The Complexities of Lifestyle Brand Segmentation

- A Study of the Lifestyle Brand Converse -

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Abstract

Title:	The Complexities of Lifestyle Brand Segmentation -A Study of the Lifestyle Brand Converse
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Keywords:	Segmentation, Lifestyle brand, Semiotics, Meaning, Neo-Tribe
Thesis purpose:	By looking at the problems regarding traditional segmentation theory, which have its foundation on a modernist worldview, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of the complexity regarding market segmentation for lifestyle brands in contemporary society.
Methodology:	Observations served as a sampling technique in order to locate the respondents. The methods used were short interviews and photo documentation. The study is highly interpretivistic and springs from a social constructionist ontological perspective.
Theoretical perspective:	Semiotics, Meaning through consumption and Neo-tribes
Empirical data:	The research was conducted in Malmö and Lund and involved 25 Converse users as respondents.
Conclusion:	Segmentation through the traditional variables is proven to be complex regarding lifestyle brands as it can not cope with subjective brand meanings and the boundless nature of the consumer.

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1. Research Background

In this section the background to our chosen thesis topic will be presented. The reader will further be introduced to the research question and the aim of this study.

1.1. Point of Departure

Market orientation is seen as a key to business success (c.f. Baker, 1989 in Brown, 1993, McGoldrick, 2002) and segmentation and positioning are regarded as central elements within the marketing discipline, deemed to facilitate this success (c.f. Söderlund, 1998, Firat and Schultz, 1997). Segmentation is the dividing of a population into clusters with individuals who share certain pre-defined characteristics on certain levels (Söderlund, 1998; McGoldrick, 2002). Individuals within a specific cluster or segment will receive the same treatment, hence be targeted by the same marketing activities by companies in order to form a desirable behaviour (Söderlund, 1998). This approach is permeated by modernist assumptions (c.f. Firat and Schultz, 1997; Söderlund, 1998; Dolfsma, 2004) such as consumer characteristics are determents for consumer behaviour (Beane and Ennis, 1987) and that consumer orientations are stable (Firat and Schultz, 1997). However, this view is contradicting what various scholars frequently have been claiming for the last years, that the consumers today are highly post-modern and consume across their predicted boundaries (c.f. Brown, 1993; Firat and Schultz, 1997; Cova and Cova, 2002; Holt, 2003). The post-modern consumer is often characterised by its boundless nature and their ability to adapt their identity depending on the social context. This worldview holds that the individual have both the ability and the willingness for contextual conformity (Firat et al., 1995).

Whichever the mindset one holds towards modernism or post-modernism, companies still segment potential customers and tries to conform their characteristics into ready-made categories (c.f. Engel et al., 1972; Beane and Ennis, 1987, Söderlund, 1998). This behaviour contradicts what have been claimed among scholars regarding the characteristics of the contemporary consumer (e.g. Baudrillard, 1988; Firat et al., 1995).

Taking these contradicting perspectives as a point of departure, the following section will more profoundly discuss modernism and post-modernism and their effect on marketing, and segmentation theory in particular.

1.2. Segmentation - Contrasting Perspectives

Modernism and post-modernism is to be regarded as characteristics of society
or worldviews - not as different historical time periods (Dolfsma, 2004)

Modernism and post-modernism are two opposing outlooks on various aspects of society. The modernistic view is founded on the streaming during the 19th and 20th century that questioned old accepted traditions and instead proposed a rational and critical mind-set towards the surrounding world (Gripsrud, 2002). Modernism emphasis the structured and predictable order in relation to post-modernism, which in turn claims that boundaries between entities are floating, unpredictable and that the individual combines social codes in order to express the self (Berger, 1999). However, late modernists such as Fornäs (1992) and Ziehe (1992) argues that modernity is not a fixed thing but changes, moves and contains tendencies which are full of inner contradictions.

Depending on which worldview one hold, the individual as a subject is viewed differently. From the modernist perspective, the individual has a highly centred self that conforms to a unified end-state. The post-modern perspective on the other hand holds that the individual simultaneously can pursue different conceptual identities, which can contradict each other (Firat et al., 1995).

Post-modernism is not a recent phenomenon but the notion has been employed to describe the changes that occurred in the post-war era within various fields, such as architecture, art, literature, music, cinema, and consumption (van Raaij, 1993). Nevertheless, it was not until the beginning of the 1990's it was recognised that post-modernism could have implications for marketing theory (Brown, 1993). However, all researchers do not agree that we yet live in a post-modern world, but rather in a late modernity, where the modernistic conditions have been intensified rather than dissolved (c.f. Fornäs, 1992; Baudrillard, 1988).

These opposing worldviews offers two ways to look at consumption and the consumer. As illustrated (*see figure 1:1*), the modernist perspective emphasis segmentation through the traditional segmentation bases i.e. demographic, psychographic, geographic and behavioural. Post-modernity on the

Figure 1:1
Source: Authors own illustration

other hand proclaim a view of the multi-narrative consumer who may consume outside their predicted frames and patterns. As a result, the social culture in which the consumer exists, serves as a determinant for behaviour and consumer preferences.

1.2.1. Modernist Segmentation

The underlying premise for market segmentation is that segments actually do exist i.e. that the market is not entirely homogenous (Beane and Ennis, 1987). Engel et al. (1972) propose that consumers are different, that these differences are related to differences in market demand and that segments of consumers can be isolated within the overall market.

Segmentation per se offers a number of advantages for the company. Engel et al. (1972) highlight that the information segmentation bring enable the precise definition of customer needs and what the customer wants. This understanding implicates that the company know how to direct marketing efforts to satisfy the potential customer. Further, this information strengthens the managements' capabilities of meeting changing marketing demands. Hence, resources can effectively be allocated as the company knows where to focus its resources. Thus, the future can systematically be planed and precise marketing objectives can be set and more distinct offerings can be made.

A number of variables can be used to segment a market (Engel et al., 1972) and there is no correct way to segment a market (Beane and Ennis, 1987). Kotler (1980 in Beane and Ennis, 1987) divides the segmentation variables into four broad categories, which has been widely accepted (c.f. Coulter, 2005; McGoldrick, 2002).

Demographic segmentation is statistical measures of the population's composition, size etcetera. The most central variables are age, sex, family status, education and occupation (c.f. McGoldrick, 2002; Solomon et al., 1999). Engel et al. (1972) explain that these variables can provide insight into imperative behavioural and motivational differences between segments. Beane and Ennis (1987) further explain that demographics as a segmentation basis are easy to understand as the population is measured and placed on definite scales.

Even if people share the same demographic characteristics, there can still be differences between them when it comes to *psychographic segmentation* (Solomon et al., 1999), also known as lifestyle segmentation (Beane and Ennis, 1987). Solomon et al. (1999) explain that the consumer is described based on socio-psychological factors such as values, beliefs and attitudes, which can explain consumption patterns and consumer behaviour. Hence, as the variables are less clear cut, they become difficult to measure but can still give indications of social class and way of living. Psychographic segmentation is a way to incorporate a person's inner with the outward expressions of the person (Beane and Ennis, 1987).

Geographic segmentation variables can provide information for determining relative sales potential for different geographical regions (Engel et al., 1972). Geographic segmentation also looks into cultural differences' impact on consumption patterns and what is expressed through consumption (Solomon et al., 1999).

Various *behavioural* or *lifestyle segmentation* typologies exist as tools for marketers to identify and understand different market segments. As the name indicates, these methods distinguish and classify people into different segments on the basis of their lifestyle. The most well-know and widely used lifestyle segmentation models used is the VALS-typology - an abbreviation of 'Values and Lifestyles'. This method, emphasising on individuals' different needs is based on the Maslow theory about hierarchical needs that have to be satisfied sequentially (Solomon et al., 1999).

The VALS-2 typology is developed from the first model and it divides individuals in eight different categories, taking into account both psychological characteristics and resources, which includes factors such as income, education and eagerness to buy etcetera. An example of these segments which have similar income, but have different approach to life is *achievers* and *experiences* whereas groups with lower income could be *believer*s or *strivers* (Salomon et al., 1999).

What all these segmentation methods have in common is that they implicate that the consumers can be labelled and categorised based on characteristics such as age, income, social class, living arrangements, values and user rates which is expected to implicate behaviour, need or orientation. Hence, a heterogeneous mass is turned into homogenous clusters.

Firat and Schultz (1997) argue that segmentation is possible as consumers are seen to be highly self-centred, self-conscious and committed to a reasoned end-state. These conditions are normally derived from modernism. The consumer strives for personal satisfaction of identified needs for 'the self' by consuming. This suggests a unity of the self, enabling stability in the consumer's orientation, need and behaviour, which implicates that they are relatively easy to understand. Thus, this unity simplifies customer targeting. Further, proponents of modernist marketing mean that the actual-self, the strived-self and the conceptual-self can and does exist, and that these in many cases are the same (c.f. Firat and Schultz, 1997). The stability perspective on the consumers brought forward is in line with the modernistic perspective. The modernist worldview thus considers that segmentation of individuals is possible. The individual is a centrepiece in the conceptualisation (Slater, 1997 in Dolfsma, 2004). Dolfsma (2004) further explain that the individual is sovereign and is in full control of its actions; hence predictability of consumption patterns is possible as decisions and choices are made independently. Thus, segmentation is used by companies to enable the

identification of desirable, homogenous segments in order to tailor the marketing mix and make the offerings attractive (McGoldrick, 2002).

Fornäs (1992) argue that the conditions of modernity have developed in recent years. One of these conditions is differentiation, which refers to individuals and their relation to society and between different types of human action and social interaction. Society is no longer as stratified as before, and today individuals, culture and society are treated as different concepts. The late modernity has also according to Fornäs (1992) universalising tendencies stretching itself all over the world, making the marketplace more homogeneous. Simultaneously modernisation produces new subcultures and lifestyles. Modernisation leads in a first stage to homogenisation, but then shapes new heterogeneities. In terms of segmentation theory, these conditions still remain in the same concept of turning a heterogeneous group into homogenous clusters (Fornäs, 1992).

1.2.2. Post-modernist 'Segmentation'

Many of today's scholars within sociology and marketing do not agree that we live in a modernistic but rather a post-modernistic world (c.f. Holt, 2002; Thompson and Haytko, 1997). The underlying conditions for post-modernism have been discussed by scholars during the last decades. Firat and Venkatesh (1993 in Firat and Schultz, 1997) have identified important conditions for post-modernism from a marketing segmentation perspective which have implications for marketing activities and the view on consumers and consumption.

The notion *fragmentation* revolves around the view that society is divided into fragments with 'boundless nature' and that these fragments interact and influence each other as compared to modernist segments that are non-interacting entities. Firat et al. (1995) explain that one major aspect of the post-modernistic idea is the de-centring of the subject as opposed to the modernist idea that the subject is highly self-centred. Here, 'subject' refers to the individual's identity in a surrounding world full of objects. When the subject is de-centred, the individual creates multiple and changeable identities depending on the diverse situations one encounters. This loss of unified self, leads to a fragmented consumer difficult to predict and classify into strict clusters (*see figure 1:2*).
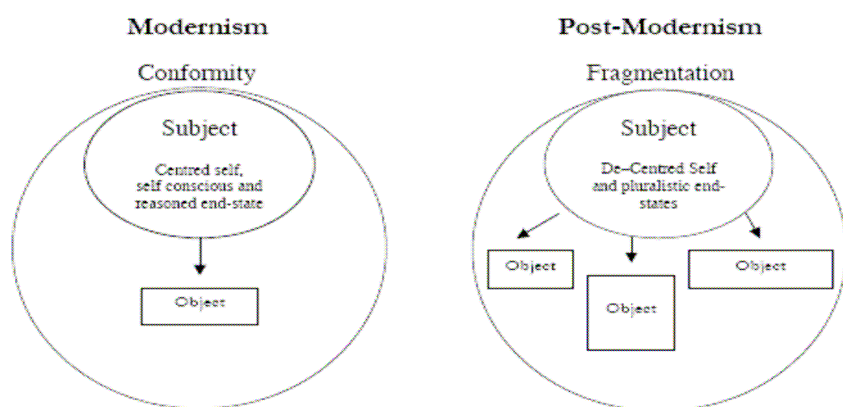

Figure 1:2
Source: Authors own illustration

As a result of fragmentation and the de-centred subject, the consumer gets a propensity to juxtapose something with something else, including oppositional, contradictory and essentially unrelated fragments. This is what Brown (1993) and Firat and Venkatesh (1993 in Firat and Schultz, 1997) refer to as *paradoxical juxtapositions*. The consumer is liberated from only pursuing one single image of the self and can hence mix and match objects which enable the creation of individualisation. In terms of consumption, paradoxical juxtapositions can be explained though the plurality of styles (van Raaij, 1993). The market is hence constituted of consumers who simultaneously can express preferences for objects that can be associated with so called 'punk', 'hip-hop', 'conservative' and 'preppy' clothing styles (Cova and Cova, 2002).

These underlying post-modern assumptions of fragmented markets and consumers, and the paradoxical juxtapositions of goods have implications for consumption. Goods have to some extent been freed from their symbolic anchoring and have begun to drift between various groups and various consumers (Corrigan, 1997). Hence, goods 'obvious' role can in many cases be questioned, implicating a greater need for marketing activities.

When liking the post-modern condition with segmentation theory a problem occurs as the fixed boundaries of 'variable thinking' collide with the fragmentation that post-modernity proposes. Firat and Schultz (1997) bring forward that the post-modern consumer encourages many different ways of being due to the de-centring of the subject. The consumer is thus neither conforming to nor committing to one single segment. This makes the term 'fragmentation' more suitable than 'segmentation' to describe the post-modern consumers' unpredictable consumption patterns. This loss of commitment to one single way of being, results in what Firat and Schultz (1997) refer to as the 'bricolage market'. This notion implies that consumers do not present a united, centred self, but rather a jigsaw collage of multiple representations of the self when consuming the same product category i.e. that the same product can be used in a number of ways.

Additionally, Cova and Cova (2002) suggest that the market may be constituted of neo-tribes, which allows greater freedom than any classes, subcultures or segments. These groupings are conceptually based and individuals participate in these different neo-tribes simultaneously in their everyday life. Further post-modern characteristics are that the consumers are seeking unique self-images and contemporary technologies allow personalised production and hence the segments are breaking up into individual consumers (McKenna, 1988 in Firat and Schultz, 1997).

But how is market segmentation theory structured and organised with post-modern assumptions? In a culture of fragmentation, where consumers use more than one single narrative, more than one cultural discourse and were their existence is based on the image they provide to the surrounding world, marketing becomes very culturally sensible. The image the brands provide must represent a seductive identity that makes consumers attractive

in different moments. Holt (2003) argues that lifestyle categories such as clothing, alcohol, food and automobiles are heavily associated with a symbolism expressing what the brand stand for. Brands permeated with symbolism have often forged a deep connection with various consumer cultures. Since individuals show less commitment, it is imperative to continuously reproduce, reformulate, reposition and regenerate the images provided (Firat and Schultz, 1997). van Raaij (1993 in Söderlund, 1998) states that individualism is one of the permeating aspects in the post-modern society. This is linked to the death of authorities which have lead to a vacuum where the individual itself has to form its own identity. This identity management's main purpose is to create a unique life-pattern. This increased interest in being unique is founded on the assumption that people aim to stand out of the crowd (du Gay and Salaman 1992 in Söderlund, 1998). Thus, segmentation of lifestyle brands, through which people wish to express their personality (c.f. Holt, 2002; 1998), where lifestyle brands serves as a means of doing so (Thompson and Haytko, 1997), might be even more complex as one consume not to fit in but to create a unique sense of self.

1.3. Conflicting Perspectives

As stated, the segmentation idea is structured around variables based on modernist assumptions, and when looking through post-modern eye-glasses, it becomes evident that there is a clash and collision regarding the views of the consumer and consumption. Fornäs (1992) states that the underlying post-modern fragmentation assumptions, is rather a radicalisation and intensification of modernism, than its dissolving. Fornäs (1992) continues that what many scientist call post-modernity should be seen as an ultra, super, or late modern phase of modernity.

On the other hand, other researchers (e.g. Baudrillard, 1988; Tompson and Haytko, 2003; Brown, 1993; Firat and Schultz, 1997) claim that the blurring of boundaries between high and low culture, between art and commercials, paradoxical juxtaposition and the de-centring of the subject, are clear sign of the post-modern conditions. Thus demonstrating the fragmentations' and the paradoxical juxtapositions' existence, and that these are characteristics of our contemporary marketplace. However, Fornäs (1992), Ziehe (1992) and Melucci (1992) question the post-modernistic conditions, and that we should understand our contemporary world as characterised by super-differentiation on all magnitudes, dissolving earlier simple, stiff and predictable boundaries into freer, floating networks of multicultural pluralities. This results in a complex interplay of communicative rationality fulfilling a genuinely modern individual by turning its reflexivity upon itself. However, still witnessing the centred subject of individuals.

What makes the segmentation possible within the modernist perspective is the unity of the self, or self-concept and a sense of one's character can and does exist. Such unity suggests

stability in the consumers' behaviour and orientation. Therefore, demographic, geographic, psychographic and behavioural segmentation variables suit this worldview very well and thus can provide marketer with fruitful knowledge and understanding about their consumers.

As segmentation is a corner stone in marketing (c.f. Söderlund, 1998; Firat and Schultz, 1997); does a problem arise if segmentation variables do not match the reality under post-modern conditions with fragmented consumer behaviour? In particular regarding lifestyle brands, with a high degree of communicative values about the individual, does the structure segmentation offers, create a problem in the post-modern society? Do segmentation variables provide marketers with poor directions? Is it possible to classify individuals employing the same lifestyle brand, by using the same variables in order to distinguish their consumption patterns? or are the customers too diverse and ascribe different meanings based on individual discourses? Can usage context or group belonging give indications for why certain consumers use the brand and why some people do not? Which implications do this have for market segmentation?

As the post-modern consumers express themselves by combining, mixing and matching diverse objects or styles, that even might be unrelated to one another, can the usage situation, context and the way things are employed by the consumers instead give indications regarding 'segmentation' that can give helpful indications about how and by whom certain goods are consumed? The reasoning behind these questions leads us to this study's research question:

1.4. Research Question

By looking at how people use lifestyle brands we aim to answer the following question:

- Which implications does lifestyle brand usage have for segmentation theory?

1.5. Research Aim

By looking at the problems regarding traditional segmentation theory, which have its foundation on a modernist worldview, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of the complexity regarding market segmentation for lifestyle brands in contemporary society.

In order to fulfil the research aim; this study will look upon the usage of the lifestyle brand Converse.

1.6. Demarcation

Lifestyle brand refers to brands with a strong character that are consumed in public. Converse is an example of such a lifestyle brand. The Converse Chuck Taylor All Star model that has been in focus for this research is hence deemed to fulfil this prerequisite.

As the aim of this study is to contribute to the understanding of the complexity regarding market segmentation for lifestyle brands in contemporary society, this study will not provide or develop a framework for how to conduct market segmentation.

The authors of this study believe that gender aspects of consumption are highly relevant in a study like ours. However, this research will not focus upon gender issues. Our opinion is that such an aspect would increase the complexity to the nature of this research. Hence we have decided to disregard this matter. We do however believe that such an analysis would provide fruitful knowledge regarding the segmentation of lifestyle brands.

2. Methodology

The following chapter aims to give the reader a depiction of how the research was conducted. In addition, the philosophical underpinnings related to this research will be accounted for.

2.1. The Choice of Converse

In order to be able to answer the research question and fulfil the aim of this study, the decision was made to look at the lifestyle brand Converse. The researchers had previously located the brand usage in various contexts and that people interpreted by the researchers to belong to various social groupings such as 'the snobs', 'the retros', 'the punks' and 'the hip-hopers' use the brand. The brand was also found suitable as the Converse shoes have a characteristic design and thus are easy to identify. Further, as the researchers previously had spotted Converse usage in a quite high frequency, access to respondents was estimated to be relatively manageable.

Not all of these previously identified diverse groupings convey a fashion discourse in line with the 'sportyness' expressed on the company web-page. *"More than shoes, Converse is a story of legends, heroes and innovators tied together by the love of sport"* – converse.com. Converse, an American company founded in 1908, has during the last century established a noticeable presence on the world sneaker-market. The company web-page (converse.com) truly emphasis the American heritage by frequently use the word 'American'. The basketball and sports heritage is also emphasised a lot and sports icons are represented and acknowledge in many ways. Another aspect emphasised is the company's innovativeness and the contributions the company have made to various sports i.e. basketball, tennis, turf and track.

"The Converse collection, built upon its American sports heritage, includes sports performance, sports classics and sports lifestyle athletic footwear for men, women and children, as well as athletic-inspired apparel"
converse.com

From originally only being a sports brand, Converse has been adopted by various lifestyles and is today used for more purposes than just sports. For instance the 'Chuck Taylor All Stars'-model, a performance shoe for basketball is now widely employed among surfers and skaters (converse.com). Hence, a shift has taking place changing the focus from the sneaker function to the street-wear coolness; from function to lifestyle. The company's aim is to

facilitate the 'Converse personality' i.e. a mixture of sport, rock n' roll and street (converse.com).

"Converse's 98 year old American heritage of first in sports and first in rock n' roll"
converse.com

2.2. The Research Process

As the illustration of the gathering of primary data indicates (*see figure 2:1*), the empirical material is based on a brand-spotting activity. Observations served as a sampling technique in order to locate people wearing Converse. The gathering of the empirical material per se involved short-interviews and photo documentation. After spotting the shoes, the respondents were approached and asked whether they would agree to participate in the study, which was conducted on the spot.
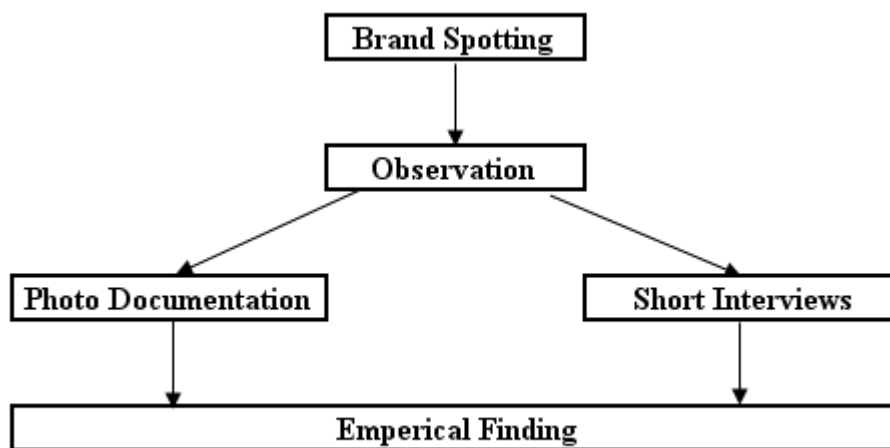
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Figure 2:1

These qualitative research methods were found suitable for this research as the aim has been to contribute to the understanding of the complexity regarding market segmentation for lifestyle brands. Due to the nature of the research aim, the emphasis was placed on understanding the domain rather than describing or generalise it which results in the interpretivistic epistemological standpoint and the qualitative methods used in the study (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Further, this research cannot claim to be positivist due to the researchers' active participation in data collection, and data interpretation. Thus, the epistemological orientation of this study is interpretivistic rather than positivistic. Further, the interactions with the respondents have limited the possibility for the researchers to have an objective mindset to the object of study. Hence, it would be impossible to claim anything else than this research originating form an ontological social constructionist perspective (c.f. Bryman and Bell, 2003).

When considering the approach to the research question and nature of this study, this research takes its point of departure in existing litterateur. Thus, one might argue this is a deductive research and one might not be wrong. However, in this research, we would argue that an *abductive* method has been used. Similar to the inductive approach it takes its point of departure in the reality, without neglecting the theoretical background already established within this field of research. With such an abductive method, the research process is refined for both the theoretical- and empirical foundation (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 1994). This reciprocal action has been used when working with the theory, empirical material and the analysis.

2.3. Gathering of Empirical Material

The sampling method i.e. observations, involved active scanning of urban areas in Malmö and Lund, in order to spot Converse users. These cities were chosen as the researchers are familiar with the cities and hence are familiar with where people can be spotted. Further due to the limited time-scope of the study, it was found necessary to research areas proximate to Lund. Hence, the choice of research locations was based on convenience (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Further, the reason to use more than one city or location in the study was based on our pre-understanding that these two cities population, despite their geographical proximity, are rather diverse. Hence, to use both cities as research grounds was found advantageous as the potential sample was believed to be more heterogeneous than when only using one city, making the study's findings more credible. Malmö can be described as a metropolitan and multi-cultural area whereas Lund is a smaller city, centred around the university.

2.3.1. The Respondents

The only prerequisite set for potential respondents was for them to be wearing Converse shoes. As a result, only Converse users were interviewed, and not people wearing Converse counterfeits. Before conducting the research no profile of the desired respondents was made up, instead diversity was embraced among respondents, especially when it came to age since our pre-understanding indicated that this potentially could be tricky. The response rate was surprisingly high and approximately 75 percent of the people encountered agreed to participate. For a closer inspection of the respondents, please *see appendix 1 and 2*.

2.3.2. The Locations

The search for respondents in Lund started a Thursday on SOL – the language- and literature centre at Lund University. This location was chosen as the researchers' pre-knowledge was that students from a wide range of faculties go there to study due to the fresh indoor environment. A number of respondents were found on this location but as a student bias was wished to be avoided, the researchers took a walk to the coach-station Universitetssjukhuset. This area was not fruitful and neither was the hospital lobby in terms of finding Converse users. Instead the researchers headed for Lund city centre. Respondents were caught eating ice-cream in the sun outside the cathedral and on Stortorget, walking on Kungsgatan and Klostergatan, and chilling at Mårtenstorget. The empirical material was found fruitful and altogether 10 respondents were interviewed and photographed.

The quest in Malmö started on a sunny Friday morning in the end of April at Södervärn coach station. The researchers lingered for a while without spotting any Converse shoes. Instead, Möllevångstorget was approached, but the only 'Converse shoes' we could spot was counterfeits, hence not of interest for this study. After having spent approximately 45 minutes on these two locations without spotting any real Converse, the researchers decided to walk towards the shopping centre Triangeln. On the way, the first respondents were found, interviewed and photographed. When at Triangeln, the density of Converse users increased and a number of respondents were found here. By now, it was lunch time and the sun outside was rather tempting, hence the researchers went to the pedestrian street Södra Förstadsgatan. On the street, many Converse users were encountered and it was not possible to approach every single one of them. The quest continued to Gustav Adolfs torg, the shopping centres Hansa Gallerian and Hansa Companiet, Stor Torget and Lilla Torg. The respondents circled some blocks in the area and then returned to Triangeln. Generally, the shopping centres did not result in many respondents; it was rather the streets and squares that were good for this purpose. However, the counterfeits haunted the researcher during the day. After four-five hours in Malmö, the empirical material of 15 respondents was found sufficient and found completing the Lund study.

2.3.3. Reflections

As this account of the research locations and respondents exhibit, the study's procedure have been highly influenced by the researchers pre-knowledge, feelings and judgement in combination with the weather. Hence, the conducted study cannot claim to be based on objectivity or stable measures, but rather to be quite randomly executed. This implicates that the empirical material gathered would have looked differently if the researchers had decided to visit other cities, or if just their strolling patterns had been reversed. Hence, this limits the scope for making objective measures as the choices made have been based on subjectivity.

This further indicates that the study have taken its point-of-departure in the ontological position of social constructionism (c.f. Bryman and Bell, 2003). The social constructionist view is based on the assumption that what is perceived as the reality is determined by people's interpretations (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). Hence, what people perceive as the 'reality' differed between people. This view is opposed to the positivistic ontology where it is assumed that the reality exists externally without the interference of individuals (Bryman and Bell, 2003).

This study has not aimed to generalise the findings, but to contribute to the understanding of the complexity regarding market segmentation for lifestyle brands, which is further in line with the social constructionist approach. The social constructionist researcher's role is to increase understanding by explaining different experiences, rather than search for external causes and fundamental laws to explain people's behaviour. Hence, the researcher is allowed to be a part of what is observed and studied in order to increase the general understanding of the situation. The analyses for social constructionist research should include and show the complexity of whole situations, which suits our aim relatively well.

2.4. Brand Spotting

In this research, brand spotting has been the main methodology. The term 'brand spotting' refers to the mapping of brands as a result of an observational sampling technique where respondents have been approached based on certain behaviour, in this case Converse usage. As a result of actively scanning urban areas for Converse shoes, interviewing these people about their perceptions regarding Converse and document their usage with photographs, an understanding to how consumers employ lifestyle brands in diverse contexts aimed to be reached. The methods used for the brand spotting, all involve a high level of interpretivism. What is verbally expressed during the short interviews had to be interpreted by the researchers, thereafter the interpretations of the photographs took place detached from the respondents, hence depending solely on the researchers ability to decode messages.

The brand spotting methodology implicated that the researchers choice of research context e.g. day, time of day and area, have directed the results of this study. Further, the researchers' ability to spot the brand had implications for the result. The characteristic design of the Converse gave a pre-understanding that it would be relatively easy to identify the shoes. However, at the field it became apparent that other brands such as Lacoste and Cheap Monday, at least in their resent collections, have copied the Converse look. Hence, numerous respondents with, according to the researchers' interpretations 'Converse-shoes', were falsely approached, and were hence not involved in the study.

2.4.1. Observations

The observations carried out should mainly be seen as a non-probability sampling technique (c.f. Bryman and Bell, 2003) employed in order to locate appropriate respondents i.e. Converse users. The observations carried out were small scale emphasising the shoes only. However, this study capitalise on some of the advantages structured observations carry, as explained by Bryman and Bell (2003). Structured observations aim to research behaviour where the researcher explicitly before entering the research context formulates rules for the observation and the recording behaviour. This has been the case for this study as the preferred behaviour – Converse usage – was a prerequisite set and how Converse is employed in diverse contexts and combined with other brands which were to be recorded. Further, the participants were unaware of the observers until being approached, giving the researchers time to identify the shoes, the brand context and in which context the shoes were worn. However, as the structured observation is used as a sampling technique, the method's classification as a quantitative (Bryman and Bell, 2003) can be dismissed.

2.4.2. Short Interviews

The choice of making interviews was made in order to understand how, when and where the respondents use their Converse, but also how the respondents perceived their style. In addition to this, the aim was to get information about 'traditional segmentation variables' to see if any user-patterns could be derived from these. The interview structure followed a structured chart (*see appendix 3*), but the interviews per se had semi-structured traits. This was required, as follow-up questions sometimes were needed in order to clarify answers. Due to the inherent limited time scope of this research approach, i.e. the nature of approaching people on the run with only a few minutes to spare for answering questions, the structured element was needed to get the right information. Hence, the questions were rather to the point to avoid wasting time and causing confusion. The information relevant for the research aim was determined to be best obtainable through interviews and not through other methods such as a questionnaire. This method was dismissed as this would demand more from the respondents e.g. to take the time to fill in the questionnaire or to be more involved. Additionally, structured questionnaires can not provide the individualised answers and statements, wished to be captured in the empirical material. Such a structure would force the researchers to in advance classify or point out different styles that were suspected to be identified in the study, and hence forcing the respondents to chose upon these. Instead, the idea of the method employed was to encourage the respondents' spontaneity or subjectivity in order to capture the underlying reasoning behind their fashion discourses carried out through the Converse shoes. Therefore, the researchers asked the questions and took notes. Further, a pure photo study was avoided, as it would only provide material about the usage context and how the shoes are combined with

other items. The duration of these short-interviews was between three and five minutes depending on how prone the respondent was in answering the questions.

The first question asked were mainly emphasising on the Converse brand and how the respondent perceived their own style. Also questions about if people in the respondent's close surrounding were using the brand and how they perceived those persons' style. The final, set of questions focused on the respondent such as age, occupation and hobbies in order to get a picture of the respondent's life situation. One downside about the short interviews is that the respondent had to reply on the actual spot without too much time to reflect. However, it could also be argued that it would increase the sincerity in the responses, the respondents responding the first things that come to their minds.

The unstructured element was also imperative in order to allow some freedom to the interview setting and enable the researchers to follow clues given by the respondents. Hence, by using a semi-structured interview structure this study can capitalise on the respondents' independence and creativity, but also the structure needed to enable clarity and focus in the empirical material. Further, as some of the questions asked were rather complex e.g. *How would you describe your style?* and highly depend on the respondents self-image, and as the wish was to capture the 'true respondent', the choice to have open-ended questions seemed logic. This, as there was no wish to direct the answers into given categories or control the result in any other manner. Rather, the respondents were encouraged to freely express themselves and give a proper view of there own personal style. From a practitioner's point of view, Cova and Cova (2002) suggest that one method to identify and understand social groups in their relation to a brand should emphasis on semi-structured and non-structured interviews on an individual or group basis, regarding what they feel and experience when using the brand. A marketer or a researcher could also use participant or non-participant observations on specific places where parts of the neo-tribe gather (Cova and Cova, 2002).

The very nature of the research methodology interviews further supports the social constructionist ontology. During the interviews, the answers given to the researchers were based on the respondents' interpretations of themselves and not necessarily a reflection of their 'objective self'. Further, they might have stated things they believed the researchers wished to hear. The results of the interviews where at the time for the interview written down and these notes were later interpreted in the empirical study. This indicates several layers of interpretation.

2.4.3. Photo Documentation

Before the encounter ended, the respondents were asked to have their picture taken in order for the researchers to after the interviews recall and further compare and contrast the context

in which the lifestyle brand was employed. The photographs lay the founding construction in the later photo analysis of the styles and discourses in order to find out who are the brand users. Buchanan (2001 in Bryman and Bell, 2003) argue that combining photographs with other methods enriches a study's material. Especially relevant for this study is the argument that photographs visualise information not captured in the interviews i.e. how the brands are combined and used are better understood visually than verbally. Additionally, it is also interesting to compare to what degree the photographs correspond to what and how the respondents' view their own styles and how they use the Converse brand.

The photographs facilitated an understanding of how the respondents use the lifestyle brand; hence an emphasis was placed on the visualisation of the respondents in order to make a proper comparison. The photograph is the most obvious manifestation of context usage and it gives a rather reasonable indication of how the brand is employed by the respondents. It is the researchers' profound conviction that photo documentation in combination with other methods, in this case the short interview, captures data not disclosed in the interview, especially since it was necessary to make the interviews relatively short. According to Gagliardi (1990 in Bryman and Bell, 2003) photos provide a particular important source of data in studies involving culture and symbolic meaning, which is in line with the research aim. Gagliard (1990 in Bryman and Bell, 2003) further argue that one must keep in mind that the photographs might not be appropriate to use as data in isolation because its necessary to have additional knowledge about the setting and the social context from where they originates.

The gathering of the material for the photo documentation can be claimed to be rather objective i.e. a snapshot of the reality, but the interpretations derived from this material is based on interpretations of social codes. Hence, further support for the social constructionist ontology view on research process is provided.

2.4.4. Triangulation

One of the reasons for using triangulation is to enable crosschecking of the different methods as have been the case in this research in order to strengthen the credibility of the research (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Triangulation enables the researchers to compare the findings of the different methods employed, i.e. short interview and photo documentation,

Figue 2:2
Source: Authors own illustration

which should result in greater confidence of the findings. This form of triangulation hence
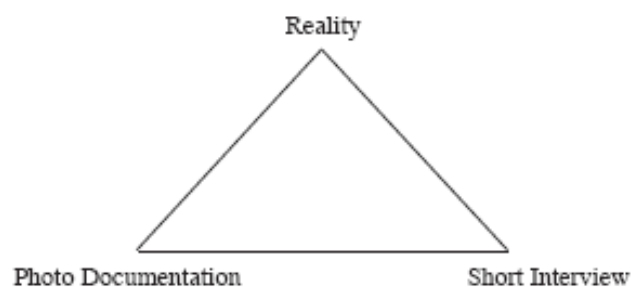
aims to increase the validity of the study, through primarily accounting for apparent 'deficiencies' associated with each method as well as maximising and expanding the knowledge derived from the empirical study (Bryman and Bell, 2003). In addition to this, triangulation is most likely to contribute to higher standard of the results. The triangulation is depicted in the illustration to the right (*see figure 2:2*).

3. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, the chosen theoretical tools for the analysis will be presented. The theoretical framework is illustrated in the triangle to the right. The chosen theories aim to provide a solid base so the research aim can be fulfilled. The next chapter - Empirical Analysis - will follow the same structure.
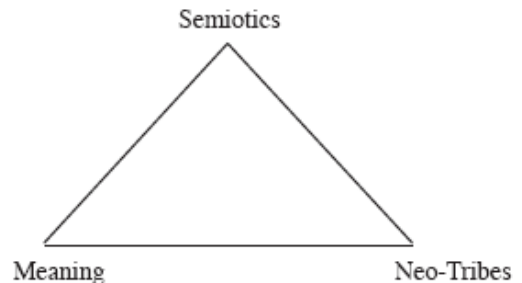
3.1. Semiotics

The theoretical framework concerning semiotics will be used for the analysis of the photographs of the respondents to facilitate the understanding of how Converse shoes are worn by the respondents.

Semiotics is about the interpretation of various signs in order to make sense of the surrounding world (Chandler, 2006). Whereas semantics concerns *what word means*, semiotics does instead look into *how signs mean* (Sturrock, 1986 in Chandler, 2006). Today's society is full of signs that are given meaning invested of words, images, sounds, acts or objects (Peirce, 1931-58 in Chandler, 2006). This implicates that anything can be as sign as long as it is interpreted as the concept it represent. Hence, the field of semiotics involves everything that can be taken as a sign (Eco, 1976 in Chandler, 2006). The interpretations of signs are founded on and facilitated by socialisation where people not only learn to agree on shared meanings but also how to make individual interpretations of different stimuli such as goods or photographs. This implicates that symbolic meanings enable the consumer to establish, preserve and convey their various identities (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998).

Peirce (1994 in Solomon et al., 1999) explains that messages should be interpreted through semiotics and that every message consists of three entities. The *object* is in focus, the *sign* is a sensory imagery that represent the intended meaning of the object e.g. the content of an advertisement, whereas the *interpretant* is the meaning derived from the sign.

Semiotics is not only the language of sign systems, but also other systems of significations such as images, gestures, and photographs etcetera (Barthes, 1967 in Chandler, 2006). *Signs* are the result of the associations the signifier makes with the signified (Saussure, 1983 in Chandler, 2006). The *signifier* is the form the sign takes whereas the *signified* is the concept

the sign represents (Sassure, 1983 in Chandler, 2006). Virtually anything can be a sign as long as someone interprets it as signifying something (Chandler, 2006). For example, the word tree is the signifier whereas the association made by the word tree is individual; hence the signified concept (Chandler, 2006).

Semiotics is often used when messages are recorded through writing, photography or audio in a vein is analysed. Photographs are built on combinations of signs that must be learned to be interpreted from a social dimension.

Chandler (2006) further explains the importance of semiotics as a necessity as it helps us regard reality as something that cannot be viewed objectively but as determined by human interpretations of different sign systems. The underlying assumption is that we take part in the creation of our reality and the role we play in this construction. Hence, meaning is not given to us but actively created by humans through interplay of codes or conventions that we normally are not aware of. The study of signs is the study of the construction and maintenance of reality. Signs not only contribute to the understanding of reality but also to various acts' or objects' meanings that are created through interpretation.

In resemblance to signs, also codes are understood in a meaning and social context (Chandler, 2006). *Social codes* concern how one express the self through verbal language, body codes, commodity codes and behavioural codes. Even though all semiotics in a sense are social codes, Chandler (2006) explicitly refers to codes such as facial expressions, postures, fashion and clothing. *Textual codes* can be detected in representation of scientific codes, aesthetical codes, rhetorical codes and mass mediated codes. *Interpretive codes* are such as perceptual codes and ideological codes. These three groups of codes represent the three kinds of knowledge required by interpreter of a text i.e. information about the world and social knowledge, information about medium and genre, and information about the relationship between these areas.

3.1.1. Clothing as a Communicator

Jakobson (1971 in McCracken, 1988) argues that clothing can be seen as a mean of a non-linguistic way of communicating. He implies that the clothing should be seen as a code and as a collection of messages, rather than a means for meaning creation. Unlike language, which establishes signs and the rules for their combination into messages, a system such as clothing gives no generative opportunity. Thus that kind of communication must be specified in advance of any act of communication the message of which the code is capable (Jakobson, 1971 in McCracken, 1988).

McCracken (1988) further argues that communication in terms of clothing is almost fully constrained, thus allowing no freedom and the message comes as if it was pre-fabricated. Because the wearer does not have the same freedom in terms of expressions, the interpreter of the style examines an outfit not for a new message, but rather an old one fixed by an already established convention of style. The wearer can only express combinational freedom by perplexing the interpreter.

When discussing the possibility that language and material culture differ in their communication ends, it becomes particularly important to understand how they differ as communicative means. As clothing is a closed code and provides society with a fixed set of messages, the use of semiotics repetition is encouraged rather than innovation. This allows the communicator and the interpreter to use cultural categories and principles without encouraging their innovative manipulation. Language is much more open, and the activity of the person communicating, which are constantly creating new messages and allowing an innovative approach. Hence, clothing in terms of style is constant in semiotics, while the language is changeable (McCracken, 1988). The understanding of how people interact and communicate through their style is important in order to comprehend the underlying complexities for lifestyles and lifestyle brands.

3.2. Meaning through Consumption

In order to a reach an understanding of how a certain lifestyle brand is used by the consumer, the underlying motives for consumption will here be looked upon from various aspects i.e. symbolic meaning, the Diderot unity and effect, and lifestyle expressions.

3.2.1. Goods as Meaning Communicators

The ideology of consumption holds that social meaning is attached to and communicated by commodities (Baudrillard, 1968 in Hirschman, 1988). Goods have risen from previously being a mean exclusively for economic exchange to being a cultural form of expression and reflection (c.f. Baudrillard, 1988 in Elliott, 1997; Douglas and Isherwood, 1978). Meaning is culturally constructed and goods have a more profound role to play in cultural interaction than to just satisfying basic human needs. Symbolic meaning as a social process visualises and stabilises cultural categories that constantly are evolving and consumption choices becomes a vital cultural source (Douglas and Isherwood, 1978). Symbolic brands fulfil internally generated needs e.g. self-fulfilment and group-belonging. Experimental brands fulfil desires

for sensory pleasure, variety and cognitive stimulation. Functional brands offer function and can hence solve externally generated consumption needs

Consumer behaviour cannot be understood without understanding the meaning people ascribe their possessions. This, as people either consciously or unconsciously view their possessions as a part of the self (Belk, 1988). The foundation of this view was laid by James (1890 in Belk, 1988) who reasoned that if our possessions can be defined as everything we can call ours, and then we are the sum of our possessions. Today, people create their identities by choosing among slightly differentiated goods (Horkheimer and Adorno 1996 in Holt, 2002) and this is what brands offer the consumer i.e. an opportunity to differentiation through brand consumption. Consumption is based on choices which implicates that the consumer will purchase what carries a desirable symbolic meaning (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998). A similar aspect is brought forward by Baudrillard (1981 in Elliott, 1997) who further mean that people consume in a way that portray their image. Thus, goods are commodity signs or as Taylor and Saarinen (1994 in Elliott, 1997) explain; the addict buys images, not things.

It has been claimed by 'post-modern scholars' (e.g. Baudrillard, 1988; Firat et al., 1995; Lyotard 1984 in Holt 1998) that one characteristics of an advanced and developed capitalist society is the overproduction of commodified signs and objectified symbolism. This proliferation of such symbolism leads to a chaos of consumer signs and thus objectified meaning cannot to the same extent be associated with social grouping or belonging. Numerous researchers claim of a overlapping in consumer preferences across social categories support this reasoning (Bourdieu, 1994; Peterson and Simkus, 1992 in Holt, 1998). Thus, they argue that in post-modern cultures it is to a larger extent difficult to gain status directly though consumption of object. Post-modern cultures is characterised by fragmentation and the breakdown of hierarchy which distinguishes legitimate 'elite' from 'mass' culture and many of the traits of the mass culture is now central elements in cultural phenomena such as art, music and theatre. Objectified cultural meaning thus become less effective in a society upheld by significantly differing categories and genres. With this reasoning, objectified cultural capital can function efficiently within stable cultural hierarchies (Holt, 1998). Deriving from this reasoning, Holt (1998) states that objects no longer serves as an accurate representations of consumer practices, rather they allow a wide vary of consumption styles not easily identified with the consumed good. For goods and brands where there is great overlap in the object consumed, it is necessary to consume in a rare, distinguishing manner.

3.2.2. Diderot Unity and Diderot Effect

According to McCracken (1988) the *Diderot unity* concerns that some goods fit a certain lifestyle and is inappropriate in other settings, no matter the user value. The notion Diderot

unity refers to the French 18th century philosopher whose harmony and accord was destroyed when his old dressing gown was replaced with a new one that did not fit into the rest of his wardrobe. The Diderot unity hence alludes to the idea that some consumer goods simply appear to accompany each other and go well together whereas other do not. The underlying premise for why certain goods or lifestyle unities fit together is their internal cultural consistency. Goods and brands work in complement since culture gives them the same symbolic properties. Hence, these theories about the Diderot unity can be the basis of understanding lifestyle and how to maintain their internal consistency (McCracken, 1988).

Further, McCracken (1988) introduces another concept based on the Diderot unity, *the Diderot effect* on consumer goods. The Diderot effect concerns consequences for the meaning of consumer goods. First, goods' meaning works to prevent the entry of an object with a different cultural significance, inconsistent from the whole context where the object tries to blend in. Secondly, the meaning operates to force the creation of an entirely new set of consumer goods. Thirdly, the individual may exploit a good's cultural meaning in order to fit certain symbolic purposes.

3.2.3. Lifestyle Expressions

Taste is the principle through which the individual makes choices according to socially determent dispositions that result in the different lifestyle of people. Through taste, the habitus is indirectly and unconsciously controlling what people believe is attractive and what individuals want to be associated with and not associated with (Gripsrud, 2002).

Visually, lifestyle can be described as the core of ones person, the product and the setting in which action and interaction take place (Solomon et al., 1999). Products are encapsulated in the lifestyle concepts as, like O'Shaughnessy (1987 in Helman and de Chernatony, 1999) suggest, consumption follows an overall consumption system or lifestyle that is the aspiration for the good life which demands certain products to contribute to the desired lifestyle. This arguing is in line with Solomon's (1994 in Helman and de Chernatony, 1999) proposition that lifestyle concerns the values and tastes that particularly are reflected in consumption patterns, such as fashion discourses and a persons style. This also involves the choices the person makes in how to spend time and money, but also that people buy certain items that are associated with a certain lifestyle, hence not only about the allocation of time and money (Solomon et al. 1999). Instead it should be seen as an embrace of the symbolic nuances linked to different groups. Thus lifestyle can serve as a determiner of which reference groups a person wishes to belong to (Dubois, 2000). These groups can be defined either as actual or imaginary, but have a significant relevance on individuals' behaviour and mental associations (Burnkrant and Cousineau, 1975 in Dubois, 2000).

A person's lifestyle can be explained as the patterns of living that show the person's inner and captures the individual's acting and interactions in the world (Armstrong and Kotler, 2005). Valette-Florence and Jolibert (1990 in Helman and de Chernatony, 1999) advocate that ones lifestyle depends on the person's A-I-O i.e. activities, interests and opinions. Examples of these determinants are for *activities*; hobbies, occupation and shopping habits, for *interests* fashion, media and recreation, and for *opinions* culture, education and self-confidence (Wells and Tigert, 1971 in Dubois, 2000). These aspects are claimed to be clearer determinants of ones lifestyle than ones social belonging and personality. This value-based approach attempts to understand consumers based on what they do and what they think in various social situations (Dubois, 2000).

3.3. The Neo-Tribe

To gain an understanding of social groupings and their influence on individual consumption patterns, the concept of neo-tribes will here be introduced.

3.3.1. Promoting Individualism

Cova (1999; in Cova and Cova, 2002) introduced what he calls a central leitmotif for marketing in a post-modern society – 'the link is more important than the thing'. This suggests that economic activity such as consumption should not focus on consumption as an independent activity but rather as one deeply rooted in a social context. Consumed goods or brands contain a *linking value* that creates a link between users in turn creating a belonging to a certain concept based setting. This setting is what Cova and Cova (2002) refer to as 'tribalism' or 'tribal marketing'.

The fragmentation of society is one of the most visible consequences of this individualism and quest for liberation from social bonds (c.f. Cova and Cova, 2002; Holt 1998). Society has also now entered an era in which every ordinary individual can and must take personal action and to show one's existence and one's differences. As society has 'liberated' people from their social bonds in earlier time (Cova and Cova, 2002), the result is now the strive for alternative social arrangement in new communities. Maffesoli (1996) argues that we can now speak of a development in the diverse direction, where individuals try to re-create social linkages and groupings. The post-modern society is characterised by multitude of experiences and multiple representations of emotion, and these characteristics are often said to encourage individualism. However, as humans are self-centred, Maffesoli (1996) argues that humans strive to recognise themselves by mentally participating in multiple concept bounded neo-

tribes. These neo-tribes are to a large degree expressed in different consumption patterns of goods and brands.

Bjarnadóttir (2004) argues that in modern societies, identity has become a personal project for individuals. Humans are discovering 'how they want to be' and how signs and symbols can be used to achieve their desired identity, hence individuals try out their possible selves; their ideas of what they want to become. Individuals are hence neither forced to stay in, nor 'stuck' in old patterns but may chose between different lifestyles, which are determined by habitus, tastes, values and activities that tie individuals together. Also the individual's lifestyle is self chosen to a degree and is important in the constitution of a person's identity.

Ziehe (1992) argues that individuals pursue an innovativeness when forming their lifestyles which has become a contemporary phenomenon. Today, virtually anyone can and are 'allowed' to use virtually everything. This de-dramatisation or co-existence of cultural movements and different lifestyles, once paradoxical to each other, are now well rooted in the cultural environment and their set of assumptions is different. This de-dramatisation of society is according to Ziehe (1992), a result from the fact that lifestyle innovation and lifestyle pluralism is increasingly taken for granted. Ziehe (1992) further argues that the de-dramatisation of cross-generational relationships also has occurred in the late modernity. For young people of today, as opposed to earlier generations, the boundaries between the parents and themselves are no longer of such importance.

Additionally, individualism refers to when individuals act more separately than collectively, and when their self and uniqueness are in the centre of society and culture. More individual choices have become possible. However, the concept of individualism has a collective aspect as well as individualism is not about avoiding interaction with other people. Autonomy is rather sought in actual interaction and relations to others. In order to express ones uniqueness, people have to understand and make use of the perspective of others. This concept is referred to as *relative individualism* (Bjarnadóttir, 2004).

3.3.2. Neo-tribal Belonging – Floating Boundaries

Between the time one leave one's family in the morning, and the time when one returns, all people enter various group-situations which have some degree of self-consciousness and stability. Sport-clubs, colleagues, friends, sporty-fans, peer-groups, or political activists are all examples of post-moderns neo-tribes (Maffesoli, 1996). Post-modern neo-tribes are hence unstable and affectual and not fixed with external parameters of the existing society. They exist through shared emotions, passions and are concept based (Cova and Cova, 2002). The notions 'neo-tribe' is in terms of consumption is not new, but in earlier times, it was referring to youth sub-cultures such as 'Mods', 'Skinhead' or 'Punk'. The difference nowadays is that

individuals can belong to more than one neo-tribe, whereas with sub-cultures it would have been impossible (Shankar and Elliot 1999 in Cova and Cova, 2002).

In our times Cova and Cova (2002) argue that neo-tribes developed their own complex meanings and symbols, and form a more or less stable group. Each individual simultaneously belong to several neo-tribes that even contradicts one another: In each neo-tribe, the individual might play a different role and behave differently. Thus they argue that it can be difficult to classify and predict such an individual, more important to belong to a certain class or a segment. As compared to Bourdieu (1994) and Holt (1998) who claims that the individual seeks for status and confirmation in their social field or class, Cova and Cova (2002) argue that individuals seek confirmation and status in the dynamic and flexible position within the post-modern neo-tribe, through consumption.

In terms of segmentation, Cova and Cova (2002) argue that neo-tribal grouping cannot be as easily identified as a sub-culture or psychographic segmentation. Rather, neo-tribes concentrate on the bonding element or linking value of a good or a brand, focusing a lot on the normative of the group or a particular group member's influence on one another. Also, since post-modern neo-tribalism expresses a need to be involved in several groupings, a marketer cannot set personality traits or shared values. It rather focuses on the shared experience or feeling.

Neo-tribe members could be described as the 'ins' who share the experience, which create the linking between the members and the 'outs' refers to people not sharing these experiences (Cova and Cova, 2002; Maffesoli, 1996). The individual participates in several different neo-tribes simultaneously (*see figure 3:1*) and there is a constant interplay between these different neo-tribes.
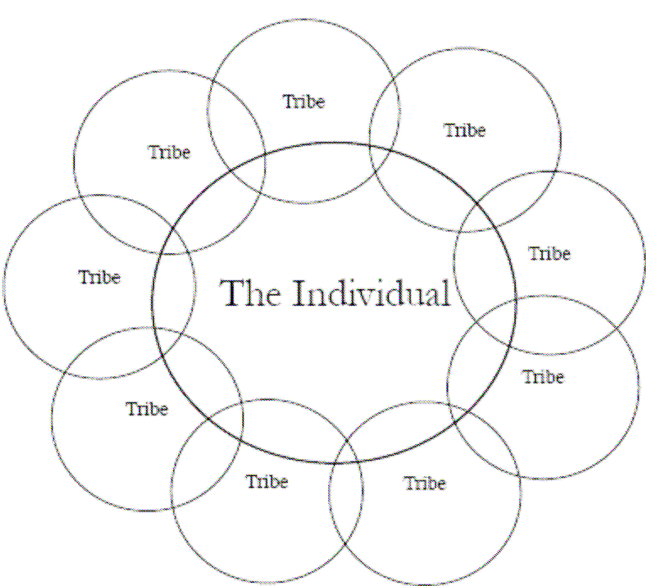

Figue 3:1
Source: Authors own illustration

The key concern to a neo-tribal marketing approach is to know which neo-tribe to attract and target. Cova and Cova (2002) have argued that marketers should put less emphasis on the product or service for a certain consumer or a segment of consumers. A company should rather focus on what holds people together as a group of enthusiasts, everything that strengthen the 'we-ness', (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). The greater the contribution of a product or service to strengthen the neo-tribal bond, the greater is the linking value. Cova and Cova (2002) mention the example of Citroën enthusiasts. They are over 120 000 official members, so what are the common characteristics of these people? People of all ages, 18-75, students, white- and blue-collar workers, retires, men and women. Cova and Cova (2002) thus mean that an analysis of personal characterises would be meaningless. Rather, what they have in common is the shared experience of the pleasure of driving the car, discussing the car and hook up in different gatherings. Maffesoli (1996) states that some neo-tribes can just be imaginary or a fantasy.

When taking part of the reasoning of the Citroën enthusiasts and neo-tribes, the resemblances to brand communities are obvious. However, the neo-tribes should not be considered as these kinds of communities are defined as specialised, non-geographically bounded communities based on structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand. Brand communities are explicitly commercial, while neo-tribes are not. As neo-tribes are organised around a commercial brand as the Citroën enthusiast, they compose many of the similarities with the brand community (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). However, as opposed to brand communities, neo-tribes are more conceptual and unconscious; hence these groupings are not explicit and structured in the same way.

4. Empirical Analysis

The empirical analysis will take its point-of-departure in the three main theories presented in the theoretical framework. Thereafter a complementing analysis of the traditional segmentation variables will be provided in order to provide a holistic perspective on the matter.

In order for the reader to better comprehend the empirical analysis that follow, the reader will be reminded of the research question:
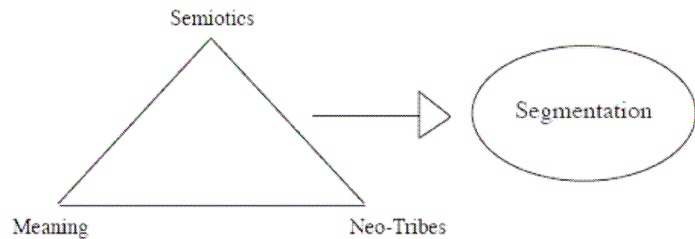
By looking at how people use lifestyle brands we aim to answer the following question: Which implications does lifestyle brand usage have for segmentation theory?

4.1. Presenting the Respondents

4.1.1. Verbally and Visually Expressed Fashion Discourse

The respondents' style covered a wide spectrum of fashion discourses. When asked to express their style, a number of themes became apparent…
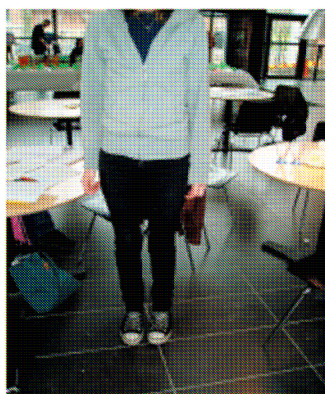
Henrik

Rock

Matilda

Caroline

Alternative

Linn
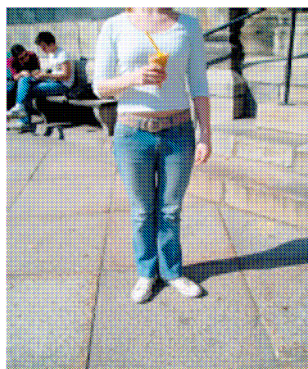
Karin

Relaxed

Tobias

Björn

Casual

Johan

Even if most respondents emphasised one style, most of them added that they mixed and matched various styles in order to create a unique style. The following respondents however truly emphasised the mix.

Mixed Style

Lina

Martin

Emma

Two of the younger respondents could not express or pin point their own style but contrasted it to others. Expressions like *"different from others but not strange"* - Alexandra and *different – I'm noticed among others"* – Dimitri characterised this pair.

Dimitri

Different from mainstream

Alexandra

Other discourse was non-definable and the respondents seemed to have no interest in fashion. Hence, they laughed at the question and claimed to have a non-existing style or a lacking style.

Karl

Non-existing

Thomas

The individualism, the mix and match approach contributed to enabled the respondents to create and express a more unique style.

Bohemian — Malin

Woolly — Katarina

Brand Dupe — Jenny

English well-dressed

versus

Decadent heroin-chic

Samuel

Nils

Punk

versus

Melbourne-style

Therese & Maria

Melvin

Mevlin described the Melbourne-style as more conscious and European compared to Sydney style.

The permeating opinion among the respondents was that they thought their Converse contributed to their verbally expressed fashion discourse.

4.1.2. Photography Analysis

When viewing the photographs like messages in accordance with Peirce's reasoning (1994 in Solomon et al., 1999), the *object* in focus is the respondents and how they look. The *sign* thus becomes the intended meaning of the object i.e. to express that fashion discourse expressed verbally. The way we as researchers interpret the photographs and form meaning form these are the *interpretant*. Further, in line with Saussure's (1983 in Chandler, 2006) arguing, the respondents of this study can be viewed as signs consisting of both a *signifier* i.e. the pure look they have and a *signified concept* i.e. the meaning the researcher ascribe to the photographs in order to make the material understandable. The interpretations of the photographs made are like Chandler (2006) explains determined by the researchers' interpretations of sign systems which form their reality.

When looking at the photographs, the respondents' postures reflect that they are posing on front of a camera. Still, they all look pretty relaxed in their jeans and Converse shoes. None are formally dressed; instead all look rather casual and street smart from the researcher perspective, which might be the *social code* that is wished to be communicated. If this is the case, the *social code* expressed through Converse usage is linking the respondents together, even though they verbally express other codes.

When comparing the respondents verbally expressed fashion discourse with the signified concept interpreted by the researchers it becomes apparent how the respondents interpret their signifier is different from how the researchers interpret the same. Hence, the signified concept in this case differs between different people, but as derived from semiotics, how the photos are interpreted is based on the interpreter's background (c.f. Chandler, 2006). From the researchers' point of view, the photographs give indications that there is a lacking coherence between the respondents verbally expressed and their visually expressed fashion discourse. This can be based on the different symbolic meanings and identities the respondents tries to establish, preserve and convey (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998), which is difficult to detect for the external observer.

For instance, let us compare Brand dupe-Jenny with Bohemian-Malin. Both respondents have a knee length trench coat, jeans and Converse shoes. Still, they verbally express different styles. When adding Woolly-Katarina, one can see that her jacket have similarities with the trench coat in terms of details i.e. buttons and visible pockets. Also Katarina wear jeans but hers are folded, just as Rock-Matilda. Matilda's leather jacket might symbolise her

'rockyness' but her sweater basically look the same as the sweaters Indiepop-Helena and Relaxed-Karin uses. They further use their blue jeans in a similar fashion as Malin and Mixed-style-Emma. Emma's jacket has similar features with Malin's, Jenny's and Katarina's. Further, Punk-Therese and Punk-Maria both wear jeans and a similar trench-coat look as the other respondents mentioned. In addition to this, only one of these respondents has black Converse and the rest white or beige shoes, further erasing visible differences.

| Jenny | Malin | Katarina | Karin |

| Emma | Therese & Maria | Matilda | Helena |

Basically, even if these respondents verbally labelled their fashion in diverse manners, when looking at the photos, no major differences strikes the observer. Hence, it is not possible for us as researchers to see the underlying concept

The same reasoning can be ascribed to the male respondents. Mixed style-Martin and English well dressed-Samuel virtually look the same i.e. shirt, vest and jeans. Additionally, their body language share profound similarities. Still, their verbally expressed fashion discourse differs.

Samuel   Martin

Both Casual-Johan and Casual-Björn basically look the same with their iPods and shoulder-bag bag carried across the torso. Further, their shoes are in one colour as opposed to the other respondents in this group. Different from mainstream-Dimitri uses the same kind of bag and has headphones around his neck. His pink printed t-shirt stands out and when not taking his haircut into account, his look does not differ very much from the look Johan and Björn are presenting. Dimitri's jeans, t-shirt and white and black Converse shoes resemble Decadent Heroin Chic-Nils.

Johan   Björn   Dimitri   Nils

And from a larger perspective, one can question if these four respondents visible fashion discourse indeed differ compared to the looks of Non-existing style-Thomas and Rock-Henrik.

Thomas   Henrik

The respondents on the pictures presented here all wear jeans and Converse. This might explain why the pictures and their styles resemble each other so much. However, when looking at the respondents not wearing jeans another discourse is created.

Karl Linn Lina Alexandra

Also the non-jeans users Relaxed-Tobias and Melbourne-Melvin look more or less the same with their beige pants and t-shirts with print.

Melvin Tobias

As we noticed people with a fashion styles standing out and being more extreme, were more humble to verbalise their style, (c.f. Non-existing style-Karl and Different from mainstream-Dimitri) whereas people who we interpreted to be more 'mainstream looking' often had more thought through and an explicitly verbalised style (c.f. Bohemian-Malin, Brand Dupe-Jenny, Decadent Herion Chic-Nils).

From a semiotic point of view, we can identify that the meaning the respondents ascribe to their fashion discourse is created through interplay of codes. Hence, the respondents can see their punk, alternative, casual etcetera style as they live in their reality. But as the researchers as interpreters exists in another reality, the differences in fashion style is not as obvious or detectable (c.f. Chandler, 2006). However, this can be linked to McCracken's (1988) idea that communication through clothing is constrained to existing codes in society i.e. that the only way to perplex the viewer is to combine clothes in original or individual manner. Hence, for this non-linguistic communication the interpretive codes are already set and it is just for the individual to stick within the predicted frames. This can be why the respondents look the same but express diverse styles. McCracken (1988) further argue that verbal expressions are more innovative and open to change than visual expressions through semiotics that are more fixed. Thus, verbally expressing difference and still looking the same is no oddity but rather

an underlying premise of communication. In terms of clothing as communication, McCracken stated that this kind of communication has shortcomings especially since the wearer does not have the same freedom in terms of expression, which has to be understood by the interpreter. We believe the empirical material in this study is a good example of when the respondents look the same but verbally expresses discourses from A to Z.

4.2. Meaning and Consumption

4.2.1. Usage Context

The vast majority of the respondents claimed that they always use their Converse, but after some reflection it came across that they referred mainly to leisure and casual settings. However, some respondents even highlighted that they use their Converse at certain occasions…

"I always use my Converse, even at weddings"
Non-existing style-Karl

"I use my Converse when I walk around in the city"
Bohemian-Malin

"I always use them, even when wearing a suit and when I go out"
Melbourne-Melvin

"I use them when it's bad weather – autumn and spring"
Punk-Maria

"I only use my Converse when the weather is nice and warm"
Mixed style-Emma

... whereas other respondents emphasised occasions when they do not use their Converse. Here, situations was mainly highlighted such as work, dinner parties, going-out activities such as clubbing and pubbing, but also season related consideration was acknowledged.

"I only use them at my spare time, not at work"
Brand Dupe-Jenny

"I use them everyday, but not when I go out"
Bohemian-Malin

"I always use my Converse, but not at more formal occasion"
Punk-Therese

"I do not use them when I'm going to the beach"
Alternative-Caroline

Further, many respondents had more than one pair and these were used parallel

"I have five pair that I use here in Sweden"
Melbourne-Melvin

"I have two pair and I use them depending on my mood"
Bohemian-Malin

"I have one pair for the winter and two for the summer"
Woolly-Katarina

4.2.2. Converse's Contribution to the Expressed Style

A variety of aspects were brought forward about how the respondents' Converse contributes to their described style…

"They are simple sneakers; they're 'in' and 'street-smart'"
Casual-Björn

"My Converse are new and I find them really comfortable"
Bohemian-Malin

"They look very good and they are sneakers"
Relaxed-Karin

... but also how the Converse are easy to combine with other items.

"It is so easy to mix Converse with all kind of clothes"
Melbourne-Melvin

Another theme brought forward was the personal relationship they have with their Converse and that the shoes add something personal to the person.

"I've always liked them"
Non-existing style-Karl

"I've had Converse all my life"
Casual-Thomas

"They give a lot of personality"
Rock-Henrik

"They're cool, and have different patterns"
Different-from-Mainstream-Alexandra

4.2.3. Meaning Analysis

Social meanings are attached and linked to commodities (Baudrillard, 1968 in Hirschman, 1988) and goods are used to communicate social identities (Solomon et al., 1999). This study suggests that Converse can be seen as a brand that expresses something about the owner to the surrounding public (c.f. Douglas and Isherwood, 1978). The respondents generally agreed that their Converse shoes contributed to their verbally expressed style, which differed tremendously. Derived from this, it can be argued that the respondents ascribe different meaning to their Converse shoes, but that the possessions should be viewed as a part of the self (Belk, 1988). This should further indicate that Converse consumption strengthen different images (c.f. Baudrillard (1981 in Elliott, 1997). This is partly in line with what Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998) argue for; i.e. that socialisation teaches people to agree on shared meanings but that socialisation also teaches how to make individual interpretations of different stimuli. No matter the different discourses, the respondents still corresponded to the idea of the Diderot unity (McCracken, 1988) as they felt that their lifestyle and clothes conformed to their shoes.

An interesting aspect stood out when the respondents verbalised other Converse users' style. They were more prone to categorise them as rock, punk, alternative or mainstream than they were when describing themselves. This was the trend unless they said that they described them to have 'same style as me'. Hence, the social meaning they ascribe to their own usage situation can be seen as separated from the more anonymous user. However, the existence of these differences can indicate that the respondents wish to differentiate from others

(Bjarnadóttir, 2004) by breaking meaning barriers to form a unique identity, especially in relation to others i.e. what Bjarnadóttir (2004) refers to as relative individualism.

This discussion indicates the overproduction of commodified meanings (c.f. Bourdieu, 1994) as there does not seem to be any consistency in the consumer signs as different meanings are ascribed to the same good. Due to this, different meanings could be ascribed to the same good.

Additionally in accordance with Ziehe's (1992) reasoning about the de-dramatisation or co-existence of cultural movements and different lifestyles, the respondents of this study clearly indicates that the same brand is employed by people pursuing different lifestyles. The wide usage is further in line with lifestyle innovation and lifestyle pluralism proposed by Ziehe (1992). Further, Ziehe (1992) discuss that the cross-generational boundaries are dissolved. Our respondent, using the Converse shoe, were in an age span covering more than thirty years. Additionally, two of the respondents in the upper age span confirmed that their children used the Converse shoes. The fact that different people from different ages use Converse can be traced to Ziehe's (1992) argument about the current de-dramatisation of cross-generational relationships.

There seems to be consensus concerning the functional side of the brand i.e. being comfortable sneakers whereas the symbolic side of the brand i.e. how the shoes contribute to the feeling of individualism – per se a shared perception – but the meanings differ widely e.g. rock, pop, brand dupe, different from mainstream. The functional side of the brand was further emphasised in usage situations. Most of the respondents claimed that they 'always' used their Converse and among the student group this was even more apparent. This, whereas the employed expressed that they did not use them at work. Further, not many respondents would say that they would use the shoes in 'fancy situations' with a few exceptions. Hence, from this it can be derived that Converse shoes are used in informal contexts where the need to be representative is not as explicit. This further is in line with the expressed usage in leisure and casual settings where the need for shoes that express such a feeling might be more relevant. This is further in line with the Diderot-unity (McCracken, 1988) of consumption when goods mutually accompanied each other in order to create a feeling and ambiance in different settings. Furthermore the Diderot effect was confirmed in this study since a majority of the respondents believe that the Converse shoe helped them to express their cultural discourse whichever that was.

The meaning Converse convey further vary as some respondents through personalisation express something different e.g. what Alternative-Linn visually express with her personalised shoes are different from Relaxed-Karin whose bright neat shoes communicate another meaning. These different social meanings can be founded on different cultural sources and are used to visualise and stabilise social standing (Douglas and Isherwood, 1978).

In line with the Chandler (2006) statement that people express themselves through consumption, our respondents truly do this in their fashion discourse. All respondent claimed to express different styles and most figured that the shoes contributed to their style, even if it was in different ways. Nevertheless, a majority of the respondents had noticed that people with other styles than their own also use Converse shoes. Therefore it is questionable whether shared social meanings do exist (c.f. Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998).

The meaning the respondents ascribe to their Converse usage can further be viewed from a lifestyle perspective i.e. the Converse shoes contributes to the desired lifestyle (O'Shaughnessy, 1987 in Helman and de Chernatony, 1999). This further support previously reasoning that the respondents look pretty relaxed which can indicate a relaxed lifestyle as the shoes in most cases are used in an everyday-context. As it has been argued that lifestyle is founded on the person's A-I-O (Valette-Florence and Jolibert, 1990 in Helman and de Chernatony, 1999), we would also argue that the respondents' hobbies from our perspective were rather casual as most expressed music, sports or meeting-friends activities

4.3. Other Converse Users

4.3.1. Random People

When asking the respondents how they would describe other Converse users' fashion style it became apparent that some of them had noticed that Converse are used by people with other fashion discourses than their own.

"I would say that there are two groupings. One is like me and the other is more alternative"
Relaxed-Karin

"Not really like my style, Converse has become really mainstream"
Non-Existing style-Thomas

"Converse are used by all groups nowadays"
Decadent Heroin Chic-Nils

"They are pretensions fashion victims"
Melbourne-Melvin

Another part of the respondent group had not identified that people with a different style than them use Converse shoes (c.f. Alternative-Caroline, Woolly-Katarina, Punk-Therese and Punk-Maria).

One response to who is using Converse was not in line with any of the styles the respondents verbally expressed.

"I would say that hip-hoppers use them"
Non-Existing style-Karl

4.3.2. Friends and Acquaintances

The younger respondents' friends and acquaintances are also to a degree Converse users. This was not the case for the older respondents.

"No, but my children do"
Casual-Björn

"No, that would be my family in that case"
Non-Existing style-Thomas

Three permeating themes came across when the respondents were asked to describe their friends fashion style. Similarities were brought forward…

"Pretty much the same as mine"
Melbourne-Melvin

"They have the same style as me"
Decadent Heroin Chic-Nils

... and differences...

"Not like me anyhow"
Brand Dupe-Jenny

... and the respondents were quick to label their friends into music and fashion categories.

"A little alternative, a little punk"

Different from Mainstream-Alexandra

"A bit rock, conscious mainstream"
Mixed Style-Martin

"A little more alternative than me"
Relaxed-Karin

"My friends' style is either rock or preppy"
Punk-Maria

"Well, I would say bohemian and rock"
Woolly-Katarina

5.3.3. Analysis from a Neo-Tribal Perspective

Maffesoli (1996) argues that humans strive to recognise themselves by mentally participate in concept bounded neo-tribes and that these neo-tribes to a large degree are expressed in consumption patterns. Further, the individuals seek confirmation and status through consumption (Cova and Cova, 2002).

This can explain why some of the respondents labelled themselves according to 'music styles' i.e. they have a wish to be associated with a certain stereotype in order to reach a desired lifestyle. Cova and Cova (2002) argue that the association derived from brands, makes it possible for individuals to simultaneously belong to several more or less stable neo-tribes. Such a statement is in line with the diverse fashion discourses expressed by the respondents. Hence, based on their fashion style, they can be categorised into different neo-tribes i.e. 'punk', 'woolly', 'different from mainstream' and 'rock'. Further, this can be a sign of individualism, i.e. the individuals need to differentiate themselves in order to show their existence (Cova and Cova, 2002) and create the desired identity (c.f. Bjarnadóttir, 2004). By believing that their style is uniquely created, they are liberated from category thinking and social bonds; hence free to experiment with their style (c.f. Cova and Cova, 2002; Bjarnadóttir (2004).

From a segmentation point of view, Cova and Cova (2002) continue by stating that what these so called neo-tribes have in common is the shared experience, pleasure and self-realisation of the brand. In order to establish whether this was the case, the respondents were asked to describe their style. A wide spectrum of styles was found such as relaxed, alternative, casual, indiepop, rock, mixed style, English well-dressed and so called non-existing. Many of the discourses stood also in stark contrast to each other e.g. the English well-dressed and the punk style, and the brand duped and the bohemian.

Comparing the above with the tribalisation theory that Cova and Cova (2002) and Maffesoli (1996) have developed, this study found several different styles and thus experiences and feelings that individuals convey when using their Converse shoes. Thus we cannot derive the brand to only one single conceptual neo-tribe, but rather to many. However, since one of the conditions of the post-modern neo-tribes is that humans have a need to mentally participate in different neo-tribes (Maffesoli, 1996) and sometimes even contradicting neo-tribes simultaneously (Cova and Cova, 2002), the empirical findings of this study suggest that people from different neo-tribes e.g. punk and English well-dressed, are using Converse simultaneously.

When the respondents were asked how they felt about other people using the Converse brand, a majority of the respondents believed that other people had another style and discourse than themselves. However, that did not seem to bother the respondents. From a neo-tribal perspective, Cova and Cova (2002) heavily emphasise the linking value of a brand and how this creates a feeling of 'we-ness' and social bond and influence (c.f. Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). This was not identified in the study and rather the opposite was indicated, i.e. that the linking value between the Converse users are weak. Hence, this suggests that no such thing as a 'Converse neo-tribe' in itself exist.

Since the respondents did not seem to be bothered with the fact that people with other styles used the Converse shoes could be in line with Holt's (1998) statement about the loss of objects cultural meaning in a world overloaded with cultural genres and categories. This is possible due to the allowance of wide vary of consumption styles not easily identified with the consumed good. This further support the variety of verbally expressed styles among the respondents and that these styles are difficult to identify by only looking at the respondents.

Concerning the respondents' friends and acquaintances and their brand usage, we found that most of the interviewees' friends also were using the brand. Burnkrant and Cousineau (1975 in Dubois, 2000) further suggest that individuals' lifestyle is determined by their actual or imaginary reference groups. For instance, the impression Decadent heroin chic-Nils gave during the interview was hardly that he was an actual drug addict, smacked up on narcotics. Rather, he expressed his style and belonging with an imaginary metaphor with an ironic twist. This also supports Maffesoli's reasoning that neo-tribes can be imaginary of based on fantasies.

Actual or imaginary reference groups further support the idea of post-modern neo-tribal belonging (c.f. Maffesoli, 1996; Cova and Cova, 2002). However, in combination with the above reasoning about the absence of liking value between Converse users and hence the no 'Converse neo-tribe' exist, this would rather implicate that the respondents share neo-tribe belonging with their friends and acquaintances based on other grounds.

4.4. Traditional Segmentation Variables

So far, the empirical material have been presented and analysed from the bases derived form the theoretical toolbox. However, as this thesis is looking into which implication the usage of lifestyle brands have for segmentation theory, a complementing analysis based on traditional segmentation variables will here be presented.

Beane and Ennis (1987) stated that the very reason for market segmentation is that segments do exist and that customers are not entirely homogenous. Even if this is the case, they still share similar traits on various variables and characteristics (Gunnarsson, 1999). These similarities are the foundation for segmentation. The research conducted show that Converse users differ on demographic and psychographic aspects such as age, sex, occupation and hobbies. However, patterns have been detected among the respondents e.g. music and aesthetical interests, sport practice and the fact that the majority are some sort of student. Further, the respondents fashion discourse was highly individualised and no real patterns could be identified. This is in stark contrast to Söderlund (1998) and McGoldrick (2002) argumentation that a segment consists of clusters of people sharing similar traits. The only similarity our study identified is the fact that the respondents de facto use the Converse brand.

4.4.1. Demographics

The age span of the sample for this study ranged from 12 to 43 years old (*see diagram 4:1*). However, the majority of the respondents were found in the 20-24 age group and the neighbouring groups.

Converse Users
Diagram 4:1
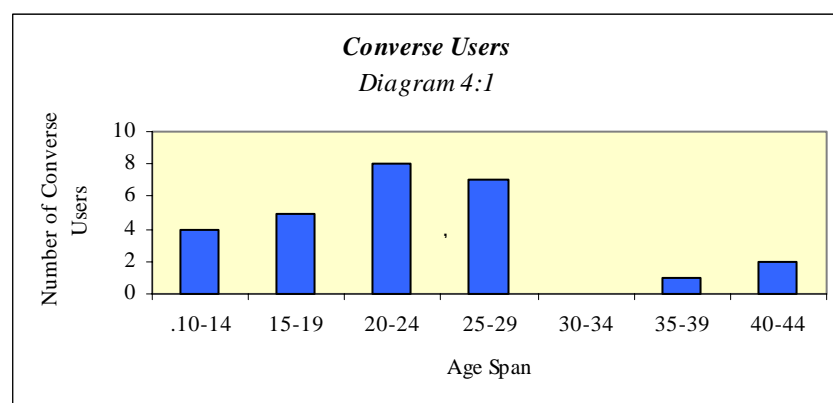
As the majority of the respondents was found in the 'young adult' age group, a large portion of the respondents was still in school, either elementary or upper secondary school, or at the university. The working respondents were found in areas such as banking, financial counselling, real estate, hair-dressing and education.

The sex ratio was evenly represented as 56 percent women and 44 percent men participated in the study. Gendered colour preferences could be detected in the study as 78% of the respondents wearing white or beige shoes were women, whereas 67% respondents wearing black shoes were men. From the respondents with patterned and coloured Converse, two females had pink and one female had red shoes and one male had green camouflage patterned shoes. Shoelaces in different colours were also used by four respondents and one respondent had drawn on the tip of the shoe.

As being a unisex product, both *men and women* use the shoes and are represented in the sample. However, as the study indicated, men had a higher propensity to use black shoes and the women were more likely used white or beige shoes.

The respondents' *age* covered an extensive spectrum ranging from 12-43 years old. Still, the majority was to be found between 20-29, and seen as a normal distribution curve, the peak can be found in this age span. McGoldrick (2002) and Solomon et al. (1999) have argued that age is one of the central variables in demographic segmentation and can provide imperative behavioural consumption patterns. They also suggest that such segmentation is relatively easy to make. Since this study has found a pattern in the age distribution of the respondents, one might therefore argue that a demographic segmentation could be conducted on the Converse market in terms of age.

According to McGoldrick (2002) *occupation* is also a variable used in the demographic segmentation since it can provide information about a person's income. A large majority of the respondent were students, either at the university or in elementary school/upper-secondary school. This could be explained with the fact that the study was conducted daytime when common workers are at work. However, other respondents did not distinguish between usage situations and used the shoes at all times.

4.4.2. Psychographic variables

Four themes permeated the respondents' hobbies. The one single interest that stood out was music both that they enjoyed listening to music, and that many practiced themselves and were in a band. Other esthetical activities were also brought forward such as painting, writing, photography and interior decorating. Different sports activities were also mentioned e.g. athletics, horse back riding, biking around, tennis, snooker and working out. The last theme concerned social activities such as hanging out with friends, going for a coffee with friends, partying and drinking with friends and meeting friends.

Thompson and Haytko (1997) have claimed that fashion discourse reflect the person's lifestyle and values that is wished to be express to the external environment. Values and lifestyle as segmentation bases are fundaments of the psychographic segmentation. Hence, how the respondents express their style should give indications of how they wishes to be perceived and proved information about ones psychographic state. In the empirical material it was found a very wide spectrum of styles and fashion discoursed among the respondents. Even styles that normally would contradict each other, such as 'decadent heroin chic' and English well dressed, was found. The material suggests that all respondents wish to express diverse lifestyles such as rock, punk, bohemian, casual and brand dupe. The respondents also emphasised that they find Converse shoes to be contributing to the style they wish to convey, through function, personalisation and easy to combine. However, the lifestyle brand (Holt, 2003) still has a strong identity and a characteristic look and when used by people who wish to express diverse messages. As the brand meaning differs widely among the respondents, thus consumption patterns in terms of 'style' cannot be confirmed.

Some of the respondents had personalised their Converse so that they stood out from the rest. This can be seen as a way for the individuals to express their individuality, lifestyle and attitudes. By exchanging the shoe laces accompanied with the shoes, something unique can be expressed. From a symbolic point of view this can be a sign of the individuals' wish to express their social identities (Solomon et al., 1999) and to express them through consumption (Belk et al., 1982).

Since there is a strong link between *hobbies* and lifestyle (Valette-Florence and Jolibert (1990 in Helman and de Chernatony, 1999), hobbies could be seen as a reflection of a person's psychographic state. The very reason to asking the respondents about their hobbies was to establish if there is a common pattern between Converse usage and certain psychographic variables. From a segmentation point of view, Converse users can be found in individuals who embrace their esthetical side e.g. music, writing, photography and sports which can be in line with the brand heritage.

According to Solomon et al. (1999) the *VALS-2 typology* is taking into account both the demographic and psychographic variables of an individual which are then analysed. The overall demographic results from this study suggest that neither demographic nor psychographic segmentation variables give clear indications of the users of this lifestyle brand.

4.4.3. Behavioural Segmentation

From the sample no real trends can be seen in how Converse are used, except that the respondents were really fond of their shoes as they kept buying them. However, a few

exceptions stand out as these persons have used a large number of Converse shoes (*see diagram 4:2*).

How many Converse have you owned?
Diagram 4:2
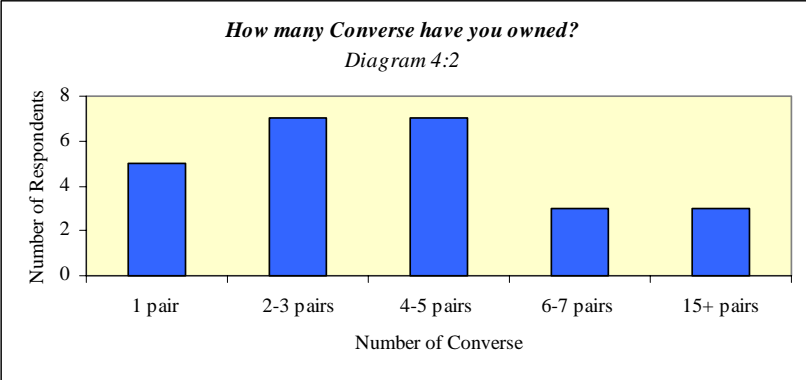
Derived from this diagram, its visible that only a fraction of the respondents are 'brand virgins' and the majority are repeat purchasers to different extent. Some more heavier addicts than others.

A large majority of the respondents had owned several pair of Converse, indicating that they are repeat purchasers. Further, many of them had a number of Converse shoes so they can alternate. Hence, the repurchase rate can be seen to be high among the Converse users. Further, when looking at the usage context, most respondents wished to use their shoes only in everyday situation characterised by casualness and leisure. Only a fraction could imagine using their Converse in socially constructed 'fancy situations' such as weddings.

5. Concluding Discussion

In this section, the findings derived from the analysis will be condensed into a discussion structured around the research question:

By looking at how people use lifestyle brands we aim to answer the following question:
- Which implications does lifestyle brand usage have for segmentation theory?

5.1 Complexities of Lifestyle Brand Segmentation

The analysis made based the traditional segmentation variables did not really provide us with guidance in terms of segmentation. The different variables suggested that the lifestyle brand Converse is used by both men and women within an age-span reaching over 30 years and where the occupations stretch from banking and financial services, to grammar school students. Hence, no real 'Converse user' in terms of demographics can be detected even if indications are provided. Neither the more intangible psychographic segmentation variables offer any guidance. Here the wide spectra of styles, contradicting styles and the expression of diverse lifestyles are in focus to express social identities. This lack of consistency is further not in line with what segmentation theory in this case can handle. A trace of consistency was however offered by the behavioural segmentation analysis, which provided insight into the casual and leisure context preferred and associated with Converse usage.

What is striking is that Converse, a shoe with a strong identity and a highly characteristic look can be used by so many people claiming to have so diverse styles without any of the groupings rejecting the brand. Our interpretation from this analysis is that created brand meaning is highly subjective and that this to a vast degree exists in the mind of the consumer. Whatever style that might be this is indicating that the respondents interpret social codes and meanings in their own individual manner. Since brand meanings are highly subjective, these can coexist without any hostility between different users. This is possible as they all ascribe different meanings and reasons for using the brand which contradicts the segmentation idea of treating everybody in the segment alike. Hence, it can be difficult to segment the market under these conditions without a fixed brand meaning.

Furthermore, the conclusions derived from the photo analysis suggest that even if the respondents verbally claimed to have really diverse personal style, the external observer could not visually identify these differences to the same extent. This implicates that their verbalised fashion discourses are located in their minds, hence not really visible for the observer, not

even when given the clue to the puzzle. However, in terms of semiotics, this can partly be explained because language is much more specific and innovative than clothing as a communication mean. Yet, the differences were in such a wide spectra of verbally different styles that it would be reasonable to argue that people using Converse wished to express different discourses.

Linking these conclusions with the neo-tribal aspect of the consumer, this study cannot claim to have identified a certain neo-tribe, which could be considered as a Converse neo-tribe as such. Due to the different discourses the respondents verbally expressed, we cannot identify shared 'experiences' or 'emotions' of the Converse brand among the respondents. Therefore the linking value of the brand for these persons is relatively weak. These are the very conditions for a neo-tribe's existence and thus the lack of these indicated the lack of a Converse neo-tribe.

Rather we suggest that this study has identified different neo-tribe using the same brand, the Converse (*see figure 5:1 modified from figure 3:1*). Since neo-tribes are concept bounded, one might argue that people mentally participate in different neo-tribes. Examples of these different concepts can be the different styles the respondents wish to convey in the fashion discourse, such as casual, English well-dress and decadent heroin chic. Participation in neo-tribes is sometime imaginary, mental constructions based on fantasies; hence these verbally different styles can thus be examples of neo-tribes the respondents wish to be identified with.
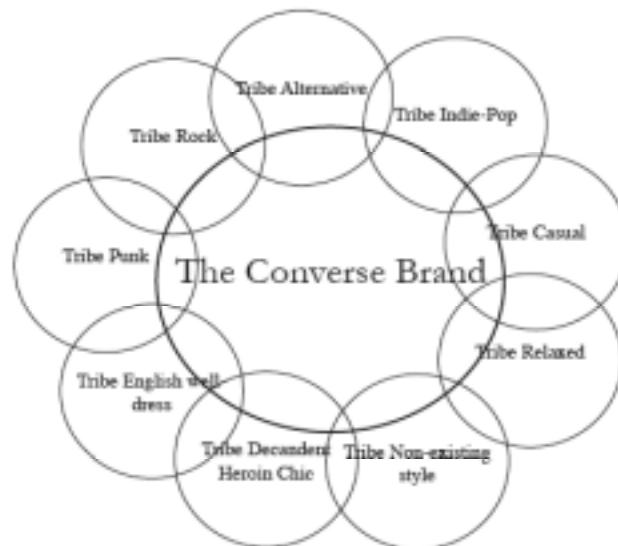

Figure 5:1
Source: Authors own illustration

The Converse users belong to a number of neo-tribes that independently from each other employ the brand in diverse ways, ascribing different lifestyle meaning to the brand. These brand meanings are highly linked to their verbally expressed style as Converse shoes are seen to contribute to the verbally diverse styles. As different meanings are ascribed and as the brand is combined in individual manners, no hostility seemed to exist between different neo-

tribes. Also, the neo-tribal theory suggests that a person is and can belong so several different neo-tribes simultaneously and sometimes even neo-tribes that could be considered mutually excluding. This implicates that neo-tribal belonging does not determine whether one can be a Converse user or not. As both lifestyle identity and neo-tribal belonging are highly intangible, a complexity occurs when segmenting markets for lifestyle brands. But what makes a person belong to a neo-tribe, and what make another person belong to another neo-tribe?

The findings discussed so far in this study have emphasised that brand meaning is highly subjective and individual. The authors of this study would not argue that just because a person uses a certain lifestyle brand in a certain manner, makes that person belong to a certain neo-tribe. Additionally, for an external observer, it is impossible to fully understand the reasons and underlying motives for why and what an individual wants to visually express with such a discourse. The findings of this study suggest that there is a complexity when only looking at people's visually expressed style as this offer no guidance for what they mentally wish to express. Brands are perceived and interpreted by people in an individual mode in order to enable mental differentiation and individuality. This uniqueness however is created in the mind of the consumer and is difficult to detect visually.

Let us consider Casual-Björn who is 41 years old and Casual-Johan who is 23, where the age difference is quite obvious. Björn has a white-collar job within banking whereas Johan works as a hairdresser not requiring any higher education. At his spear time Björn enjoys music and spending time with his family whereas Johan emphasises hanging out with friends. Björn does not use his Converse at work whereas Johan use his everyday. From a segmentation perspective, these respondents profiles' are highly diverse and when segmented, they would probably been put into different segments. What Björn and Johan have in common is the way they express their fashion discourse verbally and visually. They can be said to describe a similar meaning through their consumption of Converse shoes – to be casual. Since they wish to express this it is also reasonable to say that they mentally participate in the same so called 'casual neo-tribe'. However, from a consumption point of view what they express through their consumption of Converse shoes have strong similarities. Hence it would be more fruitful to cluster these respondents into the same neo-tribe than to segment these people into different categories regarding their lifestyle.

Non existing style-Karl who is 20 years old and Rock-Henrik who is 22 years old, are both students in the same city. Both Karl and Henrik are into music and both are band members. Both of them use their Converse everyday, all year around and also at more formal occasions. Their profiles from a segmentation point of view are obviously very similar, however, the brand meaning they have ascribed to their Converse differ, both verbally and visually. When segmenting the market these two respondents would end up in the same category, being targeted with the same marketing activities. However, through their consumption of Converse they wish to express different meanings. Karl wishes to express his lack of interest in fashion whereas Henrik wishes to emphasis his rock fashion expression. They thus have different

mental underlying motives for their consumption of the Converse brand. Hence in terms of their expressions through consumption, there is no sign that they mentally wish to participate in the same neo-tribe.

Segmentation through the traditional segmentation variables is not really covering the complexity of the lifestyle brand users. Since the aim of segmentation theory is to target homogenous clusters derived from a heterogeneous mass, we suggest that one must understand the underlying conscious wish to belong to a certain neo-tribe in order to consider a person a neo-tribe member. However, this reasoning does not indicate that one can 'segment' on style or to cluster people into neo-tribes, since that would be the same principles as the traditional segmentation methods.

Rather, we suggest that it is about one's mental willingness to participate in the neo-tribes, and one's intention in terms of communication both towards the self and to the external world. The neo-tribes as such also have a boundless nature and are constantly changing in compositions. Furthermore, the individual is likely to participate in several neo-tribes at the same time, which makes the individual more complex and tougher to comprehend from a segmentation point of view. This is difficult to detect with traditional segmentation variables based on a demographic or psychographic segmentation variables.

This study indicates that a complexity exist when 'segmenting' markets for lifestyle brands through the traditional variables, as it can not cope with subjective brand meanings, and the boundless nature of the consumer's mind.

5.2. Managerial and Theoretical Implications

In this section, suggestions will be given to how the results of this research can contribute to managerial practice and theoretical development.

This research aims to contribute to the understanding of the complexities that arises when using traditional, modernist segmentation variables for segmenting a highly post-modern consumer. In turn, this gives indications of that the usage of traditional segmentation variables are not ideal when aiming to target consumers of lifestyle brands.

This study further contributes to the understanding of how people employ and consume lifestyle brands in a popular culture context. This is imperative for both practitioners and the academic audiences as this result imply that 'lifestyle brand meaning' is formed on an individual basis. Further, those different brand meanings can coexist in the minds of different social actors.

Further, this study contributes to the current knowledge base through the gained understanding of the lacking coherence between how a person verbally express the individual fashion discourse and hence view the self, and how this is visualised through fashion consumption.

A practical implication regarding segmentation of lifestyle brands that the findings of this study can offer regards the identification of the neo-tribes. The authors of this study suggest that in order to 'segment' lifestyle brands, companies should identify the more prominent neo-tribes employing the lifestyle brand and emphasis on giving the brand the different values that are in line with those of the more eminent neo-tribes. This might strengthen the brand as an expression for those persons. As we have shown in this study, this might be highly complex as infusing brand meaning is not an obvious thing to apply due to the subjective nature and interpretative nature of individuals' brand meaning creation. Although the complexity of such actions, we suggest that this can strengthen the brand in the long run.

5.3. Future Research

This study has aimed to contribute to the understanding of the complexity regarding market segmentation for lifestyle brands. In the text that follows, the authors will give suggestion of future research.

Due to the interpretative nature of this research and the interpretative methodology of this paper, it would be interesting to conduct a comparative study with other respondents, and/or other geographical locations e.g. cities and/or countries.

Another interesting research area that can be derived from this study is to conduct the same study but focusing on other lifestyle brands, both fashion and non-fashion brands.

Additionally, the longitude of this study has been limited, which opens up for other research areas. We thus suggest a more profound research within this field, which more profoundly focus on the classic segmentation theories, with a more detailed investigation of the different variables of these methods.

Since this research have had been conducted on a very interpretative level in order to tackle the research aim, it would be interesting to further conduct a quantitative study with structured observations. This might provide fruitful knowledge in illustrating the complexity of this segmentation of lifestyle brands. Thus moreover to develop the finding of how this information can be used in practise.

Furthermore, since this research has not accounted for gender aspect of segmentation theories regarding lifestyle brands, we suggest that future studies look in to the matter. This as gender aspects most certainly provides further knowledge regarding the complexities of lifestyle brand segmentation.

6. Limitations

This section deals with the bias and limitations of the study.

Since the nature of this research is qualitative, the discussion regarding the truth criteria will rather touch upon how trustworthy the findings in this paper are, and not how to generalise the study's findings. Hence, the reliability and the internal validity of this study will not be treated in this section. Rather, different aspect of trustworthiness such as credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Bryman and Bell, 2003).

Stating of with the *credibility* of this thesis, which refers to how believable the findings are and to what degree the result will be accepted by other. This entails that the research is carried out in accordance with goods practice and that the researcher have correctly understood the respondent and their world (Bryman and Bell, 2003).

The literature and theories within this field of research is extensive and segmentation theories have been widely discussed within the marketing discipline for several decades. However, our opinion is that the theoretical foundation and existing research in this domain has been covered in relation to the time span of this study. This explains why some aspects of segmentation such as specific segmentation methods of marketing research have not been accounted for in this research. The theoretical framework in this study is also limited in relation to all existing research within the field and hence the findings could have been different if the theoretical framework had been different.

That bias occurs when the empirical material is collected in an interpretive study like ours is obvious. If we start to consider our sampling method, the observation and the way we funnelled our respondents, it is natural that the kind of respondents depended a lot upon the geographical locations, the settings and the researchers' judgement. The geographical locations where in this case Lund and Malmö. Lund is a city centred around the university with a high population of young people. The data was also collected during daytime in different locations in the city, normally when older people work and the younger part of the population is in school. This probably explains why we found an 'over representation' of students in the age span 20 to 29. When the Malmö study was conducted, the respondents identified were of more different kind. The setting in Lund was also particular as part of the collected material was gathered on university property.

The photo documentation that we later analysed can also be considered as rather subjective, as we interpreted the results from the photos and compared them. Such a conduct naturally could

have been different if the research was conducted by other researchers, and hence the finding. However, our aim has been to be as specific and explicit as possible in our reasoning when interpreting the photo so that the reader will be able to follow our reasoning regarding the photo documentation and its analysis.

There is of course also bias when considering the short semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. However, our evaluation of the nature of the research problem, to understand the complexity of segmentation of lifestyle brand, was the felt necessity to involve a high degree of listening to the respondent. Our objective was not to influence the individuals, as would have been the case with structured interviews. Neither was our aim to suggest alternatives to the respondents to choose from. Rather, our goal was to let the respondents use their own words when answering questions like "how would you describe your style?". Such a question is of course rather vague and not concrete. However, our objective was to ask questions of this nature in order to apply to the 'gut-feeling' of the respondents.

The purpose of the triangulation described in the method chapter aims to reduce the bias since it can compensate for the limitations of each of the methods employed in this research. Our opinion is that the empirical findings derived from each method has provided fruitful knowledge and enriched the overall finding of this study. One might argue that this research should have emphasised on only one method to tackle the research aim. However, with such an argument, our opinion is that one might miss the larger context. Especially since the different methods in this paper have shown findings not completely in line with each other. We hence believe that the triangulation has contributed to increase the credibility of this study

The *transferability* of the findings refers to how much this research could be transferred and to what degree this study can explain other situations in different settings (Bryman and Bell, 2003). With qualitative studies in general, they tend to be oriented towards a contextual uniqueness of the social world studied, thus it is important to consider this kind of discussion for a paper like ours.

Our opinion is that it might be difficult to transfer the all the findings of this study since they depend upon the theoretical framework that have been chosen by the both researchers, which has served as an important tool in analysis the empirical data collected in this research. Also, the choice to illustrate the complexity of segmentation of lifestyle brand with the Converse shoe has also to a degree influenced the negative transferability of the finding. The conclusions could have been somewhat different if a different brand would have been researched. Additionally, the brand spotting activity as such, with short interviews and photo documentation is to a high degree affected to the geographical location of the data and the subjective interpretations made by the researchers.

Instead of reliability, the authors of this paper aim to have a discussion of *dependability*, which aims to clarify whether the findings of this paper have established 'auditing' or complete records are kept of all phases of the research process (Bryman and Bell, 2003).

Our opinion is that the auditing of the empirical material has been sufficient. However, when editing the empirical material, it stroked the researchers that recording the responses might have been a more precise method than taking notes. On the other hand to record the interviews with a dictaphone could have resulted in a poor sound quality due to surrounding sounds associated with urban environments, making the answers impossible to hear. Hence this method was overlooked. However, we believe that the empirical material presented in this paper is worked out thoroughly and is revelled as truthful as possible.

The *conformability* refers to the fact that even if the researcher cannot be objective in a qualitative study; the researcher has to act good faith. It should be clear that the researcher not have overtly allowed personal judgement during the collection and or choosing the theoretical framework (Bryman and Bell, 2003).

As stated earlier, the interpretative character of this thesis is obvious. However, our intention during the whole research process has been not to put our own values, opinions and believes to affect the material in a negative manner. However, as this is based on our interpretations of our interpretations of the research process bias can exist.

We hope to have accounted for the limitations of this qualitative study in a suitable manner.

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Appendix 1

Alternative - Linn

Mixed Style - Lina

Mixed Style - Martin

Melbourn - Melvin

Alternative - Caroline

Rock - Matilda

Non existing - Karl

Woolly - Katarina

Rock - Henrik

Punk - Therese & Maria

Bohemian - Malin

Casual - Björn

Non existing - Thomas

Casual - Johan

Brand Dupe - Jenny

Diff Mainstream -Alexandra

Mixed Style - Emma

Relaxed - Karin

Diff Mainstream - Dimitri

Relaxed - Tobias

Indie Pop - Helena

English well dressed-Samuel

Indie Pop - Rebecka

Decadent Heroin Chic - Nils

Appendix 2

Name: **Alternative-Linn**
Age: 14
Occupation: Student
Hobbies: Music – Japanese rock

Name: **Mixed style-Lina**
Age: 18
Occupation: Student
Hobbies: Work out, shopping, relaxing

Name: **Mixed style-Martin**
Age: 25
Occupation: Store manager
Hobbies: Have no spare time

Name: **Melbourne-Melvin**
Age: 20
Occupation: Student
Hobbies: Writing, bike around

Name: **Alternative-Caroline**
Age: 17
Occupation: Student
Hobbies: Music, going to concerts

Name: **Rock-Matilda**
Age: 21
Occupation: Working at Burger-King
Hobbies: Painting, taking photos, drinking coffee

Name: **Non-existing style-Karl**
Age: 20
Occupation: Student
Hobbies: Music, in a band

Name: **Woolly-Katarina**
Age: 27
Occupation: Educator
Hobbies: Going for a coffee with friends and work out

Name: **Rock-Henrik**
Age: 22
Occupation: Student
Hobbies: Music, in a band

Name: **Punk-Therese**
Age: 13
Occupation: Student
Hobbies: Tennis

Name: **Punk-Maria**
Age: 13
Occupation: Student
Hobbies: Horse-back riding

Name: **Bohemian-Malin**
Age: 23
Occupation: Student
Hobbies: working out, fashion, interior decorating

Name: **Casual-Björn**
Age: 41
Occupation: Banking
Hobbies: Music

Name: **Non-existing style-Thomas**
Age: 43
Occupation: Within real-estate
Hobbies: Non

Name: **Casual-Johan**
Age: 23
Occupation: Hairdresser
Hobbies: Friends

Name: **Brand dupe-Jenny**
Age: 39
Occupation: Financial services
Hobbies: Working out

Name: **Different from mainstream-Alexandra**
Age: 12
Occupation: Student
Hobbies: Music, meeting friends

Name: **Mixed style-Emma**
Age: 23
Occupation: Student
Hobbies: Writing

Name: **Relaxed-Karin**
Age: 25
Occupation: Student
Hobbies: Horse-back riding, sailing

Name: **Different from mainstream-Dimitri**
Age: 16
Occupation: Student
Hobbies: Music

Name: **Relaxed-Tobias**
Age: 18
Occupation: Student
Hobbies: Snooker, friends

Name: **Indiepop-Helena**
Age: 25
Occupation: Student
Hobbies: Hiking

Name: **English well-dressed-Samuel**
Age: 25
Occupation: Student
Hobbies: Kick-boxing

Name: **Indiepop-Rebecka**
Age: 26
Occupation: Student
Hobbies: Music and meeting friends

Name: **Decadent heroin chic-Nils**
Age: 24
Occupation: Student
Hobbies: Socialising, tasting wine

Appendix 3

Name:
Age:
Occupation:
Hobbies:

1. How would you describe your style?
2. How do you think your Converse contribute to what you just described?
3. To what occasions do you use your Converse? Not use?
4. Have you encountered that Converse is used by people having the same style as you?
5. If no, how would you describe their style?
6. Do your friends and acquaintances use Converse?
7. How would you describe their style?
8. How many Converse have you owned?