develop the same close relationships to each other as with the customers. Furthermore, Rogg et al. (2001) argue that culture, leadership and the climate of an organization directly impacts the performance of employees. The empirical study showed that the head office focuses on increasing employee satisfaction by using culture as a tool for implementing the same values within the whole organization. Moreover, in line with the theories presented, the case company uses internal communication for improving internal relationships, which leads to satisfaction among the staff members.

The authors believe that it is logical to assume that employee satisfaction leads to customer satisfaction and thereby better relationships can be developed with customers. However, the authors argue that a company can create the necessary internal atmosphere for employee satisfaction according to the theories, but employee satisfaction can not be achieved among the staff if the employees have not been carefully selected. This is in line with Gremler & Brown's (1996) statement that interpersonal relationships among staff members are correlated with the personality of employees. During the interview with the area manager, the importance of having staff members with the right personality, attitude and values was pointed out as he believed that it is through these relationships are developed. Therefore, the authors state that focus should also be put on employing the right people for the right jobs. Throughout this study, the authors realized that in a Fashion company, characteristics like being social, creative, and having the ability to motivate others are important factors. These factors are also vital when developing and maintaining both internal and external relationships.

5.2.3.1 Realizing the importance of the sales force

A the majority of the participants stated that the sales force is the most important channel for conducting CRM, as they are the ones taking personal contact with the customers. A salesclerk should have a personal interest in Fashion, according to the authors, in order to provide accurate advice to customers and gain the right knowledge regarding customers' preferences through the relationship (Saviolo & Testa, 2000). From the interviews with the salesclerks, it was evident that both have the characteristics needed within Fashion and therefore, the authors believe that the store manager, among others, claimed that the salesclerks are the most important channel when developing customer relationships. As they

have the right attitude towards Fashion, they are able to develop relationships and this is clearly noticed by the store manager. The authors also claim that salesclerks are the most important channel when developing relationships in Fashion companies. This statement is further strengthened by Saviolo & Testa (2000) who argue that the focus on sales points for developing relationships is increasing. Furthermore, as Fashion products are used by consumers to communicate a lifestyle (Saviolo & Testa, 2000), and salesclerks are the ones providing consumers with the right tools for this communication, the authors believe that the salesclerks' advice are highly important for customers. If salesclerks do not help customers in the right way, customers might not find the right tools for communicating their lifestyle. The authors argue that this might be an obstacle when developing and maintaining relationships.

5.2.4 Customer satisfaction

The authors argue that a Fashion company should conduct Grönroos' (2000) service perspective as this strategy will enable the firm to gain knowledge regarding customers' preferences and thereby customer satisfaction can be achieved. Understanding customers' preferences in order to increase their satisfaction is highly important for Fashion companies as they need to develop a collection that surprises customers and not only matches their preferences (Saviolo & Testa, 2002; Marzo-Navarro et al., 2002). Customer satisfaction derives from employee satisfaction and both lead to developed and maintained relationships as mutual value is created.

As Fashion companies are operating in a highly competitive industry (McLaughlin & Wittink, 1998), it is, according to Grönroos (2002), important to offer customers more than an excellent core product or a good image in order to increase customer satisfaction. Grönroos (2002) claims that this can be done through a total service offering and the authors believe that if Fashion companies achieve this in an outstanding way, they will gain a competitive advantage within their industry and create customer satisfaction.

Throughout the empirical research, no evidence was found showing that the case company has a service perspective and compete with a total service offering. However, the authors state that the case company strives for customer satisfaction. A majority of the participants defined customer satisfaction as when customers return to the store on a frequent basis and when the company gains reputation of good services and products, through word of mouth. The area manager believed that customers are satisfied when they receive maximal service. Moreover, he argued that as the company increases the number of purchases from suppliers, customers are offered more up to date products and customer satisfaction is increased. According to the authors, even though the case company does not have a service perspective, it is still achieving customer satisfaction to some extent. However, some components from the theories regarding customer satisfaction, such as after sales services, are not achieved. Even though after sales services are important for Fashion companies conducting CRM, no evidence of such activities were found during the empirical research. The authors claim that if the company would implement a service perspective, especially as they are a Fashion company, the importance of all customer satisfaction components would become evident. Finally, in line with Söderlund's (1997) argument, that customer satisfaction is achieved through a combination of the four components, namely the product, sales services, after sales services and the culture, the authors argue that the lack of after sales activities might prevent customer satisfaction more than the company realizes.

5.2.4.1 The product

During the interviews the participants stated that by developing and maintaining close relationships to customers, knowledge about their preferences is gained and this results in producing products that meet their demands. In theories regarding customer satisfaction in CRM, this procedure is stressed and according to Lele & Sheth (1998), when doing this, indication of customer importance is given, leading to customer satisfaction.

The authors argue that firms within the Fashion industry should employ strategies that are beyond this procedure. Saviolo & Testa argue that;

“It is not enough in Fashion to offer the market what it wants today...”, as customers want to be surprised (Saviolo & Testa, 2002, p. 32).

The authors believe that this is not really realized by the case company and that customer satisfaction would increase if awareness regarding this fact was achieved. The authors strongly believe that for Fashion companies, it is not about developing and maintaining relationships so that the company can provide customers with products according to their preferences. It is rather about developing and maintaining relationships with customers so that companies can surprise them with new products that will suit their future preferences.

5.2.4.2 Sales activities

According to Lele & Sheth (1998) sales activities are important for customer satisfaction in CRM as in-store interactions are the one of the best opportunities the sales force has to develop and maintain customer relationships. A notable factor from the interviews with the sales force was the fact that they all believe that honest, trust, compliments, extra benefits and a pleasant stay in the store are all factors that contribute to customer satisfaction. The authors argue that the case company has realized the importance of in-store interactions and that focus is put on treating customers correctly, throughout their stay in the store. Moreover, the authors claim that the case company uses all tools available in the store to create an atmosphere where customer satisfaction is maximized. Example of these are, playing music in the store that suits the target customers preferences, wearing Fashion products designed by the same company and make the customer feel included and important in the company during his stay.

Finally, in order to increase customer satisfaction and maximize the customers' experience in the store, customers of the case company are treated as relational customers, in line with Grönroos' (2000) definition. This means that customers are treated the same, no matter whether they buy products or not, according to the store manager. In Fashion companies for men, the authors argue that, treating consumers as relational customers is vital. This argument is strengthened by men's consumer behavior that was discussed throughout the empirical findings. It was evident that men often know what they are looking for and carry out the purchase at once. Therefore, the authors state that, as the number of times where men go “window-shopping” are limited, it is crucial to take use of visits to show that they are included in the organization even though no purchase is taking place. The authors believe that this will increase customer satisfaction and lead to the development of semi-intimate relationships.

5.2.5 Adding value through benefits

The authors argue that even though all benefits and activities that were presented in the empirical findings are important for the customers, they can not be considered as important aspect of developing and maintaining semi-intimate relationships in Fashion retailing.

Many of the benefits and activities were not aimed for developing and maintaining relationships, rather for maintaining the brand identity and making the customer return to the store. The ones aimed to the company's key customers and that are perceived, by the authors, to contribute to the development and maintenance of customer relationships are analyzed in section 5.2.5.1 -2.

The theories presented regarding CRM describe both the advantages and disadvantages of identifying key customers of an organization. On the other hand, theories regarding Fashion management and the empirical findings stresses the fact that key customers should be identified in order to deliver a suitable collection and increase sales. The authors believe that companies within the Fashion industry should identify their key customers. The authors argue that since a Fashion product is a personal tool to communicate a lifestyle or an attitude, it is important to gain accurate knowledge about the customers' preferences, and in order to do so, a Fashion company needs to identify its key customers (Saviolo & Testa, 2002) so that deeper relationships with these can be developed (Brown, 2000).

Before discussing benefits to key customers, the authors found it inevitable to identify the term key customer in Fashion companies conducting CRM. According to Peppers & Rogers (1999) key customers are the ones with high strategic value for the organization, while Saviolo & Testa (2002) argue that key customers are the ones who contribute to a large amount of sales. The case company however, identified their key customers as customers who return to the store frequently, no matter if any purchase is taking place or not. On the other hand, considering the discussion the sales force held about men's consumer behavior, namely that men often purchase when entering a store, the authors argue that the case company's definition is close to both Peppers & Rogers' and Saviolo & Testa's definitions. Thus, according to the authors, it is obvious that key customers in Fashion retailing are the ones with a sense for fashion (as the collections are designed according to their preferences) who have a monetary value for the company.

5.2.5.1 Spoiling the customer

According to the area manager, it is important to spoil the customer as it is what they want when they purchase something. The authors believe that this statement is in line with Grönroos' (2000) argument that consumers do not only buy a product or service anymore; they rather buy the benefits that are gained through the purchase. As consumers have not been included in this study, the authors can not determine this fact. However, the authors argue that if this is the case, a Fashion company conducting CRM should, in line with Brown's (2000) customer strategy, embrace key customers with customer strategies that are developed with the help of the knowledge that is gained through relationships. This was evident from the empirical findings as the case company had identified their key customers, developed semi-intimate relationships with them, gained knowledge about them and offered benefits and activities designed after the key customers preferences and attitudes. The most notable aspect of the activities was the fact that these were designed to fit male consumers. This is something that all Fashion companies for men should take into account when implementing activities or benefits for their male consumers, according to the authors. Furthermore, the authors argue that developing the customer strategy according to the key customers preferences (Brown, 2000), is especially crucial for Fashion companies for men's wear as this target group is more skeptical towards what they gain from the benefits. Moreover, the correct development of the customer strategy is also important for Fashion companies since this strategy is the base for gaining loyal customers. This statement is strengthened by the empirical findings, Brown (2000), and it is in line with the authors beliefs.

Finally, it should be mentioned that developing customer strategies according to key customers preferences and attitudes is regarded, by the authors, as an important aspect for maintaining semi-intimate relationships with key customers. The authors argue that when semi-intimate relationships have been developed, in order to maintain these relationships, it is important to make sure that customers experience the mutual benefits and values even at this level. Thus, developing a customer strategy that provides customers with benefits or activities that suits their preferences and attitudes is a tool for maintaining developed semi-intimate relationships.

5.2.5.2 Adding value to a plastic card

The authors argue that the meaning with having a loyalty club is to gain loyal customers and offer them benefits. However, in reality, customers in loyalty clubs are loyal, but not to one company, rather to all loyalty cards that they have.

According to Barnes (2000), loyalty clubs might not generate value for the customers, and if the customers do not receive values or benefits, neither will the organization, meaning that no mutual values are in place. This argument was strengthened by the empirical findings as, among others, the area manager stated that it is not about providing the customers with a plastic card. It is rather about providing a plastic card with benefits and values so that better customer relationships can be generated through the card. The authors argue that, as loyalty clubs (or similar activities) are very common and almost every store offer memberships, it is important for a Fashion company for men's wear aiming at developing and maintaining semi-intimate relationships with their customers, to ensure that the membership card is associated with service and mutual benefits.

Furthermore, the authors believe that as a semi-intimate relationships is characterized by gaining mutual benefits beyond monetary values, it is vital for the customer to realize that the membership card's value is more than monetary, in order for him to obtain a coherent picture of the relationship. The authors stress the fact that benefits aimed for men should have, in line with the empirical findings, more than monetary values, but also, the benefits should be designed according to men's marketing preferences, namely, simple and within one theme (Sanjay, 2001).

5.2.6 Communicating the brand to male consumers

The last important aspect when developing and maintaining relationships within Fashion retailing, according to the authors, is communication. According to salesclerk 2;

"It is through interactions and communication that a company can truly develop relationships to its customers and therefore it is crucial to do this in the right way,"

Saviolo & Testa (2002) discuss the importance of communication in Fashion companies and argue that communication on different levels can be divided into internal- and external communication. The empirical research showed that the head office arranges meetings frequently to have good internal communication, and this is believed to improve the external relationships with customers as staff members are all aware of new happenings in the company. The store manager stated that the internal communication between stores and within her store were functioning very well as exchanges of ideas are evident. The authors state that internal communication is highly important as it is through these communications that internal relationships and employee satisfaction are achieved. As discussed earlier, employee satisfaction is directly correlated with customer satisfaction, and both factors lead to semi-intimate relationships.

However, Saviolo & Testa (2002) state that Fashion products demand a special type of external communication as they change every six months. Therefore, Fashion companies can not concentrate on communicating the product, they need to communicate the brand. The authors of this thesis believe that although internal communication is important, focus should be put on communicating the brand identity of the company. According to Saviolo & Testa (2002), brand communication is important in Fashion as the products are tools used by consumers to communicate a lifestyle. Moreover, internal – and external communication should deliver the same messages in order to strengthen the perception of a brand.

Although the participants in the empirical findings stated that the internal communication between the stores is good, the authors can not help but reflect upon the fact that the stores are either franchised or owned by a sister subsidiary of the main company. It was stated that the fact that the stores have different owners leads to different conduction of CRM in the different store. According to the authors, this is a lack of consistency in the external communication as a store located in south of Sweden might provide higher value for their customers, than a store up north. The authors believe that this results in that different customers have different perception of the brand identity and that firms need to aim for consistent communication. This will help customers with identifying with the company and the authors believe that customer commitment and trust is gained. The authors argue that a customer will not be able to trust a Fashion company and feel committed to it if the communication of the brand is acted out differently.

Nevertheless, the marketing manager believed that the new national loyalty club will improve the consistency and the communication of the brand and the authors agree, as it will provide customers with similar benefit. The authors also claim that, in line with the area manager, the new membership card should be used for communication with the customers. This means that the membership card can be associated with the brand identity if mutual value is achieved through the loyalty club, and this will lead to developed and maintained customer relationships.

Communication tools, used by Fashion companies, are also divided into three categories, namely; seasonal-, relational- and institutional communication tools Saviolo & Testa (2002). Catalogues are examples of institutional tools and are seen as the most traditional tools used by Fashion companies. The case company has a catalogue or a magazine that is offered to customers and the company believes that this magazine is consistent with the brand identity. According to Yaccato (2003), firms need to understand the difference in consumer behavior and information processing between men and women, before designing any communication tools. This will prevent firms from spending lots of resources on tools or channels that are used in the wrong way, for the wrong gender. The authors state that this is achieved by the case company as the magazine is designed according to males' preferences and it offers articles regarding music, movies, sports etc and not only Fashion apparels. It is perfectly suited for men, however, although the authors find it relevant to deliver communication tools with consistency and that the magazine should reflect the brand and be suited for male consumers, the authors do not believe that the magazine improves the semi-intimate relationships and therefore it is not regarded as an important aspect within communication.

Relational tools are a company's website and e-mail send-outs, according to Saviolo & Testa (2002), who also believe that the internet should be used more by Fashion companies in order to increase interactions with customers. However, the authors of this thesis do not believe in using technological solutions in order to improve semi-intimate relationships and therefore the authors do not agree with Saviolo & Testa's argument. Although technological solutions in many cases can be used to improve communication with customers, these

solutions will lead to more frequent interactions and not to personal communication. The authors state that, as semi-intimate relationships can only be developed and maintained through personal interactions, given the nature of it, and the authors claim that Saviolo & Testa's (2002) definition of relational tools is misleading. The authors argue that these tools should be defined as technological tools for improving communication and not as relational tools.

However, the authors agree with Saviolo & Testa's (2002) discussion regarding the importance of in-store interactions, for improving the communication of the brand. In line with their argument, and the discussion with the area manager, the authors claim that the sales point is about creating relationships and communicating the brand through the sales force. As stated earlier in 5.2.3, employee satisfaction leads to customer satisfaction. The authors claim that this procedure is evident in the communication of the brand as well. Meaning that, if the employees have the same values and attitudes as the company and the brand it will lead to the fact that customers will achieve an accurate apprehension of the brand, during their visit in the store. In other words, the authors claim that in-store interactions are the best tools for communication of the brand identity. This statement was further stressed by the interviews with the sales force where it was argued that advertising is not as efficient anymore and that focus is on improving the communication of the brand through in-store interactions. According to Yaccato (2003), men are not affected by advertisements in the same sense as women and firms need to find new ways, other than traditional advertising strategies, in order to communicate with male consumers. This is in line with the store manager's argument that personal communication in the store is the best communication tool and that it results in marketing through the word of mouth which, according to her is an efficient communication channel.

Finally, as the authors do not agree with Saviolo & Testa's definition of relational tools, it is believed that relational tools for communicating the brand identity of the company so that semi-intimate relationships can be developed and maintained, require new implications. The authors argue that, in the context of this research, examples of relational tools are; the sales force, the use of benefits and activities that contribute to non monetary values, and the offering of membership in a loyalty club with a plastic card that communicates the brand identity of the company. These tools are vital when developing and maintaining semi-intimate relationships, according to the authors.

6 Conclusions

The last Chapter of this thesis presents the main conclusions that were made in the analysis. Moreover, the authors' reflections, managerial implications and suggestions for further research are discussed.

As stated in Chapter 1, the aim of this thesis is to;

"...determine what a customer-supplier relationship in Fashion companies for men's wear is and when it exists, in order to identify the most important aspects when developing and maintaining this relationship."

In order to fulfill the purpose, the following research questions were outlined;

- I. *What is a customer-supplier relationship in Fashion companies for men's wear, and when does it exist?*
- II. *What are the most important aspects for a Fashion company for men's wear, when developing and maintaining relationships to its target customers?*

The authors believe that the purpose of this thesis was fulfilled as the two research questions were examined and answered in the analysis. The following part will provide readers with conclusions from the analysis for each research question.

- I. *A customer-supplier relationship in Fashion companies for men's wear is a semi-intimate relationship. This relationship exists when the parties involved experience mutual values and benefits. Moreover, customers feel included in the organization and common attitudes are shared by the parties.*

A semi-intimate relationship is a long-term relationship that is characterized by frequent personal interactions and personal information exchange. Furthermore, this relationship includes a shared mode of thinking, two-way commitment and trust. Also, a semi-intimate relationship must contribute to mutual values, as it is a vital factor for its existence. Mutual values in Fashion retailing refers to services and benefits that leads to satisfaction beyond monetary values. This is especially important for male consumers as they are skeptical regarding benefits that arrive from a relationship within Fashion retailing. Furthermore, a semi-intimate relationship exists when the customers are included in the company and interactions are on an interpersonal level. Also, for this relationship to exist, importance should be put on taking contact with male consumer as they are more hesitant to ask for help. Finally, the authors have come to the conclusion that, a semi-intimate relationship does not exist through one action; it is rather developed through a series of actions.

- II. *A fashion company for men's wear need to consider the following aspects in order to develop and maintain semi-intimate relationships to its target customers; a customer focused culture, trust, commitment and loyalty, employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction, adding value through benefits and communicating the brand to the male customer.*

Culture influences all the important aspects discussed by the authors, but mostly employee- and customer satisfaction and trust, commitment and loyalty. A customer focused culture means that customers must be embedded in the culture. In order to develop a customer focused culture, managers need to employ the right people and create a connection between the culture and attitudes in the company. The authors conclude that culture and attitudes can not be compiled together. Culture is rather a foundation for creating the right attitudes. Customer focused culture should run through the entire organization and into the sales points, where semi-intimate relationships are developed through interpersonal interactions. The authors claim that developed and maintained semi-intimate relationships are eas-

Conclusions

ier to achieve if the values and attitudes for creating them are included in the organization culture.

Trust, commitment and loyalty are the foundation for developing and maintaining semi-intimate relationships. Trust within Fashion retailing for men means that the sales force must provide male consumers with honest opinions, although it might prevent these customers from purchasing certain apparels. This is highly important as male consumers are dependent on in-store assistance. Moreover, trust is believed to have a direct affect on whether interpersonal relationships are developed or not. Commitment refers to both employee- and customer commitment. When emotional bonds between the company and its customers are evident, customer commitment is gained and this will lead to semi-intimate relationships. In order to gain customer loyalty, Fashion companies for men's wear should implement a loyalty club, designed according to male consumer behavior that offers customers extra benefits which contribute to value beyond monetary terms. This is vital as male consumers are more loyal than women and understanding what enables their loyalty helps the company in achieving it.

Employee satisfaction is achieved when staff members of the company feel they are included in the whole organization and there are friendly relationships among the employees. Both the organization culture and internal communication should strive for increasing employee satisfaction as it has a direct affect on customer satisfaction. Employee satisfaction is maximized when the staff members are carefully selected and the right people with the right attitudes, values and personalities are employed. In Fashion retailing, the right people with the right personality are social, creative and have the ability to motivate others. These factors will lead to improved internal relationships and developed semi-intimate relationships. Finally, the authors concluded that the sales force is the most important channel when developing and maintaining semi-intimate relationships and realizing the importance of the sales force and their satisfaction is vital in Fashion retailing.

Customer satisfaction leads to developed and maintained semi-intimate relationships as it derives from employee satisfaction and both are evidence of that mutual value is created. In order to gain customer satisfaction, firms need to have a service perspective so that knowledge about the customers' preferences can be gained. Furthermore, as the Fashion industry is highly competitive, having a service perspective and offering customers a total service offering will provide companies with competitive advantages through the relationships developed. Customer satisfaction does not arise from one or some of the component necessary, it is rather a combination of all four factors. In Fashion companies, the first customer satisfying factor, namely the product, should not be designed according to customers' demands. An organization must know its customers' preferences well so that they can offer products that will surprise customers while it suits their preferences. Nevertheless, perfect products do not result in semi-intimate relationships. Sales activities are important as it is through in-store interactions that semi-intimate relationships are developed and maintained. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that these activities are essential even when the male consumer is not purchasing anything. Given that male consumers do not go "window-shopping" often, it is important for the semi-intimate relationships' development and maintenance that they feel included in the organization and feel that a relationship exists beyond monetary values during these occasions. This means that Fashion companies should treat customers as relational customers.

In order to add value through benefits, a Fashion company for men's wear should identify the customers' preferences and with this knowledge offer benefits and activities that makes sure that the customers experience extra values. This fact is believed to be crucial for Fashion companies for men's wear as male customers are more skeptical towards what they gain

from benefits. Furthermore, in order to achieve the discussed recommendation, it is important to conduct a correct customer strategy as this strategy is the base for gaining loyal customers, with whom relationships can be developed. Finally, when aiming at developing and maintaining relationships, loyalty clubs (or similar activities) and the benefits provided through them are not important. Significance is instead put on the benefits and values that the card provides, which generates better relationships. Also, the card must be associated with mutual benefits and values. These benefits should have more than monetary values and be designed after men's marketing preferences.

Communicating the brand to male consumers is the last important aspect in order to develop and maintain semi-intimate relationships. The authors came to the conclusion that communication of the brand identity must be consistent in the whole organization in order for a customers to be able to identify with the company and feel trust and commitment, which leads to semi-intimate relationships. Communication in Fashion companies for men is improved by implementing a loyalty club that offers values and extra benefits suited for male consumers. The membership card can then be seen as a communication tool as male consumers will associate it with values and the brand identity of the company. However, the most important communication channel is the sales point as it is through interpersonal interactions that semi-intimate relationships are created. As male consumers are not highly influenced by advertisement, personal communication is the best tool for communicating the brand identity of the company. Finally, new implications for relational tool have been introduced, namely; the sales force, the use of benefits and activities that contribute to non monetary values, and the offering of membership in a loyalty club with a plastic card that communicates the brand identity of the company. It was concluded that these tools are important for the development and maintenance of semi-intimate relationships.

Taking the previous discussions into account, the authors believe that the purpose of this thesis has been fulfilled as a customer-supplier relationship in Fashion companies for men's wear has been defined as a semi-intimate relationship. Moreover, the conditions for its existence have been identified. Finally, the most important aspects when developing and maintaining semi-intimate relationships have been determined.

6.1 Managerial implications

In Section 1.4 the authors argued that this thesis should in particular be of interest for Fashion companies for men's wear. The outcome of this research strongly suggests that managers of Fashion companies should focus on implementing, improving or achieving the mentioned important aspects, in order to develop and maintain semi-intimate relationships. However, even though the beliefs presented are supported by both the empirical and the theoretical findings, the authors, in line with the suggestions in Section 2.3, strongly recommend managers to ensure that these recommendations are suitable for the organization in question. Furthermore, the authors urge managers to read through the empirical and theoretical findings before implementing any of the conclusions drawn in this thesis in order to gain more knowledge about the subject/subjects so that the applications can be made in a correct way.

The authors believe that when implementing these recommendations, firstly, managers should keep in mind that relationships are not developed through superior products. The authors argue that a satisfying product is provided by any company that has recurring customers. Therefore, companies aiming at developing and maintaining semi-intimate relationships should focus on embedding the importance of customers in the culture and make sure that this culture is streamed through the entire organization, down to the sales points.

When doing so, the customer will feel important for the company through the sales- and after sales activities, which arise from the purchase of the products. Moreover, emphasis should be put on improving internal relationships so that better interpersonal interactions with the customers can be gained through sales- and after sales activities. Furthermore, the overall outcome of this study implies that managers need to focus on creating mutual values, or else relationships can not be developed.

It can not be neglected that any benefits or activities aimed to male customers, but especially the benefits and activities for developing relationships, should be designed according to males' consumer behavior. This will enable the customers to feel included in the organization as they will feel that the values embedded in the organization reflect their preferences and values. Moreover, the managers should keep in mind that if any financial or managerial resources are invested in, for example loyalty clubs or activities, it must be ensured that the benefits gained through these add values beyond monetary term, since it is these values that enable the development and maintenance of semi-intimate relationships.

Moreover, the managers should regard the benefits and activities that offer more than monetary values as communication tools. They should be aware of the fact that if these tools are used in a correct way, the identity of the brand is strengthened and customers can identify themselves with the company, which leads to trust and commitment. Finally, managers are encouraged to employ staff members with attitudes and values that are in line with the organization culture. This is important as it is evident that the communication that is managed by the sales force, in the sales points, leads to interpersonal interactions and thereby to semi-intimate relationships.

6.2 Suggestions for further studies

Throughout this research the authors recognized interesting subjects within CRM in Fashion companies for men's wear that are not sufficiently enlightened and that should be studied.

As stated earlier in Section 2.2.5, by examining one Jack & Jones store, the authors were able to gain in-depth knowledge about the practice of CRM in one store. The authors suggest that a study similar to this one should be conducted by examining several stores of Jack & Jones, or another Fashion company for men with multiple chain stores, in order to gain broad knowledge about the subject in question.

Moreover, the fact that the examined store is located in a smaller city was also discussed by the authors who believe that some of the outcomes of this study might not be applicable on stores located in big cities. Therefore, it would be interesting to conduct a study on stores located in big cities in order to exploit the use of CRM in Fashion companies for men's wear even more. The authors believe that as the store's customer circle is larger, some of the important aspects discussed in the conclusions section might be more difficult to achieve.

In addition, the interviewees chosen for this study are all staff members of the chosen case company and the authors believe that further knowledge and managerial implications regarding the chosen subject can be gained by performing a study with customers' perspective in focus. In Chapter 3, theories regarding consumers' definition of relationships were presented, however more research is needed within this area. Therefore the authors suggest that a study conducted by interviews with male customers of one case company might be of interest.

Conclusions

Finally, although men's consumer behavior was not one of the main subjects for this thesis, it turned out to be an evident fact that affects strategies taken by the chosen case company. Therefore, the authors believe that additional research is needed within this area as well. Very little research has been made regarding men's consumer behavior in Fashion retailing and the authors strongly trust that this subject should be of interest for any company operating in the Fashion industry for men.

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Appendix 1

Contact information for preliminary research

Gant

Augustendalsvägen 47
SE-131 92 Nacka Strand
Sweden
Per Sjödel
Country Manager
Gant Sweden AB
E-mail address: info.sweden@gant.com & per.sjodell@gant.com

Dressman AB Sverige

Skäpplandsgatan 1B
Box 947
701 31 Örebro
Sverige

Niklas Holmström, Country Manager Sweden
E-mail address: niklas.holmstrom@dressmann.no

Thomas Behring, Marketing Manager
E-mail address: thomas.behring@dressmann.no

Ole Jakob Ytterdal, Communication Manager
E-mail address: olejakob.ytterdal@dressmann.no

Jeans & Clothes & Brothers

E-mail address: info@brothers.se & kristin.hellstrom@jc.se
Clas Friberg
Owner of Brothers in Jönköping

Jack & Jones

Bestseller
Haga Herrgård
Frösundaviksallé 9
169 70 Solna
Sweden

Jessica Clarin
Marketing Manager Bestseller Sweden
Tfn: 08 520 47 4372
E-mail address: jessica.clarin@bestseller.com

Appendix 2

Preliminary research

E-mail send outs to Gant, Dressman & Brothers, 2006-03-02:

Hello,

We are two students from the International Business School in Jönköping who are writing a master thesis within management. Our aim of the thesis is to study customer relationship management (CRM) in Fashion companies for men's wear. We would be very grateful if you could take time to answer the following questions in order to help us determine whether CRM is an important aspect for companies within your industry:

1) Do you practice CRM within your company?

If yes, how important is it to your organization?

2) Do you believe that CRM is practiced in a proper way or are there any improvements that can be made?

3) Would you be interested in participating in an interview for this thesis?

Thank you in advance for your time and we hope you will find time to answer this email.

Best regards

Joyce Antar & Donya Gholamifar

Reply from Gant, 2006-03-06:

Hi Joyce and Donya,

Please read my answers bellow that I wrote fast as I am traveling for the moment. We require reading and approving any information used with Gant as a reference. Best regards

Per Sjödel

Country Manager

Gant Sweden AB

1) We practice CRM in a way that we have a customer database that is updated on a regular basis and used for communication with key customers. Communication is done through send outs of catalogues and information.

2) We are a much slimmed organization and CRM is integrated with other parts of our marketing department and this is managed by a marketing coordinator and me. We work very close to our customers through our Gant Stores where we have close contact with customers on a daily basis. I believe that it is important for us to keep it simple and maintain the customer focused as a starting point. As we do not work with providing customers with specific discount offers we keep focus on information. I am sure we can improve but the situation today is that we have an active database with interested and current customers.

3) Due to a very tight schedule we do not have time participate in any interviews for the moment.

Reply from Dressman, 2006-03-03:

Hi,

Thank you for your interest. Unfortunately I am afraid that we do not have any reasons to participate in this research for the moment.

Good luck with the thesis!

Ole Jakob Ytterdal, Communication Manager, Dressman.

Reply from Brothers, 2006-03-07:

Hi!

Unfortunately the woman in charge for this kind of questions is away ill on an unknown time. Therefore we can not help you.

Regards,

Kristin Hellström

Brothers Info

Telephone Interviews with Gant, Brothers and Jack & Jones, 2006-03-15.

Hi, my name is Joyce/Donya and I am calling from the International Business School in Jönköping. I and my colleague are writing a master thesis within customer relationship management in Fashion companies for men's wear. Do you have time to answer a couple of questions? We would like to know whether you practice CRM within your company and if it is an important aspect? Do you believe that customer relationships are different depending on the gender of the customer?

Thank you for your time.

Answers from Gant, *Per Sjödel*.

We work with a lot CRM and the contact in our stores are the most important strategy to maintain close relationships to customers. It is important to have salesclerks with an instinctive feeling. We put a lot of effort in educating the staff and we have kick offs so that salesclerk is familiar with the whole collection. Consumer behavior among gender is different. For example the stores for men and women have different designs. Men buy clothes later than women and men are more loyal than women. The foundation of CRM in Gant is the Gant catalogue. We are selective when it comes to sending information to customers and we maintain key customers through special treatment

Answers from Brothers, *Clas Friberg*.

For our company customers keeping customers in focus is a vital aspect. We conduct CRM through two main strategies; identifying target customers and having a loyalty club by which customer loyalty is maintained. Male customers have different consumer behavior and tend to remain loyal. This leads to that the relationships to male customers are different than the ones to female customers.

Answers from Jack & Jones, *Jessica Clarin*.

CRM is very important for us at Jack & Jones and Bestseller. Without close relationships to customers, a company can not survive in the long run. Customer relationships are important for all genders, however women are more aware of what it is style than men are.

Additional question for Jack & Jones:

Would you like to participate in a personal interview for this thesis?

Answer: I would be glad to help you with your thesis, however, send me an email with preliminary questions and a more detailed description of your thesis in order for me to get a full picture of your aim of the research.

Appendix 3

Preliminary questions for Bestseller Sweden AB

Email send out to marketing manager at Bestseller Sweden AB, Jessica Clarin.

Dear Jessica,

We have earlier contacted you concerning our master thesis. We are two students from International Business School in Jönköping that have decided to examine *customer relationships within Fashion companies for men*. We believe that Jack & Jones is an interesting case for our study since you put a lot of effort in creating close relationships with your customers in your stores. We gained this knowledge through contact with one salesclerks and one store owner.

We would like to use Jack & Jones as a case for our study and we believe that you will have great use of the outcome, assuming that you value customer relationships. We will not need a lot of guiding from you, but right now we need some information about your organization so that we can design a more in-dept interview.

The aim of this thesis is to deetermine what a customer-supplier relationship in Fashion companies for men's wear is and when it exists, in order to identify the most important aspects when developing and maintaining this relationship.

We will be using theories about Customer Relationship Management (CRM), Fashion management and consumer behavior in order to create a guidelines with the most important aspect when conducting CRM in Fashion companies for men, therefore we would like to learn more about following:

- History about Jack & Jones Sweden (Number of employees, years in the industry, vision, business idea, target group etc.)
- How important customer relationships are for the company?
- A description of your organization culture.
- What kind of leadership is applied in the company?

We will be examining Fashion companies for men since according to a preliminary study that we made; men need more help in a store compared to women, meaning that relationships with this gender should be more important than the other gender. Do you believe that this is the case at Jack & Jones?

Finally, we would like to know if the different departments in Jack & Jones have a close cooperation in order to improve the service offered to its customers.

From the answers provided to us from you, we will choose an interesting ankle that we will analyze more thoroughly.

Best regards,

Donya Gholamifar & Joyce Antar

Reply from marketing manager at Bestseller Sweden AB

Dear Joyce,

Hope you are doing well. Here are my answers.
Have a nice week-end.

Jack & Jones stores are franchised owned and we have 55 stores in Sweden. We have 3 sales managers in Sweden and they handle all the sales to the stores. Jack & Jones was founded in Denmark 1988 and has been active on the Swedish market since 1993. Jack & Jones' vision is to be a leading jeans brand, while keeping a high quality and a Fashion style that addresses a wide target group. Jack & Jones' goal is to offer the right collection for the right price at the right time. The main product is jeans, cool and trendy jeans with a international attitude. The target group is men between 18-30 years.

Customer relationships are very important for us at bestseller. It is these relationships that make it possible for a company to survive in the long-run. Jack & Jones is a chain, but the stores are run by private partners whom value customer relationships very much and are continuously working towards improvements in this area.

Bestseller is a family owned company and is not listed on the stock exchange. Our vision is "*One world, one philosophy, one family*" and i believe that it summarizes very clearly the culture conducted at Bestseller.

Freedom under responsibility is applied at Bestseller. The main strategies are set by the top managers while the different stores/owners have the freedom to develop their own areas as long as they maintain within the company frames.

Customer relationships are important for male, female and children, but men can in some cases need more guidance than female customers. This can depend on the fact that girls often have a greater interest for Fashion and Google different trends. Furthermore, girls read more magazines about Fashion and are more up-to-date than men. Customer relationships are important no matter gender or industry, but these relationships can be different among gender.

The different departments on the different brands owned by Bestseller do cooperate to a certain level. They are still independent brands and an internal competition is a deliberate choice in order to awake excellent performance and prevents holdups in improvements. Still, all the brands are Bestseller brands and indirectly we are all cooperating to achieve the goals that are set up for the Bestseller Group.

Appendix 4

Contact information for personal interviews

Marketing Manager Bestseller Sweden AB, 2006-04-26

Jessica Clarin
Bestseller
Haga Herrgård
Frösundaviksallé 9
169 70 Solna
Sweden
Tfn: 08 520 47 4372
E-mail address: jessica.clarin@bestseller.com

Area manager Bestseller Retail, 2006-05-09

Mattias Johansson
Bestseller Retail
Bilprovarev. 5
46137 Trollhättan
Sweden
Tfn: 0520 – 47 42 00
E-mail address: mattias.johansson@bestseller.com

Store manager, Jack & Jones in Jönköping, 2006-05-03

Anna Bjernehag
Jack & Jones
A6 Center, Jönköping
Sweden
Tfn: 036 – 16 47 20
E-mail address: jjswe11141@bestseller.com

Salesclerks, Jack & Jones in Jönköping, 2006-04-28

Joseph Kourieh
Jack & Jones
A6 Center, Jönköping
Tfn: 036 – 16 47 20

Daniel Lindman, 2006-05-04

Jack & Jones
A6 Center, Jönköping
Tfn: 036 – 16 47 20

Appendix 5

Interview guide for marketing manager at Bestseller Sweden AB

Introduction questions

Firstly, we would like you to tell us about how Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is implemented in your organization? Which difficulties/obstacles arose during the implementation of this management and if you believe that any of these difficulties or obstacles appeared because you are a Fashion company conducting Fashion management? We would also like to know if you found any advantages with being a Fashion company conducting Fashion management when implementing CRM. Finally, we would like you to tell us how the company gained awareness of the importance for customer relationships and why you decided to introduce it in Jack & Jones?

Main questions

1. Which role do you believe CRM has in Jack & Jones?
2. How do you conduct CRM in Jack & Jones?
3. What kind of instructions regarding CRM do you give to your franchisers?
4. How do you give these instructions? (Meetings, workshops?)
5. How do you increase the awareness about CRM in your stores?
6. What kind of “extra benefits” do you offer your customers?
7. Do you have a loyalty club? If yes, how does it work? Do you feel that it improves CRM?
8. How do you believe CRM can be improved at Jack & Jones?
9. Do you believe that Jack & Jones’ income/profit has increased since the company decided to conduct CRM?
10. How does Jack & Jones integrate with its customers in addition to the things that have been mentioned? Are there more concrete things that are made in order to gain and maintain customers?
11. How do you define customer satisfaction?
12. Does Jack & Jones prioritize some customers over others?
13. Through which channels does Jack & Jones reach its customers?
14. Which are the most important channels for Jack & Jones in order to retain good customer relationships? (Catalogues, salesclerks, loyalty clubs?)
15. Do you believe that the most important activity for a company today is to satisfy customers?
16. How does Jack & Jones work in order to find out customers’ demands?
17. Do you believe that Jack & Jones receives feedback from the customers regarding the products and services provided to them? If yes, in which way do you receive feedbacks and do you believe that these are used in the best way in order to create customer satisfaction? Do you believe that the usage of the feedback can be improved? If yes, in what way?
18. What is done in order to compensate dissatisfied customers?
19. In the literature for Fashion management authors often discuss the importance of finding a balance and good communication between the innovative part of the organization (designers) and the managers in a Fashion company. Do you believe that Jack & Jones are doing this in a successful way?
20. How would you describe Jack & Jones culture? Do you think that the culture is different from store to store or that Jack & Jones as a brand has the same culture everywhere? What are the benefits or disadvantages with the answer you gave in the previous question?
21. What are the advantages for Jack & Jones and its customers by having a close relationship?
22. Finally, do you believe that the fact that Jack & Jones stores are franchised is a disadvantage when conducting CRM, since everyone may not work with CRM in the same way?

Appendix 6

Interview guide for area manager at Bestseller Retail

Introduction questions

Firstly, we would like you to tell us about how Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is implemented in your organization? We would also like to know if you found any advantages with being a Fashion company conducting Fashion management when implementing CRM.

Main questions

1. How do you conduct CRM in Jack & Jones?
2. What kind of instructions regarding CRM do you give to your stores and how do you give these instructions (Meetings, workshops)?
3. How do you increase the awareness about CRM in your stores?
4. What kind of “extra benefits” do you offer your customers?
5. Do your stores have a customers club? If yes, how does it work and do you feel that it improves CRM?
6. How do you believe CRM can be improved at Jack & Jones?
7. Do you believe that Jack & Jones’ income/profit has increased since the company decided to conduct CRM?
8. How does Jack & Jones integrate with its customers in addition to the things that have been mentioned? Are there more concrete things that are made in order to gain and maintain customers?
9. How do you define customer satisfaction?
10. Does Jack & Jones prioritize some customers over others?
11. Through which channels does Jack & Jones reach its customers and which are the most important ones? (Catalogues, sales-clerks, customers clubs?)
12. Do you believe that the most important activity for a company today is to satisfy customers?
13. How does Jack & Jones work in order to find out customers’ demands?
14. Do you believe that Jack & Jones receives feedback from the customers regarding the products and services provided to them? If yes, in which way do you receive feedbacks and do you believe that these are used in the best way in order to create customer satisfaction? Do you believe that the usage of the feedback can be improved? If yes, in what way?
15. What is done in order to compensate dissatisfied customers?
16. In the literature for Fashion management authors often discuss the importance of finding a balance and good communication between the innovative part of the organization (designers) and the managers in a Fashion company. Do you believe that Jack & Jones are doing this in a successful way?
17. How would you describe Jack & Jones culture? Do you think that the culture is different from store to store or that Jack & Jones as a brand has the same culture everywhere? What are the benefits or disadvantages with the answer you gave in the previous question
18. What are the advantages for Jack & Jones and its customers by having a close relationship?
19. Finally, do you believe that the fact that Jack & Jones stores are franchised is a disadvantage when conducting CRM, since everyone may not work with CRM in the same way?

Appendix 7

Interview guide for store manager at Jack & Jones

Introduction questions

Firstly, we would like you to tell us about how Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is implemented and practiced in Jack & Jones, and more specifically in your store? Did you find any advantages with being a Fashion company conducting Fashion management when implementing/ practicing CRM?

Main questions

1. How do you conduct CRM in your store?
2. Do you believe that CRM is an important aspect for the store you are managing?
-Why/ why not?
3. What kind of instructions about CRM do you receive from the headquarters?
-How do you receive these? (Meetings?)
4. How do you increase the awareness about CRM among your staff?
5. What kind of “extra benefits” do you offer your customers, if there are any?
6. Do you have a loyalty club in your store? If yes, how does it work? Do you feel that it improves CRM?
7. How do you believe CRM can be improved at Jack & Jones?
8. Do you believe that your income/ profit have increased since you conducted CRM?
9. How do you integrate with your customers in addition to the things that have been mentioned? Are there more concrete things that are made in order to gain and maintain customers?
10. How do you define customer satisfaction?
11. Do you prioritize some customers over others?
12. Through which channels does Jack & Jones reach its customers and which are the most important ones? (Catalogues? Salesclerks? Loyalty Clubs?)
13. Do you believe that the most important activity for a company today is to satisfy customers? If yes, how do you work in order to satisfy them?
14. Do you believe that you receive feedback from your customers regarding the products and services provided to them? If yes, in which way do you receive these feedbacks and do you believe that these are used in the best way in order to create customer satisfaction? What improvements can be made regarding the information stream in the company?
15. What is done in order to compensate dissatisfied customers?
16. How would you describe Jack & Jones culture? Do you think that the culture is different from store to store or that Jack & Jones as a brand has the same culture everywhere? What are the benefits or disadvantages with the answer you gave in the previous question?
17. Do you believe that culture is an important aspect in order to retain close relationships to your customers? Why?
18. What are the advantages for Jack & Jones and its customers by having a close relationship?
19. Do you cooperate with another Jack & Jones store? If yes, how does this cooperation work?
20. Your store is owned by Bestseller Retail Europe while other Jack & Jones stores are franchised. Do you see this as a disadvantage when conducting CRM, since every store may not work with CRM in the same way? Do you think that this can be seen as an obstacle when creating close relationships to consumers as customers may not get the same service from other stores?
21. Finally, what do you believe the headquarters and your store can do in order to improve CRM at Jack & Jones?

Appendix 8

Interview guide for salesclerks at Jack & Jones

Introduction question

Firstly we would like you to tell us about how Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is implemented and practiced in your store?

Main questions

1. How do you conduct CRM in your store and which role do you believe CRM has in the store you are working in?
2. What kind of instructions about CRM do you receive from the your manager?
-How do you receive these? (Meetings, Workshops etc?)
4. What activities are made in order to increase the awareness for CRM in your store?
5. What are the “extra benefits” that Jack & Jones are offering its customers, if there are any?
6. Do you have a loyalty club in your store? If yes, how does it work and do you feel that it improves CRM?
7. Do you feel that you have succeeded in establishing close relationships to your customers?
8. If the answer to the previous question is yes:
 - Describe the relationships between you and the customers.
 - Would you describe these customers as loyal customers?
 - Do you think that you sell more products due to the fact that the customers trust your judgment and that you can give personal advices regarding clothes that suit certain types of people?
9. What do you think should be done in order to improve CRM in your store?
10. How do you integrate with your customers in addition to the things that have been mentioned? Are there more concrete things that are made in order to gain and maintain customers?
11. How do you define customer satisfaction?
12. Do you/your store prioritize some customers over other?
13. Through what channels do you reach your customers and which are the most important ones? (Catalogues, salesclerks, loyalty clubs?)
14. Do you believe that the most important activity for a company today is to satisfy customers? If yes, how do you work in order to satisfy them?
15. Do you believe that you receive feedback from your customers regarding the products and services provided to them? If yes, in what way do you receive these feedbacks and do you believe that these are used in the best way in order to create customer satisfaction? Do you think that this feedback reaches the headquarters, in other words, does the upward stream of communication work in Jack & Jones? What improvements can be made regarding the information stream in the company?
16. What is done in order to compensate dissatisfied customers?
17. How would you describe Jack & Jones culture? Do you think that the culture is different from store to store or that Jack & Jones as a brand has the same culture everywhere? What are the benefits or disadvantages with the answer you gave in the previous question?
18. Do you think that the culture is an important aspect to maintain close customer relationships?
19. What are the advantages for Jack & Jones and its customers by having a close relationship?
20. Your store is owned by Bestseller Retail Europe and other Jack & Jones stores are franchised, do you believe that this is a disadvantage when conducting CRM, since every store may not work with CRM in the same way? Do you think that this can be seen as an obstacle when creating close relationships to consumers as customers may not get the same service from other stores?
21. Do you cooperate with another Jack & Jones store?
If yes, how does this cooperation work?
22. Finally, what do you think that the headquarter of Jack & Jones, your store and your manager can do in order to improve the use of CRM in Jack & Jones stores?