

# Brands in Bad Company

*Is every consumer favourable for the brand?*

Master Thesis

Course: Degree Project in International Marketing and Brand Management (BUSM08)  
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Hand-in: 26<sup>th</sup> May 2011  
Word Count: 30.756



**LUND**  
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## Abstract

Springing from the relatively new co-creation paradigm, this article is based on the fact that consumers have a significant influence on the brand building process. However consumers cannot be understood as a sound and compact group of buyers with homogeneous values. Instead various societal developments, and in particular the emergence of consumer tribes, support the existence of a multiplicity of consumer groups. Furthermore each of those groups is trying to appropriate the brand and to impose their own values and meanings on it. This is particularly true for social identity brands, like fashion labels, which are carrying strong cultural and identity meanings as well as symbolic power. Therefore consumer segments, which are not specifically targeted by the company, present marketers with a tricky challenge.

Consequently this paper is structured around one specific research question: Is every customer favourable for the brand? In order to answer this question an extensive case study will be built around the experience of Stone Island, an Italian high-end fashion brand, which unintentionally became the symbol of the hooligan culture in the early 1990s. After an in-depth analysis of the case, the authors reveal that there are consumer segments that are inherently unfavourable for brands. However, the nuances of the topic make the reasoning path just as important as the answer itself. Beyond that, an illustrative categorization of various types of *unintended consumer segments* will be elaborated. Furthermore, by reviewing the examples of other companies that faced the occurrence of *unintended consumer segments*, plausible action paths will be analyzed following the presented categorization. Moreover, theoretical and managerial contributions will be outlined and future research possibilities on the topic of *unintended consumer segments* will be offered.

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## 1 Introduction

*Eric is walking down the streets of Malmö. Suddenly he realizes that strangers passing by are whispering and kids are pointing at him. Eric is taken completely by surprise and doesn't know what he did to provoke these reactions. However everything becomes clear when his friend says: "Don't you understand? It's the jacket you're wearing!".*

The traditional perspective of marketing tended to see consumers as passive reactors of marketers' efforts and strategies. Brands and products were designed and executed by deliberate plans, in a calculated process where consumers had no impact until the goods were already in the shelves. This approach was the leading opinion in the decades that followed the birth of marketing as a field of research within business studies. However, over the recent years both scholars and practitioners have identified the need for a new perspective in marketing. This new focus should account for the empowerment of consumers that came with the new reality of globalization and advanced communications. Pioneering authors such as Vargo and Lusch (2004) refer to this phenomenon as the shift from a goods-dominant logic to a service-dominant logic, describing the way consumers' input is now regarded as adding value along the whole production chain. This has led to what is called the brand co-creation paradigm: the consumer shifts from being a passive audience to an active player, and brands are supposed to be built around them, rather than just around company requirements (Payne et al., 2009, p380).

The enthusiasm around this new paradigm has led to abundant research that presents co-creation as something inherently positive for brands. This is because customers' input is regarded as complementary to marketers' plans. However, there are cases where consumers' and companies' perspectives are not so clearly aligned and can even be contradictory. One example of this collision of interests between consumers and companies can be found in the Newton-Apple case, where consumers love a cult brand but hate the company behind it due to its lack of commercial taste. Here, customers see themselves as *"guardians of the brands' authenticity"*. (Cova et al., 2007, p22)

Another example of these contrasting views between consumers and companies constitutes the core of this paper: the existence of unintended segments among brands' users. According to the common view of brand management, segmenting the markets and identifying the ideal consumer for their products is one of the key tasks of marketers. Through the example of Stone Island, this paper will illustrate that often, segments can be the emergent results of companies' actions instead of a deliberate decision.

Stone Island is an Italian fashion brand focused on casual men's clothing. It is famous for its unconventional surface treatment of fabrics and dyeing techniques, which have brought a solid reputation as one of the most innovative companies in fashion design. However, the brand is better known as an icon of the *hooligan culture*. The term hooliganism is applied to groups of football fans that share a general inclination towards violence. As every social tribe, they see themselves as a community held together by a common passion and they bond over the football culture. The exercise of violence is not restricted to the stadium, but is an everyday matter in many contexts of their lives. This explains why these groups are regarded as dangerous and unlawful by authorities, and societies spend a lot of money to prevent and control hooliganism (Maniglio, 2007, p204).

These hard-core football fans adopted Stone Island in the early 1990s and made it a symbol of their values and identity. The association between the brand and hooliganism became so strong that today it is almost impossible to separate the brand from this seemingly undesirable consumer group: a man wearing a Stone Island jacket has high chances of being considered a hooligan even by people outside this culture. Considering the company's sophisticated and progressive character, it seems clear that hooligans are not its originally intended target customers.

The characteristics of these particular consumer groups are likely to be transferred to the brand and dilute its image. Therefore, consumers outside these groups may feel alienated by these negative brand associations and reject it. This phenomenon is contradictory with the dominant business logic that implies that every customer is an achievement because it generates profit. Kotler (1977, p65) explains that *"An enormous number of U.S. companies are sales-minded, but only a few are marketing-minded. The difference is subtle and usually hard for sales executives to see, but it spells the difference between unstable short term success and stable long-term growth"*. This paper will address a new perspective on this logic.

## **2 Problem formulation and relevance**

The intended consumers for a brand can be identified by analyzing the company's brand guidelines and strategies. The actual consumers can be identified by analyzing who is buying the brand and what they are saying about it. If there are major differences between these two pictures, it can be said that the brand is in presence of unintended consumer segments. But does unintended mean that they are also

negative? This phenomenon may have a number of different outcomes: it may be a threat to the brand identity, an actual opportunity for the company, or merely a phase that will be eventually overcome.

In order to understand if the occurrence of unintended segments is negative for the brand, this paper will focus on answering one particular research question: **Is every consumer favourable for the brand?**

The concept of unintended segments as presented in the introduction has not been studied in previous branding literature. Therefore, this paper will leverage on related established marketing concepts to analyze the case of Stone Island. This case was selected because fashion brands, as a product category that is highly loaded with identity meanings, are particularly illustrative for the research interest of this paper. Among other topics, this study will touch upon, the new meanings that these segments bring into the brand, the motivations behind the adoption; its impact on the general public's perception and its possible influence on the company's strategies. The outcomes of this in-depth analysis will be used to understand whether the current branding models are sufficiently explanatory of the appropriation of brands by unintended consumer groups.

The relevance of the present paper for marketing studies can be understood both from a theoretical and a practitioners' point of view.

From the theoretical perspective, the primary contribution of this study will be the introduction of unintended segments as a concept in the field of marketing science. This outcome is deeply connected to the second contribution: the development of a categorization of unintended consumer segments.

From the practitioners' perspective this paper addresses several challenges marketers are facing with the increasing empowerment of consumers. A major insight for managers is the identification of consumers' heterogeneity, and how this generates a multiplicity of simultaneous meanings for the brand. At the same time the acknowledgement of these different groups of coexisting consumers should reinforce the need for practitioners to develop new skills in order to grasp the cultural impact and meaning of brands.

In the next chapter relevant existing research will be explored, in order to identify those concepts that can act as a foundation for the analysis that will produce the aforementioned contributions.

### **3 Literature review**

As the notion of unintended segments has not been explored as a separate research topic before, this paper will draw on a set of established marketing concepts in order to build a theoretical framework for this area of interest. These concepts will allow for a deeper understanding on how brands can evolve into cultural symbols and consumer groups appropriate the brand.

As starting point, an analysis of branding as a marketing discipline will be the basis for an identification of the specificities of fashion brands. Fashion is a key category for understanding the formation of unintended segments, because of its unique intensity in terms of identity development and expression. Consumers reject or embrace brands according to the way these brands fit with their perceived identities. Therefore, the concept of identity has strong explanatory power for the way consumers interact with each other and with brands. Consumers are not mere receptors of branding efforts; they have gained acknowledgment as participants and even owners of brands. This point of view has produced a new stream of research that, reflecting the increasing consumer empowerment, gave birth to the paradigm of brand co-creation. It is also important to note that the process of co-creation cannot just be seen as the interaction between the company and just one single group of consumers. It is rather a multiplicity of consumer groups, each of them trying to impose their identity on the brand and give meaning to it. Consequently it is crucial to be aware of the existence of different consumer groups, which according to some authors can also be studied as tribes. The phenomenon of tribes will therefore be another main concept of the literature reviewed.

#### **3.1 Branding and identity**

##### **3.1.1 Producer and consumer in traditional branding**

Branding is the process of building and managing strong brands. It is important to understand its fundamental principles in order to provide a theoretical background to the analysis of unintended segments.

Kapferer's book *The new strategic brand management: creating and sustaining brand equity long term* (2008) is used in this paper as the fundamental reference for this topic, because throughout its different editions since 1992, the author has continued solidifying its expert reputation. As a marketing critic said, "*Kapferer's book is not an easy read. It is dense, with sometimes difficult language and concepts. But rather than reading like a conventional "brand-travel guide", it deals with the very essence and culture of*



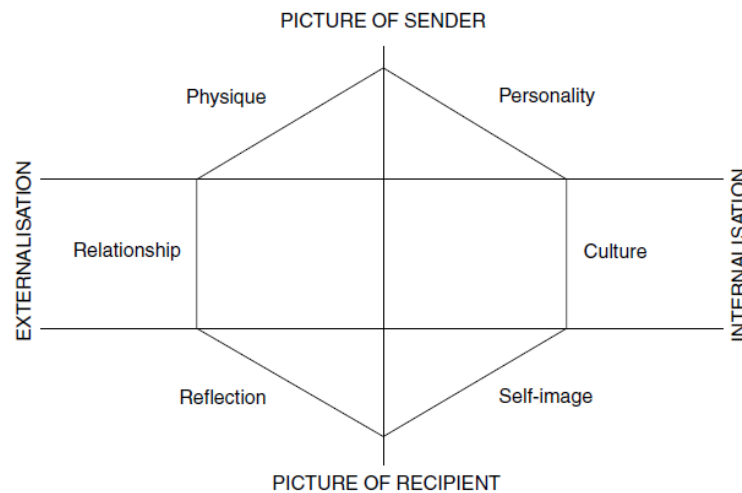
*branding. It provides an overall philosophy of branding (...) with a coherence which stems from its basic conceptual framework. Its conceptual platform makes it both practical and strategically sound. This is a book for experienced people who already know the basics, and wish to be stimulated to further interrogate their brands so that every last ounce of benefit is realized."* (McWilliam, 1993, p105).

A key distinction in Kapferer's study of branding is the difference between brand image and brand identity. Image lies on the receiver's side, it is the way that consumers decode the signals sent by the product and its communication. On the other hand, identity lies on the sender's side; it precedes image because without a round identity developed by marketers, consumers would have nothing to decode. (Kapferer, 2008, p174) This distinction sets a conceptual milestone in traditional branding literature: the notion that brand managers are the ones that define and manage what the brand *is*, whilst the role of consumers is to passively receive this brand entity as a given.

After analyzing the guidelines that different companies use for managing their brands' identity, Kapferer explains his vision on this topic with the graphical tool of a hexagonal prism. He describes this identity prism as a product of the constructivist school of communication, which emphasizes the representations that both the source and the addressee form of each other and of the relationship between them. The brand identity prism reflects that the brand has six facets (p183):

1. Physique: Physical specificities and qualities, mainly what the brand is and does
2. Personality: Character, the way it would be if it were human. It is the personality facet of the source, not to be confused with the customers reflected image which is a portrayal of the ideal receiver
3. Culture: Set of values feeding the brand's inspiration, basic principles governing its outward signs (product and communication)
4. Relationship: Brands are often at the heart of exchanges between persons, this is more visible in the case of service brands
5. Reflection: Brands are customer reflections, related to its perceived ideal consumer. Reflection is often confused with target, but the difference is that while the target describes potential users, reflection is linked to the way these users wish to be seen as a result of buying the brand.
6. Self-image: If reflection is the target's outward mirror (they are...), self-image is the target's own internal mirror (I am...). Through their attitude towards brands, consumers develop inner certain types of inner relationship with themselves.

The brand identity prism is to be understood in both a horizontal and vertical dimension. In the horizontal, Kapferer (2008, p197) distinguishes between the sender and the recipient, due to the semiotic influence of his work. The facets of relationship and culture bridge the gap between sender and recipient. In the vertical dimension, the facets to the left are the social ones, which give the brand its exterior expression. The facets to the right are those embedded in the brand itself, its spirit.



**Illustration 1 Kapferer's brand identity prism**

As explained above, it is clear that Kapferer regards the consumer as the receiving side of the branding relationship, a more passive role if compared to the defining role of the brand management team. In the latest edition of his book, he acknowledges that the paradigm of a person deciding in a social vacuum is no longer sustainable, because everyone belongs to networks and tribes. However, he refers to these groups as *mediators of influence*. This transmits the idea that they are some sort of buffer between the producer and the consumer, whose influence moves only in this direction instead of being two-way (p163).

Holt (2004, p6) criticizes traditional branding models, such as Kapferer's, and says that those are ignorant to the fact that brands support and express consumers' identities. He faults that "(...) consultants and academics routinely invoke one-size-fits-all models that lump together all kinds of brands into a single framework. (...) This lack of specification is a big mistake. Identity brands create customer value differently than do other types of brands, so they must be managed differently as well." Therefore, a distinction has to be made between utilitarian and social identity brands and products.

### **3.1.2 Utilitarian vs. identity products**

According to uniqueness theory people have a need for maintaining separate identities and therefore feel uneasy, being too similar to others (Fromkin, 1970, p521). However the need for uniqueness is not always the same. Individuals are more dedicated to distinguish themselves from their fellow peers in domains that serve an expressive or self-realizing function (Berger & Heath, 2007, p132; Campbell, 1986, p282). As a result, they focus on product categories that are publicly visible and identity relevant. This implicates that product choices are not based on functional benefits (Berger & Heath, 2007, p132).

Consumer goods have two primary functions; a utilitarian and a social identity function (Schlosser, 1998, p346; Shavitt, 1990, p129): Objects with a utilitarian function are intrinsically associated with rewards and punishments, as well as behaviour routines relevant to those outcomes. Clothing e.g. protects the user from cold, wind or rain (reward), on the other side garments will get dirty and worn with usage (punishment). However the owner can protect his garments by washing and maintaining them in the right way (behaviour routines). Objects with a social identity function on the other side are linked to self-other relationships and one's self-concept. In that case the consumer uses the product to express himself and send a message to his peers.

Products mainly just serve one of those primary functions. However certain product categories serve both functions simultaneously. Clothes admittedly are functional. Nevertheless the purchase decision does not so much depend on its functionality, as on its social expressiveness (Berger & Heath, 2007, p132; Kort et al., 2006, p1364; Veblen, 1899). Fashion is rather a vehicle used to express identity and self-image as well as to impress others (Beaudoin et al. (2004): p194; Goldsmith et al. (1991): p38). Other product categories that also serve both a utilitarian and social function are cars or cell phones.

This insight is foundational in order to understand why some segments may be unfavourable for a brand. If the motivation behind purchase decisions is of a social rather than a utilitarian nature, consumers assess the products in question differently. Product or brand choices become more complex, because it's not only the utility of the product that has to be evaluated; it has also to be considered which message it conveys to others.

### **3.1.3 Self-management through consumption**

Liebenstein (1950, p184) advocates the view that consumption behaviour is dependent on the consumption of others. As a result he differentiates between three types of external effects on utility, which again influence demand (p189): the bandwagon effect, the snob effect and the Veblen effect.

The bandwagon effect reflects peoples' desire to be "one of the boys", and coincides with Kant's perception of fashion, namely that it is merely blind imitation (Gronow, 1993, p89). In this case demand generates even more demand, and is therefore contrasting with the snob effect. The latter implies that demand decreases, when too many, or the wrong kind of people, are purchasing a good. This phenomenon can be observed looking at fashion and its function of class distinction. The upper stratum of society abandons their fashions as soon as the lower prepare to adopt them (Ragone, 1996, p310; Simmel, 1957, p543f.). Thus the snob effect is a function of the consumption of others. The Veblen effect on the other side is a function of price. In this case, demand increases with rising prices, which is indicative of conspicuous consumption, and individuals use fashion to portray their social status. In fact, research literature takes a great interest in the display of social status through apparel (O'Cass & Frost, 2002; Frijetes, 1998)

Consumers use brands as a means of non-verbal communication. They are following a means-end model by facilitating the achievement of a desired end state (communicating certain values) by the consumption of certain products and brands (Gutman & Mills, 1982, p60). Belk (1988) speaks of the extended self. He suggests that the desire to have something is to enlarge our sense of self, as possessions can contribute to our capabilities of doing and being. Furthermore he explains that only a *"complete ensemble of consumption objects may be able to represent the diverse and possibly incongruous aspects of the total self"*(p146). Consequently one can speak of self-management by consumption (Schiemer, 2010, p87; O'Cass & Frost 2002, p.67/ 71). This view is helpful for understanding that the usage of certain products and brands contribute to an individual's expression of self and identity. The link between consumers' need for self-projection and his purchase decisions is important for recognising the particularity, complexity and power of social identity products.

#### **3.1.4. Identity as self-congruency model**

Consumers' purchase behaviour and self-portrayal depends on the interaction of their self-image, their self-concept and the product or brand image. Self-concept is multidimensional in nature, and involves four main images of self in consumer research (Sirgy, 1982, p287):

- (1) The actual self-image: how consumers see themselves
- (2) The ideal self-image: how consumers would like to see themselves
- (3) The social self-image: how consumers believe they are seen by significant others
- (4) The ideal social self-image: how consumers would like to be seen by significant others

Sirgy (1982) developed a conceptual model of self-congruity in order to clarify the influence of product image on consumer purchase behaviour. This involves matching consumers' self-concept to product image. According to the four dimensions of self-concept there are four different varieties of self-congruity (actual self-congruity, ideal self-congruity, social self-congruity and ideal social-congruity) (Sirgy et al. 2000, p130). Each of those can be either positive or negative. If e.g. the product image coincides with the customer's actual self-image, the actual self-congruity would be positive. The correlation between self-concept and the product image is mediated by different self-concept motives (self-consistency motive, self-esteem-motive, social consistency motive, social approval motive). The self-consistency motive e.g. suggests that shoppers want to protect their own identities and might feel uncomfortable wearing brands or products that do not reflect their actual selves. From a self-esteem perspective however, the consumer will choose a product that does not reflect the actual self (negative actual self-congruity), but the ideal self (positive ideal self-congruity), in order to build himself up by approaching an ideal image.

Through this concept it becomes clear how complex individual purchase decisions are, regarding social identity products. An individual has not only to cater to its own needs but has to be responsive to the opinion of significant others. Furthermore this concept stresses the importance of brand images and meanings. As the consumer tries to send a certain message by using specific brands, it's necessary for those brands to have a clear and consistent meaning; and the customer relies on it for his self-portrayal purpose. However the meaning inherent in a specific brand is far from being stable. Marketers can try to fill their brands with meaning. Yet brands are rather a psychological phenomenon, originating from the perceptions of its consumers (Holt, 2004, p3). It's them, who also give meaning to the brand and therefore it is a rather fickle than stable concern. The view of consumers as the passive receivers of marketers' influence is being increasingly challenged by recent marketing literature, generating a new perspective that will be explored in greater depth.

## **3.2 Co-creation**

### **3.2.1 New perspectives on the role of consumers**

Since the late 1990s, marketing scholars began to highlight the need for a shift in the reigning paradigm. It was argued that the evolution of research and practice within this field had lost focus on consumers, and was excessively company and product-centric. By that time, disciplines such as relationship marketing, quality management, market orientation, services marketing and brand relationships were

becoming increasingly influential for practitioners and academics; and therefore a new emphasis was put on returning to a customer perspective (Payne et al., 2009, p379).

One of the most fundamental contributions to this new approach was Vargo and Lusch's award-winning paper from 2004, where they developed the idea of a service-dominant logic as opposed to the goods-dominant logic. The latter view understands marketing as the process in which products are manufactured and distributed; and it's only companies that create and add value throughout this chain, until the goods reach the consumer. Here, the consumer adopts a passive role as the object of marketers' strategies and plans and economical value arises from the surplus of this exchange. By contrast, the service-dominant logic considers that consumers don't buy the goods for themselves, but for the benefits or skills that are inherent to them. Marketing is seen as the interaction of producers and consumers, through the spread of knowledge along the chain. Therefore, value is not created in exchange: it is created in use, by the dialogue between producers and consumers. This is known as co-creation of value, meaning that the interaction between consumers and producers *"should generate more value than a traditional transaction process, during which seller and buyer meet briefly, exchange finished products and services and then go their separate ways. (...) It is assumed that this will create more value in several ways. In particular it is assumed that the deeper relationship will create opportunities for acquiring more knowledge, thus making the company better able to adapt to the customer and to provide higher quality."* (Wikström, 1996, p7).

Many of the premises of this theoretical framework of co-creation come from research within the Business-to-Business environment. The IMP Group<sup>1</sup> studied buyer-seller relationships, and developed conclusions on learning, adaptations and the creation of value. Authors like Wikström (1996) question the applicability of these conclusions to consumer markets, since they are very different in terms of the depth and scope of the relationships that are established in industrial markets. However, they recognize that in certain types of consumers markets (more homogeneous and stable) these premises are relevant. Furthermore they understand that there is still a huge potential for research in this topic (Wikström, 1996, p15).

Today it is widely accepted that a series of factors such as the fast evolution of communications and global markets have created a scenario where consumers can easily access information on products and companies. This has empowered their role within the economy, and most organizations understand that consumers exercise influence over almost every part of their activities, from product design to the

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<sup>1</sup> The IMP Group is a industrial marketing research group, based in the Swedish city of Uppsala

actual consumption (Lawer & Knox, 2006, p122). “Companies can no longer act independently. Whether designing products, developing processes, creating marketing messages, controlling channels and critically, managing brands, consumers are now able to exercise their influence over almost every part of the firm's activities.” (Lawer & Knox, 2006, p122). Within the fashion business that is the focus of this paper, consumers are the ones dictating trends and determining the right places for distribution, rather than elite designers (Thomas et al., 2007, p590).

Kapferer (2008) does mention the existence of co-creation practices in his aforementioned chart of *mediators of influence*. However, he does not explain how he understands the term of co-creation. This silence gives the impression that the author felt the need of including this highly discussed topic in his latest book revision. Yet it still does not completely fit his model that conceives consumers as the receiver side of branding.

### **3.2.2 Consumer-centrism to the fullest: Lovemarks & brand hijack**

The reversion in the traditional power balance in the commercial relationship, where consumers organize themselves, share opinions and understand their rights vis-à-vis companies, has received a lot of attention from practitioners that seek to understand what is expected from them in this ever-changing environment (Pitt et al., 2006, p12). Consumers are not only seen as part of the value-creating process: they are even claimed to be the actual owners of the brand, because they have the power to raise or destroy them (Veloutsou, 2009, p128). Some authors state that the term consumer is not adequate anymore due to its passive connotations, preferring terms, such as *prosumers* or *multipliers* (Kozinets et al., 2008, p350). Consumers have never been so demanding because they have never had so many options. They live in a tailor-made world where they went from “*the right to choose to the right of having exactly what they want*” (Moynagh & Worsley, 2002, p296). As positive as this may sound, consumers are also facing new sources of stress, because the overwhelming amount of choices can lead to frustration and confusion, distorting preferences. Over time, they will have to develop new personal skills to cope with empowerment in the best way (Wathieu et al., 2002, p299).

This new understanding of the role of consumers would of course challenge business as usual for companies. According to many authors, the traditional marketing management process would need revisions to move from a company-centric model towards one with the consumer as a centre, similar to the Vargo & Lusch’s approach to the service-dominant logic (Lawer & Knox, 2006, p121). The traditional marketing manager was supposed to communicate a single, consistent product image that consumers would passively accept. Now it is accepted that consumers develop different perceptions that depend of

the intensity of their relationship with the brand (Koll & Wallpach, 2009, p343) Petty (2008, p415) goes as far as saying that companies should be more flexible regarding trademark rights, to enable consumers to use their favourite logotypes more freely. In another study he recommends companies to consider licensing rather than litigating brand parodies, acknowledging the limitations of laws when brands become cultural references (Petty, 2009, p65).

From the practitioners' side, there are two particular works within the co-creation area that generated a strong discussion and gave birth to new terms in branding. The first one is Kevin Roberts' (2004) *Lovemarks: the future beyond brands*. It could be said that this book takes brand co-creation to an extreme, stating that the evolution of marketing has come to a point where brands are not enough anymore. Since it is consumers that own brands, the future belongs to Lovemarks, which are those brands with a remarkably successful emotional attachment (Roberts, 2004, p57). It is clear that the author attempts to be provocative and engaging for marketers rather than methodologically flawless. Although this work has been criticized by academics (Sayers & Monin, 2007, p673), it is still an evidence of the increasing interest on this topic among managers.

The second of these controversial books is Alex Wipperfurth's (2005) *Brand Hijack*. This work is based on the premise that brands belong to the market, not to companies. The term hijacking refers to the fact that the newly empowered consumers seize control of the brands' ideology and persona, away from the companies. He differentiates between *serendipitous hijack* and *co-created hijack*. *Serendipitous hijack* is completely involuntary from the company's side; *co-created hijack*, on the other side is born from a deliberate management action. Under this perspective consumers should be regarded as peers instead of targets, and marketers need new skills and metrics to understand the cultural impact of brands (Wipperfurth, 2005, p82).

Although the term *hijack* has a negative connotation in everyday language, Wipperfurth does not seem to consider it intrinsically harmful. In his eyes, the fact that consumers engage in such a deep relationship with the brand speaks of its relevance and cultural meaning. Therefore it is a matter of understanding how to embrace it in the most beneficial way for the business. He (2005, p44) refers only briefly to the possibility that this process may be damaging for the brand in some extreme cases: "*However, there may be times when you'll need to reclaim the brand because the "wrong" people have hijacked it. That is when the brand manager must step in to change the brand image or limit its association with a particular subculture*". The author proceeds then to a few lines' description of Burberry's over-popularization and Ben Sherman's association with neo-Nazis, but he does not explain



the logic behind it or how the reclaim of the brand through the management should take place. Overall, the tone of the book transmits the impression that hijacking is desirable for marketers. Of all the concepts analyzed in this chapter, brand hijacking is the one that seems closest to undesired segments, because of its emphasis on consumers' appropriation of brands. Throughout this paper, it will become clear that the concept of brand hijacking is not enough to grasp the nuances of unintended segments. Also the analysis will focus on whether this scenario is always positive or there are situations when brands should fight certain cultural associations.

### **3.2.3 Theoretical gaps in both traditional and new paradigms**

In chapter 3.2.1, the most significant challenge to the traditional paradigm of marketing was analyzed: the fact that its passive understanding of consumer no longer reflects their empowered role in the business environment. However, the new approach of brand co-creation still has a long way to go in terms of research development, particularly in the field of the branding process.

Payne et al. (2009, p380) explain that it is only now that *“some research is now starting to emphasize the building of brands and relationships around customers rather than company requirements (e.g., Dall’Olmo Riley and de Chernatony, 2000) and such work is moving brand researchers in the direction of a co-creation approach to the brand (e.g., Bello et al., 2007) However, in the area of service-dominant logic and co-creation, little work deals with brands and brand experiences. (...) Any reference to branding in the service literature is often indirect.(...) Vargo and Lusch, (Vargo and Lusch, 2004) only briefly mention the branding concept.”*

One exception to this shortage of branding studies within the co-creation paradigm is the work of Boyle (2007), who attempts to develop a model for brand co-creation. She claims that brand loyalty is remarkably related to consumers' brand associations, and only slightly to management strategies. However, she acknowledges the need for further research on the source of consumer value and more importantly, on the balance of power between consumers and companies.

As explained above, co-creation studies are admittedly centred on consumers as peer brand creators. Yet the review of literature that was outlined for this paper evidenced another shortage: when these authors speak of consumers, they portray them as a sound, single actor in the co-creation experience. But as it will be further analyzed in chapter 3.3, consumers are hardly a homogeneous figure. Rather, they should be understood as a multiplicity of interacting consumer groups. Without this understanding, the co-creation paradigm will still lack explanatory power in today's market scenarios.

In short, there seems to be a mutual theoretical gap connecting the traditional and the new paradigms of marketing: the traditional branding models don't include the co-creation perspective in their analysis of the consumer role; and the new paradigm of co-creation still lacks an in-depth analysis of consumers' influence on branding processes and the impact of their social aggregations. It is within this gap that the present paper locates the concept of unintended segments, because it can only be understood as a *branding* issue, derived from the *multiplicity of consumer personalities and motivations*, under the perspective of *co-creation*.

Since the complexity of consumer identities is crucial for the understanding of unintended segments, a brief analysis of market segmentation will be prior to the explanation of consumer tribes.

### **3.3 Segmentation and consumer tribes**

#### **3.3.1 Segmentation – the traditional view**

Smith's work from 1956 is considered seminal for the concept of market segmentation. Its premise of a product adjustment to fit consumer demand in a more accurate way would become widely spread, until consolidating a basic concept of marketing. Its main purpose is to maximize effectiveness in terms of identification of business opportunities from the demand side, and managing resources.

The term evolved from its initial scope on geographical and product-based approach, to lifestyle and psychographic segmentation in the 1980s and 1990s (Quinn et al., 2007, p442). Although the concept of market segmentation is strategic for marketing scholars, there is a relative lack of consistency within literature on this topic (Simkin & Dibb, 1998, p407).

Simkin & Dibb (1998, p407) follow Kotler's definition that "*the basic process of market segmentation consists of three steps: determining segments, targeting and positioning*". The first step consists of identifying groups of customers with similar needs and purchase behaviour, and organizing them into segments. The second step, involves determining which of these groups or segments are the most appropriate for the allocation of company resources and marketing efforts. The third step involves the definition of the marketing mix activities that best suit the defined segments.

In spite of this detailed roadmap, in practice the process of segmenting consumers can be both planned or intuitive; and organizations often rely on their previous experience and intuition rather than applying a theoretical approach. It can also be classified in terms of being dynamic or static, and the personality

of the company owner or managing teams is highly influential (Quinn et al., 2007, p459) While implementing a segmentation strategy, a company may be seeking to maximize short-term profit or long-run success.

Over the last years the relevance and usefulness of applying segmentation strategies has been increasingly questioned, regarding the complexity of today's consumer: more connected and informed, highly unpredictable and infinitely less homogeneous than when this concept was first developed (Quinn et al., 2007, p442). Especially in the fashion business, practitioners believe that market segmentation is less effective than ever, because of its volatile demand, the global changes in style, income, age and ethnic groups. Some will even go as far as saying that since segmentation is ultimately an arbitrary process where marketers' personal opinions and views are the determinant, its results are no better than a mass marketing approach (Hines & Bruce, 2007, p77). In spite of these limitations, market segmentation is still useful for fashion organizations: techniques from anthropology and ethnography can be helpful for understanding "*how people actively, creatively and socially use brands, advertisements and mediated consumption in their own lives to symbolically realize their wishes and fantasies and to produce a sense of social identity*" (Hines & Bruce, 2007, p85). However it is criticised that consumer behaviour studies predominantly focus on the influence of individual cognition, perception or traits of individual behaviour (Cova, 1997, p297). Consumer behaviour should no longer be only studied from an individual perspective. Researchers should rather focus on a micro-social level of analysis, in order to gain additional understanding of product use, brands and shared symbolic meaning (Goulding & Saren, 2007, p239f). This change can be attributed to the shift of societal dynamics (Cova, 1997, p298-300).

### **3.3.2 From individualism to tribalism**

The modern individual strived for individualisation. Social bonds were at best seen as instrumental and apart from that as mere ties, which were inhibiting its quest for individual freedom. The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century represents the liberalisation of the individual and the modern wish for individualisation became reality in post modernity. The postmodern individual is merely concerned with becoming someone; portraying its own existence and difference. It is highly autonomous and has no more or only few durable social links. As Cova (1997, p300) puts it, "*The individual has never been as free in his or her private and public choices as today and never so alone and cut off from the spirit of community.*" This lack of community triggered a new thirst for values, and the search for the social link. As a result consumption gains a new centrality in human life, compensating the lack of close relationships through

the symbolic significance of the act of buying (Eliott, 1994, p162f). Individuals are trying to find their way into the social aspects of life through the consumption of goods, which permit social interaction (Kozinets, 1999, p252; Cova, 1997, p307). This development also reflects a reverse movement from individualism to tribalism. Knowingly or not, the postmodern individual participates in a variety of micro-groups on a day-to-day basis. Those so-called tribes have nothing to do with demographics or status.<sup>2</sup> The group is rather loosely connected and inherently unstable; and their members are held together through emotion, shared passion and social empathy (Otnes & Maclaran, 2007, p52; Cova & Cova, 2002, p598; Cova, 1997, p301). And even though tribes are in the research literature sometimes equated with subcultures, one has to be aware that there are certain differences between the two concepts. Subcultures are seen as tight, coherent social groups, representing a culture within a dominant culture (Bennett, 1999, p605). However this concept is not consistent with the postmodern individual, who is participating in a multitude of different groups, adopting and portraying distinct identities (Bennett, 1999, p605; Cova, 1997, p301). The notion of tribes lives up to this development. Tribes are seen as ephemeral and non-totalising groupings without conceptual boundaries. Furthermore a person can belong to several tribes, sharing feelings and (re)appropriated signs with its members (Cova & Cova, 2002, p599).

It is important to recognise that due to societal dynamics, subcultures are increasingly transforming into tribes. They lose their firm structure and allow their members to be not only a dedicated part of one culture, but rather a multiplicity of cultures. The Mods, the Teddy Boys or other former British subcultures are an example of such tight and consistent groups. Their members were dedicated to a unifying style of fashion, music and values, which set them apart from other cultures. Nowadays however, fashion, music and attitude do not necessarily have to be in line; an individual can consume Rock music, wear skater clothes and dedicate himself to the protection of nature.

As a result postmodern society can be considered as an ensemble of tribes, which makes it hard for sociologists to identify those tribes and to classify individuals, as they did with social classes or segments (Cova & Cova, 2002, p599/ 604; Cova, 1997, p301). Furthermore, as the postmodern individual is a member of various tribes, consumption becomes rather unpredictable and therefore a challenge for marketers. As Cova (1997, p303/ 309) observes, the consumer “(...) *appears fickle and unreliable, buys black in the morning and white in the afternoon, making it impossible to pin down their behaviour*”. Therefore the marketer’s task is not so much to predict consumer behaviour, as to develop the ability to

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<sup>2</sup> Tribes have different notations in the literature, which however share the same meaning. Those terms would be neo-tribes, postmodern tribes or consumer tribes.

react fast to it. Moreover as consumers belong to a variety of tribes, brands are also loaded with a variety of meanings. The overlap of members gives tribes a dynamism that subcultures never experienced. Consumers pass along products and brands between different consumer tribes, continuously altering their meaning. In order to realise why this might be a challenge, it is necessary to understand the relevance and function of products and their consumption within a tribe.

### 3.3.3 Tribes and the linking value

According to Maffesoli (1996, p98) tribes convey a common ambience and state of mind, “(...) *which is preferably expressed through lifestyles that favour appearance and form*”, and their consumption choices reflect a “*self-constructed notion of identity*” (Bennett, 1999, p607). Therefore the consumption of certain products, brands or ideas facilitates meaningful social relationships (Cova et al., 2007, 5f). This insight is summarised in the leitmotiv of postmodern consumption: *The link is more important than the thing* (Cova & Cova, 2002, p545; Cova, 1997, p307). The linking value, which reinforces bonds between individuals, can stem from a certain brand, a product or an activity (Cova & Cova, 2001, p70). However it can also be made up from more complex consumption patterns. Ostberg (2007), for example studies consumption and behaviour of the Stockholm Brat enclave, which is not defined by a single product, brand or activity but by the interaction of them all. The author identifies “*consumption in a stylish manner*” as the linking value of this particular tribe, and realises that “(...) *subcultural capital is necessary to embody the cultural codes necessary to maintain one’s membership.*” (Ostberg, 2007, p95).<sup>3</sup>

If linking value derives from a singular product, one would speak of a brand community, which is a “*specialised, non-geographically-bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand*” (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001, p412). However contrasting with tribes, brand communities are explicitly commercial. Nevertheless Cova & Cova (2002, p603) admit that a tribe organised around a cult object (e.g. Harley Davidson), is very similar to a brand community. In this context it is important to say that not every product has the same potential to exert linking value. Companies don’t have the power to give linking value to their products; it’s the consumer that finally declares it (Cova, 1997, p308). Nevertheless marketers should try to create links between their consumers rather than taking an individual marketing approach. In general it can be said, that the emergence of postmodern tribalism presents companies with a multiplicity of new challenges that have to be mastered. Companies must incorporate consumers’ experiences and expertise in order to be

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3 NB: Thornton (1996) coined the concept of subcultural capital, which refers to Bourdieu’s (1986) concept of cultural capital, but illustrates a more localized form of cultural capital.

successful in the future. However this demands major advances in management (Cova et al., 2007, p21). The existence of a group of united customers will shift some of the marketers' power to the consumer tribes, which might try to appropriate it (Cova et al., 2007, p17; Kozinets, 1999, p258). According to Cova (2007, p4), *"(...) Consumer Tribes rarely consume brands and products – even the most mundane ones – without adding to them, grappling with them, blending them with their own lives and altering them"*. They are turning normal goods into symbols of group solidarity (Hebdige, 1979, p126), which is not in every case a favourable situation for a brand. Brand managers are not only facing the challenge of having to anticipate that the consumer is co-creating the brand. The climax of this issue is the fact that there are several consumer tribes, all trying to appropriate the brand and impose their, often opposing, values and identity on the brand. As a result for some consumer groups, the brand might be associated with the "wrong" crowd, the "wrong" values and as a consequence the brand image will be diluted. In the worst case, loyal customers will stop purchasing, because it sends the "wrong" message; a message they don't want to be associated with.

This paper illustrates the case of the fashion brand Stone Island, and its association with perceived hooligan connotations, such as violence, danger and crime. In order to fully grasp the impact of this example it is necessary to take a closer look at the fashion industry and its peculiarities.

### **3.4 The particularities of the fashion industry**

#### **3.4.1 The need for cultural capital**

A major particularity of fashion is its fast pace. Fashion is transitory; therefore the phenomenon of "being in fashion" will necessarily lead to "being out of fashion" at a later point (Gronow, 1993, p93-94). Fashion has life cycles, just like any other product, which are helpful to understand consumers' purchasing behaviour. The structure of fashion and other product lifecycles is basically the same (Sproles, 1981, p116): The stages (1) introduction, (2) growth, (3) maturation and (4) decline are still valid. They translate to (1) the adoption by fashion leaders, (2) increasing public acceptance, (3) mass conformity and (4) the inevitable decline. Nevertheless there is an important difference to be acknowledged, which distinguishes fashion from other kinds of products: the cycles' time frames. Sproles (1981, p117) differentiates between two time frames: Long run cycles, marking major secular styles over decades or centuries. And on the other hand short run cycles, represent seasonal acceptance, during a period of months to years.

Due to its fast pace, a perpetual consensus of taste will never really exist and the proper display of fashion demands knowledge and taste. Therefore Bourdieu's (1986) concept of "cultural capital" is especially applicable in fashion. Having the economic capital to buy expensive fashion brands isn't enough to communicate and secure social status. What is needed is a style that is exerted within the boundaries of socially valid taste (Gronow, 1993, p90).<sup>4</sup> Style can be understood as a selection of objects that are combined, and through their selection and combination have communicative potential (Kjeldgaard, 2009, p72). However the intended and the actually conveyed message might not always be the same. This can be illustrated by the example of so called "fashion victims", who are often newly riches who want to display their social status and sense of fashion. However they are led astray, displaying the latest trends and high-end brands in excess, which makes them look gaudy and tacky and they are being labelled as the "*expensively misguided*" (Schiermer, 2010, p86; Fairchild, 1998, p.89).

It has to be understood, that a person-object relationship is never two-way, but always three-way (person-object-person) (Belk, 1988, p147). The ideal image that the consumer is trying to portray might be misunderstood by the observer. And in the end the message conveyed lies in the eyes of the beholder. A successful self-expression therefore requires realistic self-assessment.

It might also be the case that self-expression fails because the observer is not familiar with the consumer's social setting and culture. After all, fashion is about the creation of social bonds and ensures that consumers will fit into a given social setting (Thompson & Haytko, 1997, p35) Therefore a member of the working class may not always understand the message created by an upper-class person's fashion style, and the same might for example apply for parents and their children. The observer has to know the meanings that are being coincided by certain brands or products, in order to encode the message the consumer is trying to create. This knowledge is highly dependent on the way and speed of the diffusion of fashion styles. Different theories regarding this topic will be explored in the next chapter.

### **3.4.2 Diffusion of fashion trends**

It is undeniable that the fashion industry has an important influence on the direction of fashion. However in the end it depends on the consumer, if a new trend will be accepted or declined. Therefore fashion entrepreneurs take small steps and avoid radical innovations, which are at risk of not being accepted by the critical mass. Schiermer (2010) promotes the view that fashion is reducible to pure (unconscious or unreflected) social needs and that people do not choose to follow fashion. In fact he

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<sup>4</sup>NB: It has to be understood that fashion does not have an ideal standard of good taste, but a form of universal taste, which allows for singularity and subjectivity of individual tastes.

points out that *“the day that people freely choose their objects without imitational bias would simply be the end of fashion as a social dynamic.”* (p94/97). This tendency to imitate also explains the diffusion of changes in fashion. Understanding this process is an important step towards realising in which way the diffusion process determines the successful acceptance of changes in fashion. Moreover it will reveal different perspectives on consumer groups and their impact on brand acceptance. Generally, there are four different ways of trend diffusion: The trickle-down theory, the mass-market theory, the theory of collective selection and the subculture leadership theory (Law et al., 2004, p363; Sproles, 1981, p118f).

The trickle-down theory goes back to Simmel’s (1957) upper class theory of fashion. As lower classes are historically on a permanent quest of catching up with the upper class, they are trying to generate similarity by adopting their style of fashion. However the elite are dedicated to maintain their exclusivity. Therefore, once a certain threshold of diffusion is crossed, the privileged groups drop the innovation and adopt a new one. As a result it can be said that every innovation has its origin in the upper class and trickles down to other social classes (Ragone, 1996, p310; Sproles, 1981, p119; Simmel, 1957, p544f). However this view is considered being outdated, and predominantly applicable for 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century European society. A defined and visible elite in a traditional sense does no longer exist and contemporary societies are rather considered to be mass consumption societies (Schiermer, 2010, p87; Ragone, 1996, p311).

Therefore a mass–market theory seems to be more appropriate. This view is based on the fact that mass production and mass communication enable the diffusion of fashion at the same time within each class (Ragone, 1996, p311; Sproles, 1981, p119) Each class has its own opinion leaders and the flow of adoption goes from them to the rest of their peers.

Blumer (2005, p281f) however doesn’t support the view of class differentiation either and even goes further by advocating the diffusion of fashion as a case of collective selection. He suggests that innovators, leaders, followers and participants are all involved in a collective process. Collective tastes are formed and those, which are reflecting the spirit of the time the best, will gain a competitive edge and become fashionable.

A theory that is particularly important in the context of this paper is Sproles’ (1981) subcultural leadership theory, which was seen as a wholly new process of fashion diffusion at that time. Subcultures such as blacks, youths or blue-collar workers may have a unique style, which is detected and appreciated by the larger population. As a consequence this particular style diffuses from its origins and is adopted by the mass population (Sproles, 1981, p120).



Goulding & Saren (2007, p231), who researched the subculture of Goths, divided this process into three main stages which are rebellion, fragmentation and commodification: Being a member of a new subculture means being outside the mainstream but united through common passions pursuing collective, ritualised rebellion. However, as more members joined the subculture, the original motives of the innovators get gradually lost. This sensation can be connected to the concept of informational cascades. According to this view, decision makers will at some stage ignore private information and just follow the behaviour of the preceding individual (Bikhchandani et al., 1992, p994) Furthermore it supports the notion, that individuals want to be part of a group for the love of objects, being associated with this group not the other way round (Schiermer, 2010, p95).

The second stage of commodification is fragmentation, which goes alongside with the evolution of a subculture (Goulding & Saren, 2007, p232-235). The Goth subculture for example was fragmented in terms of music and fashion and developed different strides, such as Cyber Goths, Romantics or Vampire Goths. In the course of this development, solidarity of the group is increasingly based on appearance and form. This again enables the adoption by the mainstream and thus commodification, which becomes apparent by the increasing availability in the retail and leisure industry. However the diffusion of subcultural style into mainstream is usually encountering resistance by the members of the subculture, as the adoption by outsiders can dilute its original appeal (Berger & Heath, 2007, p123; Rinallo, 2007, p77; Shouten & McAlexander, 1995, p59). A practical example of subcultural leadership theory would be the adoption of the British Teddy Boys style in the 1960s.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore it is not anymore just the upper class, which wants to be exclusive and rejects recent adoptions of stylistic choices as soon as the mass market appropriates them. Fashion is a social phenomenon and therefore got increasingly more complex with the abolishment of the typical social hierarchies of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. Individualisation and the perpetual emergence of new consumer tribes generate a continuous tug-of-war for the appropriation of fashion styles and brands. That implies that co-creation does not only happen between a company and THE customer; but between a company and a multiplicity of consumer groups. Those circumstances present fashion marketers and brand managers with various, continual challenges. One of the most important is the risk of brand dilution. Especially in the fashion industry it is true that the product is actually the brand, which allows for especially high price mark-ups (Kort et al., 2006, p1363). However it is a fine line between

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<sup>5</sup> Fyvel (1963): The original Teddy Boys were young, unsophisticated proletarians and therefore not the paragon of fashion and style. They adopted the style of the Edwardian era, which looked like a masquerade on them, and spent significant amounts of money on their appearance. After a while the stylistic choices of the Teddy Boys diffused into the mainstream and became a mass movement. Furthermore the cult inspired the later Dandyism in the working class.

popularity and brand dilution; between exclusivity and awareness of the brand. And for a brand's image and equity it is vital to strike a balance.

Knowing your customer (KYC) is a crucial concept in marketing, and particularly valid for products with social identity functions. Marketers have to be aware of who is buying their brand, and what they are trying to communicate with it. Consumers are not only co-creating a brand intentionally but also unknowingly, just by buying and using the brand. They transfer their own image and identity to the brand. And this is not a static concern. Fashion is a highly dynamic industry and accordingly this matter needs continuous reassessment. However companies can't know each of their customers individually. That is why marketers are segmenting the market into distinct groups, according to various characteristics, such as demographics. However the marketing complexity of social identity products as well as a change in societal dynamics postulates segmentation practices that go beyond macro-social factors. A new way of customer segmentation has to be developed, which embraces customers as members of consumer tribes. Marketers have to know their dynamics and their symbolism from the tribe's point of view as well as from the market's point of view, in order to understand why their brand is attractive to the tribe and why this particular tribe is regarded as a threat by other consumers.

In the following the case of Stone Island will be presented; an Italian fashion brand that is holding strong associations with football hooliganism. It will be explored if and how those links influenced the brand image and finally if these unintended consumer groups are an actual threat to the company or an opportunity.

## **4 Research Design**

The research question that originates this paper is clearly of a practical nature. Of course, it entitles theoretical interest, but fundamentally it's very relevant for practitioners that want to understand the evolution of their brands. Therefore the present study can be considered a case of applied research, because of its clear objective of improving a given situation in managerial practice (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p5)

As explained in the Literature Review section, there is currently a high interest on co-creation as a marketing paradigm, but there's still no research development around the topic of brands' unintended segments as a consequence of co-creation processes. This explorative approach classifies the study as part of an inductive process, which attempts to draw generalizable conclusions out of observations. The

approach of grounded theory will be used in order to generate a categorization on unintended consumer segments, with the data obtained in the case analysis.

Last, in terms of the overall description of the present investigation, it is clearly a qualitative approach because of its emphasis in using words to build meanings. *“The difference between quantitative and qualitative research strategies can be perceived in a number of ways but the most fundamental is the latter strategy’s commitment to interpretivist accounts. (...) The basic thrust, then, of a qualitative approach is that of the interpretation of actions, events and perspectives through the eyes of those being investigated.”*(Bryman & Bell, 2007, p14). Bryman & Bell (2007) oppose quantitative research’s tendency to impose meanings to the qualitative goal of exposing meanings, and this aspect is particularly relevant in this paper that seeks to understand the impact that certain consumer groups may have on brands’ identities.

A research design is the way the investigation is organized, including the collection of data, to achieve the research aims (Easterby-Smith, 2008, p83). In this case, the selected design is a case study, which is *“an empirical inquiry that: investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used”* (Svengren, 1993, p445). As explained above, the nature of this research question is explorative; therefore this type of design seems perfectly suitable as *“case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events”*(Yin, 1989, p2).

For some authors, such a design needs a previous set of theories before even starting to collect case data. For others, previous theories may compromise the possibility of finding new and interesting categories (Svengren, 1993, p447). In this paper, since the topic of unintended segments has not been presented before, previous research will be used as a contextual framework to approach the area of interest in the most suitable way.

Case studies can be used for a number of research objectives: enabling descriptions, testing theories or generating theories (Eisenhardt, 1989, p535). Regarding this latter goal, case studies are often believed to be more limited than other methodologies because researchers’ preconceptions may jeopardize the analysis. However, Eisenhardt says that in reality is the exact opposite because opposing views and conflicting realities can “unfreeze” ideas and as a consequence generate theory that is less biased than the one built from other design (Eisenhardt, 1989, p546). Of all the goals above mentioned, generating

theory will be the focus of this paper in order to serve as the foundation of future research on unintended consumer segments.

In case study designs, the process of sampling becomes extremely relevant, because as Svengren (1993, p455) explains, *“The quality of a case study research, whatever approach or method, is dependent on the quality of the researcher and the relation with the organization studied.”* It is evident that the researcher needs to immerse himself in the selected organization and this means that not only the chosen sample should be relevant and accurate in terms of the research topic, but it also should be empirically approachable as a study object. The specific nature of case studies implies that this research employs theoretical sampling, meaning cases are chosen for theoretical rather than statistical reasons (Eisenhardt, 1989, p533) Stone Island was chosen as the subject of this case study because of its close fit to the phenomenon that is the topic of this paper. Due to the richness of information that can be found about both the company and its consumer groups, this brand seemed particularly well fitted for this study’s purposes.

Regarding data collection methods archives, interviews, questionnaires and observations are usually present in case studies (Eisenhardt, 1989, p534) This particular paper is centred in the fashion business, a world that, as explained in the literature review, is a construct of individual values and expressions in constant interaction with social imagery. The particularities of this business and of the studied phenomena call for methods that enable grasping individual meanings as well as wider cultural trends. Therefore, the selected data collection methods will be interviews and netnography. Thompson & Hayko (1997, p15) explain that *“(...) consumers use fashion discourse to inscribe their consumption behaviours in a complex ideological system of folk theories about the nature of self and society. By appropriating fashion discourse, consumers generate personalized fashion narratives and metaphoric and metonymic references that negotiate key existential tensions and that often express resistance to dominant fashion norms in their social milieu or consumer culture at large”*. Following the example of these authors, this paper will leverage on in-depth interviews: on the one hand, the interviews will dig into the selected organization’s marketing strategy and intended segments, as well as its core values and views on cultural associations. On the other hand, the interviews will be conducted on particular consumers of Stone Island that have developed a special relationship with the brand as advocates or community members. These interviews will seek to understand what is it that consumers are seeing in this brand, and enable to connect these meanings with the social trends in their environments.

Personal interviews are suitable for this sort of in-depth elaboration. For this paper, they will be combined with another method to maximize their explanatory power: netnography. In the words of Kozinets (2002, p2), author of foundational papers on this method, it can be defined as *“a new qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research techniques to the study of cultures and communities emerging through computer-mediated communications”*. Besides its leveraging on the increasing growth of Internet as a source of information and a place of interaction with consumers, there are a number of factors that make this a very useful technique. First, it is less time-consuming than observation and interviews. Second, it is considered more unobtrusive than traditional ethnography, since it captures the subject’s interactions in their natural environments, unlike more artificial recreations such as focus groups. Third, its open-ended inquiry quality makes it recommendable for exploratory studies such as the present paper (Sandlin, 2007, p289).

Kozinets (2002, p4) identifies five types of online communities that are appropriate for netnography approaches: boards, independent web-pages, listservs, multi-user dungeons and chat rooms. Of all these categories, this paper will focus on the first category, also called usegroups or newsgroups, organized around certain products or lifestyles. This kind of online interactions among consumers will be illustrative and provide rich verbatim that will complete the interpretation process started with the interviews. Kozinets (2002, p5) also suggests certain features that make these communities suitable for netnography, which are either: a segment that is more relevant for the research question, topic or group; higher traffic of postings; larger numbers of message posters; more descriptively rich data; or more between-member interactions. Because of the explorative nature of this study, the descriptive power of the brand communities’ information is considered as more relevant than the amount of it; in short, quality will be privileged over quantity. The information gathered through the netscrapping process will be incorporated not only into the analysis but also into the case study. This use of the information will provide a richer description of the company and enable readers to a better understanding of the studied phenomenon.

For this paper’s research purposes, an interview was conducted with Lotta Axelsson, Consumer Insights Manager at Sony Ericsson. She provided very interesting views on today’s marketing research challenges, particularly regarding the method of netnography. On the topic of representativeness, which is particularly relevant for this method considering the endless amount of information available online, she claims: *“We need to give up on representativeness. It’s simply impossible today, and maybe we have also fooled ourselves for a long time. It’s not possible to make representative samples anymore. Today*

*consumers don't really need market research to express their opinions, because they can express those everywhere, anywhere, every time.(...) I think we need to realize that and be honest about it. And I think using figures; you can support any story you like to. But what's necessary nowadays is to have a lot of different sources to support those figures. But you need to back it up with much more qualitative information with text or images; because you have to understand the "why".* Axelsson underlines the fact that in netnography, the researcher's interpretative skills are more important than ever: in this context, the strength of an observation does not come from the size of the sample but from its explanatory richness. *"You need to realize that in the today's world, the information is there, and available for everyone. And what you need is people with brainpower that can make sense out of it. And your interpretation is as good as anybody else's. There are no rights or wrongs. You can make your points reliable and trustworthy if you use a lot of different angles on the topic, and support your interpretations by different things. A holistic view is important. It's not always the quantity of people that counts. But there might be some individuals who stand out with different views, and maybe it's them who are right. To be in the front is to dare to challenge."*

Axelsson's observations on the trustworthiness of a researcher's conclusions lead to a reflection on the concepts of reliability and validity. In both quantitative and qualitative research, reliability and validity are a fundamental concern for investigators. But for qualitative researchers, this criterion generates different views: while some authors employ the terms in similar ways to quantitative researchers, others call for the use of different terms due to the lack of absolute truths about the social world (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p 414). This paper shares the latter vision: the social reality is complex by nature, and there may be several equally compelling representations of the same phenomena. Hammersley (1992)<sup>6</sup> proposes that validity means that an empirical account must be credible and should take into account the amount and kind of evidence used in relation to the facts. He also says that the concept of *validity* should be combined with that of *relevance*, meaning the importance of a topic within its substantial field or its contribution to the related literature. Therefore, this paper will focus on ensuring that the quantity and quality of the empirical data are satisfactory and comply with Hammersley's validity standards. At the same time, this author's relevance standards will be crucial due to the explorative nature of this paper: the topic of unintended segments has not been investigated before and will consequently be a significant contribution towards branding literature.

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Bryman & Bell, p415.

## 5 Case Study

### 5.1 Hooliganism

#### 5.1.1 Origin of the concept of hooliganism

The term *hooliganism* can be understood in a broad sense as violent or disorderly behaviour in the context of football fans. It is important to note that the origin of the word does not stem from a formal academic definition, but from the common use of media; especially the tabloids that contributed early on to the popularization of the term (Pearson, 2007, online source). Pearson (2007) distinguishes between two types of violent behaviour related to hooliganism. On the one hand there is the spontaneous and low level of violence caused by spectators during matches. On the other hand there is a more organized violence, performed by gangs (or 'firms') who attach themselves to football clubs and are fighting other clubs, sometimes a long way in time and space from the actual match. The fact that typical hooligan behaviour is not restricted to the football courts is very important for the means of this paper, because it sheds light on the reach of hooliganism into popular culture: *"Violent behaviours take place on both match and non match days and in other contexts (i.e., bars, pubs, shops, railway and bus stations, streets, etc.) apart from the stadium, making it harder for the police to anticipate clashes."* (Maniglio, 2006, p204).

There are records of disorderly conduct in sports going all the way back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, but hooliganism as a popular term came up in the 1960s. Through the decades that followed, violent episodes related to football significantly increased in number. Furthermore they began to receive a lot of attention from the media, due to the shocking nature of stories such as the 1985 European Cup final between Liverpool and Juventus, where 39 people died; or the 1989 FA Cup Semi-final between Liverpool and Nottingham, where 96 people lost their lives (Dunning, 2000, p145). During the 1990s this topic became less newsworthy and media coverage of hooliganism began to decrease in England. This does not mean that violent episodes were actually reduced in number, only that they weren't as sensationally reported as before. The role of the media in portraying hooliganism as a social threat is significant. It has been said that it was tabloids in the 1970s and 1980s that amplified the problem and created panic by blowing the issue out of proportion (Pearson, 2007, online source).

Although the phenomenon of hooliganism and the term in itself is commonly associated with England, studies on the matter evidence that its scope is much wider; other countries such as Germany and Italy

reported even more incidents of this sort. In fact, it could be said that hooliganism is highly spread throughout Europe, and is becoming increasingly visible in Central and South America as well (Dunning, 2000, p143).

### **5.1.2 On the causes of hooliganism**

Regarding the causes of hooliganism, politicians and the media relate it to a number of factors such as: alcohol or drug consumption, players themselves incurring in violent behaviour, unemployment, a general spread of violence throughout society, hooligans' own personal background of violence, extreme identification with traditionally rival teams, social frustration or non-adaptation. However, none of them can be considered a single cause explanation in itself. For instance, Maniglio (2006, p204) notes that alcohol consumption cannot be said to be a direct cause of football hooliganism because not all hooligans drink before fighting and not all of them who drink fight later. Similarly, Dunning (2000, p151) denies that unemployment is the root of hooliganism: *"During the 1930s when unemployment in England was high, the incidence of reported match related violence was at an all-time low. Similarly, when English football hooliganism began to enter its current phase in the 1960s, the national rate of unemployment was at its lowest ever recorded level."*

Within the academia, different disciplines point at various explanations for hooliganism. From a psychological perspective *"recognized supremacy"* is the ultimate goal for hooligans. *"Hooligans say that they need to support and to fight in order to be recognized as good hooligans, i.e., as good supporters as well as good fighters. (...) the behaviour of hooligans could be similar to other group hostile interactions. Other youth movements (e.g., Nazis, Fascists, and Skinheads) feel powerful and put others down because of their race, ethnic origins, religious beliefs, or sexual orientation. They cover up their inferiority by pretending to be superior."* (Maniglio, 2006, p207). Sociology approaches highlight the community aspect of hooliganism: *"The football ground has been the locale of male, working-class leisure par excellence. Traditionally, the local football club is inextricably bound up with the men folk of its ambient, working-class community, alongside surrounding pubs and clubs. Fights between football fans have been a longstanding aspect of the attending experience."* (Giulanotti and Armstrong, 2002, p213).

Hooliganism as the habit of violence in football has been criminalized and persecuted by governments since the 1970s, but the results have not been entirely successful. Violence has not disappeared, and the waste of official time and resources upsets the general public. Yet the English experience evidences that it is possible to reduce extreme disorder in and outside stadia: after being banned from European club



cups in the 1980s, English courts today are relatively safe. Pearson (2007, online source) claims that violence may be controlled but never eliminated, because *“whenever large groups of predominantly males get together, often under the influence of alcohol, there is the potential for disorder, regardless of whether there is a football match taking place or not.”*

The hooligan culture generates intense curiosity among outside audiences, and this is at the same time cause and consequence of its huge impact on popular culture. Crawford (2004, p135) explains that *“In recent years ‘hooliganism’ has become a genre in itself within popular culture. Numerous television programmes and videos have been produced that either seek to ‘explain’ hooliganism, provide insight into its ‘murky’ world, or purely offer voyeuristic entertainment to the viewing public. (...) Football hooliganism provides the pinnacle of this voyeuristic journey into the (under)world of alcohol, danger, violence and overt masculinity for the consuming public to enjoy in the comfort (and safety) of their own homes.”* There are so many autobiographies of former hooligans turning into best-sellers that some would say it’s a new genre, with Hornby’s (1992) *Fever Pitch* considered the initiator of this trend. Hooliganism has also been investigated in numerous documentaries, with MacIntyre’s (1999) *Uncovered* on the Chelsea fans being one of the most famous. Among the numerous examples of hooligan-related films, *The Firm* (1988), *The Football Factory* (2004) and *Green Street* (2005) can be considered the most influential (Poulton, 2007, p153).

### **5.1.3 Hooligan features and the birth of casual style**

Certain characteristics can be considered as common for hooligans across the world: they come predominantly from the lower levels of the social scale and are basically working class youths. They tend to resent and resist formal education; are more likely to be unemployed; have parents who display a relatively tolerant attitude towards the use of violence and aggression; and gain prestige and status from fighting and generally displaying macho characteristics (Dunning, 2000, p160).

These demographic features were not enough to identify who was a hooligan and who was not. That is why fashion and clothing became central to these groups from the very beginning, both to recognize each other and be recognizable for others. In this case, the dominant purpose of fashion for hooligan groups is the social identity function as members are influenced by a social approval motive, as

described in the social congruency model. At the beginning, hooligans adopted the Mod style of the 1950s<sup>7</sup>, replacing it with a more edgy look in the 1960s and 1970s: the Skinhead aesthetics.<sup>8</sup>

As any other social phenomenon, hooliganism evolved over time, and the following decades saw a relative increase in the participation of young skilled workers in these groups. The *firms* provided a space of belonging and empowerment, and young men from different social backgrounds began to consider it as a valid way of self-expression. The change in the typical hooligan profile had consequences on their external appearance: while until the 1980s firm members accepted the Skinhead style, new hooligans resented the recent association with the middle class. This gave place to the development of what became known as the *Casual style* that is intended to be *classless* instead of *middleclass* (Dunning, 2000, p152).

There are other explanations for the birth of the Casual style: some say that in the late 1970s when the English firms began to visit other European countries while supporting their teams, they brought back expensive Italian and French designer sportswear, most of which they looted from stores. These clothing brands had not been seen in the country before, and soon other fans were pursuing these rare items of clothing, such as Lacoste or Sergio Tacchini shirts, and original adidas trainers. By that time, the police forces were thinking that hooligans dressed like Skinheads, so the expensive designer clothes were a great facade for hooligans. This new way of dressing more subtly, avoiding club colours, made it easier to enter public spaces such as pubs without immediately engaging in fights (Didcock, 2005, online source).

#### **5.1.4 Casuals and the centrality of brands**

Here lies the key importance of the Casual culture for this paper: while Mods, Skinheads or any other cultures would wear *just any* suit or shirt in the culture's style, Casuals' requirements were absolutely clear – they wanted *specific brands*. As Mottam (2003, online source) puts it: *“To be a dandy, mod, punk or skin involves an attention to detail shared by the Casual, but thanks to branding, that attention to detail can be reduced to a basic list of clothing manufacturers, rather than, to take mods as an example, an in-depth understanding of the proper number of cuff buttons and an eye for the correct width of tie. (...) But the fact remains that Casual was the first brand-led fashion movement to take hold in the UK, and it is branding that has made it last.”*

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<sup>7</sup>The typical mod aesthetic for men could be described as tailor-made suits with narrow lapels, thin ties, button-down collar shirts, pointed-toe shoes, and neat hairstyles.

<sup>8</sup>The typical skinhead aesthetic for men could be described as long or short-sleeve button-up shirts, sheepskin 3/4-length coats, parkas, jeans or combat pants worn deliberately short to show off boots, braces, loafers, and hair cropped.

Early on in the 1980s, Casuals were spotted in Sergio Tacchini, Lacoste, Fila, Ellesse, Diadora, and Kappa. During the 1990s new brands became the choice of Casuals, like Stone Island, Ralph Lauren, Fred Perry, Barbour, Burberry, and Acquascutum. Casual style became an entity of its own, and although it's still highly linked to football fans, many men adopted it without necessarily being engaged in the firms. However, the association of some of these brands to certain hooligan characteristics such as masculinity, power and camaraderie provide a symbolic meaning to its users that cannot be ignored. In the words of the interviewed Stone Island fan: *"I love the Casual clothing style because it reflects my kind of personality. I've always been into sports. I like to dress proper, but in a sporty way, like mixing nice clothes with comfortable shoes. (...) There are also other people who are adopting the style. But I would say that probably 99% of the people adopt the casual style because they see associations with the hooligans and they are fascinated about it. Or they think it's cool."*

It is important to differentiate the Casual style from both sportswear and the looks inspired by football players. Casual clothing is not designed to play the sport, but to enjoy it as a spectator and to be elegant and comfortable for socializing after the game. Therefore, it is not restricted by the functionality in shapes and materials that are characteristics of sports clothing. Stone Island's owner and creative director, Carlo Rivetti, warns: *"Pay attention. Sportswear is not active. So my competitors are not Nike or adidas. The usage is not an active one. I hate sweat. We design for civil use; to go and enjoy the game. Not to actually play."* On the other hand, Stone Island is not as upper-tier and luxurious as the style that some football players took from famous designers, specifically those in Italy. Giorgio Armani's satin-lined suits are considered the prototype for footballer's elegance, and he has referred to them as the new style icons after actors and models (Coad, 2005, p125). This style is not relaxed and easy-going as Casuals intend to be seen, therefore is not inspirational for them.

Although Casual brands may have popularized into the general public, they still carry a strong reference of power within hooligan groups, and therefore they are to be handled with care. An interviewed brand fan explains *"Anyone can be casually dressed or be a Casual. That actually has nothing to do with being a hooligan. Regular supporters dress Casual as well, because it's part of the football culture. But the hooligans, they wear the high-end brands of the Casual clothing, e.g. Stone Island that a regular supporter probably wouldn't wear. There is a few that wear Stone Island, even though they are not hooligans, because they are just dedicated to the Casual style. But mainly it depends which part of the hierarchy you are in. The hooligans wear the high-end Casual brands and the other ones wear the lower Casual brands. Stone Island is probably the only brand that is taboo to wear if you are not a hooligan. All*

*the other brands people can wear, without being hooligans. (...) They (hooligans) wouldn't do anything if you're just wearing Lacoste or Henry Lloyd or any kind of these brands. (...) But definitely Stone Island. They're saying that if you're going to a football match and you're wearing Stone Island, you have to be prepared to stand up for it and be prepared to fight. 'Do you have the balls to wear Stone Island?' that's what they say."*

There are two points to be highlighted from the previous paragraph: dressing in Casual style does not equal being a hooligan. Casual style is strictly related to football, but it is possible to be a Casual without being a hooligan. On the other hand, all hooligans consider themselves Casuals, so it could be said that hooligans are a subculture within the bigger Casual culture. And though they both share a passion for football, Casuals emphasize the fashion component of their culture, while hooligan values imply violent behaviour. The second point is that *firms* still resent this generalization and attempt to retain part of the symbolic power of clothes. That is why they consider certain brands like Stone Island as strictly their territory, and they are willing to fight for it in the literal sense of the word. As explained in the reviewed literature, what starts as a niche style quickly expands through early adopters, until it becomes so massive that the initial users feel alienated and eventually abandon it.

## **5.2 Stone Island**

### **5.2.1 Brand history<sup>9</sup>**

Stone Island's history is a story of passion and technology. Massimo Osti, a graphic designer and intellectual from Bologna, created the brand in 1982. Osti first founded C.P. Company and was considered the forefather of all Italian casual wear brands. He took a great interest in military garments and dedicated himself to the intense study of their functional characteristics (shapes, pockets, fastenings) as well as their colours and gradients. In order to reproduce those garments he did extensive research on fabrics and dyeing, rather than working from patterns, as it was common at the time. During one of his experiments he came across a special material, a heavy lorry tarpaulin. He found a creative way of processing it and created a unique jacket in terms of fabric and dye that outshined everything that has been done before. However the revolutionary item did not fit into the C.P. collection, as it was too casual and progressive for C.P.'s smart aura. As a result a secondary line of the main C.P. Company label was started. This collection was composed of seven jackets, in 12 colours, made of one fabric. The

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<sup>9</sup> The information of this chapter is mainly put together from the company's corporate website as well as an interview with Carlo Rivetti, conducted by the authors, which can be found in Appendix 2. Other sources will be indicated.

items were known as Tela Stella and the collection was named Stone Island. In fact there is much speculation and myth about how Stone Island's got its name. According to some, Osti named the brand after his boat (Butterwood, 2006, online source); others claim that his wife Daniela inspired the name, researching books by Joseph Conrad (Kan, 2010, online source). Whilst a multitude of romanticised explanations and interpretations of Osti's reasoning for the brand name can be found on the Internet, company owner Carlo Rivetti reveals that the naming was rather simple. According to him there was not really a strong marketing approach behind this process. One of Osti's assistants suggested the title of a book he just read, "L'isola di pietra", as a brand name. The name was translated to Stone Island in order to make it internationally more accessible. In fact this book was not only a reference for the brand name. It also inspired the design of the famous black rectangular patch, which buttons onto the upper sleeve of the left arm and is a major distinguishing feature of the brand. The attachment of the infamous patch is inspired by the insignia ("*mostrine*") on Italian army uniforms,<sup>10</sup> and was a clear proof of Osti's aim to pay a tribute to military garments. In general, the items of the Stone Island collection illustrated the heavy army influence, Osti was so passionate about. The first page of the book featured a wind rose, in yellow and green, circled by the Stone Island lettering, which became Stone Island's logo, being displayed on the arm patch.

The collection was an immediate success and was sold out within ten days. The brand enjoyed huge popularity among the *Paninari*, the first generation of Italians that took a deep interest in fashion. They were displaying brands such as Timberland, Burlington and Montclair. Soon also Stone Island became one of those iconic brands, however at that time, it was only merchandised in Italy. That changed when Osti decided that the company needed more structure and resources, and sold his shares to GFT (Gruppo Finanziario Tessile), one of the most important fashion companies in Europe at that time. As a result, in 1989 Stone Island was already selling all over Europe, the US and Japan.

With the sell-off, Carlo Rivetti came into the picture, as a shareholder of GFT. He left GFT in 1993 and acquired 100% of the company, which he renamed into Sportswear Company, consisting of C.P. Company and Stone Island. Three years later Massimo Osti left the company and the Englishman Paul Harvey became the creative force behind Stone Island. Under his influence the brand did not only maintain Osti's legacy but also took it to the next level. After the designer left in 2008, Carlo Rivetti himself took over the art direction, with a multicultural team of designers. Even though Massimo Osti

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<sup>10</sup> The *mostrine* is fixed to the collar and its colour is indicative of the military unit.

left the company and deceased in 2005, the Stone Island brand identity cannot be disconnected from its creator, as those relationships can last far beyond death (Kapferer, 2008, p196).

### 5.2.2 Innovativeness & quality

With the introduction of Stone Island, Osti found a playground for acting out his passion for innovative ways of processing material and progressive dyeing techniques. For Stone Island, he designed garments that, according to Styles UK, displayed a *“unique melding between state-of-the-art materials and a love for the basic functional form offered by military and working clothes”*.

With his innovations Osti turned the textile industry up-side-down. He came up with techniques and processes that revolutionized the clothing industry. His first major textile innovation was garment dye (*“il tinto in capo”*): *“Osti made a jacket in a fabric that consisted of two different fibres, canvas and nylon. He put the complete jacket into a red dye bath. Canvas and nylon react differently to the dye, providing a very special effect. That is basically what tinto was. It was a huge innovation at the time but a standard procedure in fashion ever since”* (Kan, 2010, online source). Another game-changer was the use of the stonewash process in denim, which found an abundant number of imitators.

Osti turned fashion into science, using materials such as Kevlar, glass or metal into his designs. He was a visionary and due to all his innovations, Stone Island became famous worldwide for its cutting-edge garment technology and innovative design.

A highly symbolic product of the brand would be the Ice Jacket, one of the most iconic Stone Island items, created in 1993. Displaying state-of the art chemical and fabric research it was a revolutionary invention. The jacket is heat sensitive and reacts to temperature in a way that it changes its colour drastically and as a result also evoked drastic reactions: *“It was technically very special, it went far beyond innovation, and this was absolutely to the moon! Osti was the first to apply such a highly technical principle in clothing, he was an architect, an engineer.”* (Kan, 2010, online source). According to Kapferer (2008) a brand’s values must be embodied in the brand’s most representative products, as they only can convey meaning this way (Kapferer, 2008, p190-192). The Ice Jacket does exactly that for Stone Island. It is an icon, representing the brand’s passion for experimentation and research.

Stone Island products are of high quality; and this quality also shows in product prices. Jackets range from €270, - (jeans jacket) to €1.030, - (leather jacket).<sup>11</sup> According to those prices, Stone Island can be classified as an upper-range brand. However, with a focus on its attributes it shares certain features with

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<sup>11</sup> Those prices refer to the Spring/Summer collection 2011 on the Stone Island online store, Italy.

a luxury brand. For example, items are handled piece-by-piece and hand-painted. They are unique, enduring and a result of excellent workmanship, comparable to luxury brands like Hermès or Rolls Royce (Kapferer, 2008, p98).

### 5.2.3 Marketing approach

Through the last chapter, it becomes clear that Stone Island is more than just fashion. The brand rather contains associations with science, science fiction or fashion engineering. Carlo Rivetti even states, that he doesn't see his brand as a fashion brand, but feels more comfortable talking about a design brand. The difference is that fashion is about selling lifestyle. Stone Island on the other side is about the product. This can also be seen in the brands advertising, which only illustrated the actual product. It was only recently that the brand decided, *"To put a man inside"*. And even with the model the focus still lies on the garment. The picture only shows a man in a shirt or jacket and looks so minimalistic that it could even have been taken in a police station. This approach towards communication is highly unlikely for conventional fashion ads. For Stone Island the mere display of an item won't do the product any justice. The true magic lies within the production process and the cutting-edge technology behind it. Words like "beautiful" will never be found in a Stone Island product description. Reading about the garment can rather be compared to reading a car manual – it's technical.

Understanding this perspective on the brand it seems natural that the brand follows more of a technology-push approach towards marketing, than a market-pull concept. Rivetti explains that the brand indeed listens to its customers, however refuses to be driven by the market. He states that *"(...) the customers desire what they know. But we always try to do something that is unknown. (...) in my opinion it is stupid to do something that is already on the market. (...) I cannot do a stupid copy. (...) If you always try to run to the market you will always be too late. (...) We stick to the beliefs and the philosophy of our brand and the market will follow. I think integrity is a winning position in the long-term."* Rivetti obviously doesn't want to adapt his brand to the rules of various market segments in order to succeed. Stone Island is not a generalist brand being open and adaptive to just anybody; but a specialist brand, that is rather exclusive and features sine qua non characteristics of the products in order to qualify for the brand (Kapferer, 2008, p275).

The beliefs and philosophy of the brand is about passion. About passion for research, experimentation, function and use; about creating garments inspired by the army, with a marine feel to it. With that in mind the Stone Island's target customer becomes rather obvious. According to Rivetti Stone Island is for real men, who he classifies as a rather simple concept: *"Real men like three things: sports, motors and*

women". Consequently the main medium for ad placement is the *Gazzetta dello Sport*; the most sold daily newspaper in Italy, containing 45 pages of sports. The brand also has a social aspect to it. Rivetti explains, "(...) when two men are walking down the street, wearing a Stone Island jacket, they notice each other. We look each other in the eye and recognise a sort of club. That's also part of the reason why I don't want to do a line for women. Because I think these types of men, (...), they don't want to see their Stone Island men product being worn by women."

The consumer he describes also needs a certain understanding for the brand and is able to appreciate the design, the technology and the time that is being put into a garment.

In order to give the consumer a possibility to increase this understanding, the brand recently featured videos on its corporate webpage and YouTube. The clips include a guided tour through the production site by the owner Carlo Rivetti himself. Furthermore it is shown how the process of garment dyeing works. Through those videos, the viewer gets a chance to experience what is happening behind the scenes. This is also relevant because of the large distance between the company and its final customer. 95% of the company's turnover is made through multi-brand independent boutiques. As a consequence there are several filters in the communication between the brand and the consumer. In order to prevent information loss, the brand planned on enhancing its presence on the Internet.

### **5.3 Stone Island Users**

As stated before, Stone Island's current director Carlo Rivetti does not consider himself restricted by traditional marketing techniques. He does not paint an overly complex picture of the brand's target consumers, because he refers to them as "the simple men" and does not engage into more detailed aspects such as age, income, education, etc. Although this may be a way of emphasizing the brand's confident spirit, it is clear that the company's leadership does not look at consumers under the perspective of strict categories, but following the core values of the company: intuition and innovation.

In order to allow a detailed analysis of Stone Island's consumer base, an identification of three main consumer groups will follow. The insights gained from this segmentation will be the basis for the understanding of unintended consumer segments.

#### **5.3.1 Common users (Consumer Group A)**

Common users will be understood as those consumers that purchase the brand because they like a particular garment and have the resources to afford it. They think that a particular piece of clothing fits



their personal style, but do not consider themselves to be a part of a fashion tribe. They may or may not be aware of Stone Island's association with football, but that is not related to their purchasing behaviour. They may be sporadic or repetitive buyers, they don't engage in typical brand fan practices, such as blogging, advocating, collecting, etc. A typical statement made by a user classified as Consumer Group A might be *"we can all go on and on about how SI means this and SI means that or your this if you wear it and you are that, when it comes down to it I wear it coz it looks bloody smart on me. The designs are what I'm in to and not coz it will last me years and years or I want to be branded into a certain group. I just bought a new jacket for £535. And I can't help myself I'm looking at all new sites online, looking for my next piece. I'm addicted to the label like most of us who buy it."*<sup>12</sup>

### **5.3.2 Casuals (Consumer Group B)**

Casuals will be understood as those consumers that purchase Stone Island because of its strong bond with the Casual style. Casuals share a passion for football with an eye for fashion, and they have developed a recognizable style over the years. Unlike other cultures, they have adopted specific brands as representative of their style, and they are very clear advocates of those brands. They realize that they are part of a bigger group that shares certain tastes, but they prioritize their personal approach when it comes to their appearance. Although they display a cocky attitude when they show off their brands, for them, Casual elegance comes first: they would never engage in fights because that may risk ruining their treasured clothes. *"In reality, today's Casual prefers a stainless, wrinkle-free outfit any time to a brave black eye. "My clothes are expensive and I am not willing to ruin them in any hassle or fight", says Elliot, "Most of us don't want any hassle; we only want to parade our outfits."* (Grosse, 2010, online source).<sup>13</sup>

### **5.3.2 Hooligans (Consumer Group C)**

Hooligans will be understood as those consumers that purchase Stone Island because it means instant identification with the *firms*. Many say that only the top members of these firms are eligible for wearing these brands because it is the ultimate aspiration brand for hooligans. They think of themselves as members of a collective: hooliganism is never individual and they refer to themselves as *us*. They enjoy the attention that they receive for being hooligans. That is why they are not secretive and they don't compromise about it even if that may sometimes carry risks. They glorify the often violent actions of the

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<sup>12</sup> Eric Young on Facebook's unofficial Stone Island Group.

<sup>13</sup> Translated from German: "In der Realität der heutigen Casuals wird ein fleckenloses, knitterfreies Outfit einem furchtlosen blauen Auge eher vorgezogen. "Meine Kleider sind teuer, und ich habe keine Lust, sie mir durch Stress und Schlägerei versauen zu lassen", sagt Elliot. „Dabei wollen die meisten von uns gar keinen Stress, sondern einfach nur unsere Outfits vorführen!"

*firms* because their sense for right or wrong is subdued by the group component. In a discussion on the unofficial Stone Island Facebook group, Warren Tat Tate states: *“Obviously you don’t know REAL BOYS!!! They ALL wear s.i, who’s scared of cops?? Safety in numbers, we travel in large numbers and no group of cops are going to stop us, as was seen by our visit to the dive!!!”*

These Consumer Groups constitute different references of linking values as described in the literature review. While for Group B the linking value is constituted by consumption of certain brands that are representative of a casual style, for Group C it is constituted by the strength of the brotherhood.

#### **5.4 Trends in Stone Island Consumer Practices**

Schau et al. (2009) researched brand communities and tried to answer the question in which way they are creating value. They are conducting an extensive research across nine brand communities and identify twelve value-creating practices (Welcoming, Empathizing, Governing, Evangelizing, Justifying, Staking, Mile Stoning, Badging, Documenting, Grooming, Customizing, and Commoditizing). The authors divide the twelve practices into four “thematic categories” (Social Networking, Impression Management, Community Engagement, and Brand Use practices) and argue that *“Practices work together both to enhance the value people realize when engaged in brand communities and to promote the collective health and welfare of the social bodies centred on brands.”* (Schau et al., 2009, p32f)

However those practices cannot only be found in communities that are centred on merely one brand, that is to say the linking value is the brand. They can also be found within Consumer Tribes that are based on different linking values. The Casuals for example dedicate themselves to consuming a variety of brands and among those also Stone Island. Therefore the identified practices can still be found in the communities they engage in. The following chapter will display how Stone Island users act across different platforms on the Internet, such as discussion forums or social community platforms. In order to make sense of the vast amount of information on Stone Island that can be found online, the netscrapping process will be divided into five trends, which are remarkably visible behaviour patterns of consumers in this virtual environment. The objective of this section is not to synthesize all the data and opinions about the brand, because it's an impossible task, particularly for the present research scope. The key point of the analysis will be the identification of the most significant patterns in which consumers engage with each other and with the brand. These five online trends will be decoded through

the community practices identified by Schau et al. (2009), in order to understand their meaning and their impact on the phenomenon of unintended consumer segments.

#### **5.4.1 Who is the real Stoney? Intragroup distinctions**

An important form of community engagement is *staking*. According to Schau et al. (2009, p44) this practice represents heterogeneity within the brand community and marks intragroup distinctions. In the case of Stone Island, users try to display their expertise on the brand and differentiate themselves from common followers and new fans. One way of showing off their in-depth knowledge and long-term relationship with Stone Island is to claim that the new pieces cannot live up to the earlier garments.

In a discussion on Facebook's unofficial Stone Island group, Dipesh Sodha explains *"My jackets from around 1999 - 2003 piss all over the current day jackets in style, quality, exclusiveness and the mad fabrics used (metal shells, liquid crystals, kevlar, fibre optic lights, full stainless steel and bronze!!)"* An important and often discussed subject he mentions is the exclusivity of the jackets. Customers, whose history with the brand dates back to its beginnings, feel that Stone Island has lost its original appeal by getting too common. And it's not only the fact that too many people wear Stone Island. This resentment over the brand's shift into mainstream is congruent with Liebenstein's snob effect (see section 3.1.3). What's even more important is that those, who begin to adopt it, dilute the original appeal of the brand. However the understanding of *who* ruins the brand differs between every consumer group who tries to appropriate the brand as their own. For hooligans (Consumer Group C) it's the Chavs who ruin Stone Island's image. According to BBC Inside Out, they are Britain's *"working class youth - a kind of white trash underclass"*. Kris Wright posts on the unofficial Stone Island Facebook group's wall: *"Hardly ever wear stone island these days cos of all the little chavs thinking its hip hop. If i do, its without the badge. It's not exclusive anymore, even the rare stuff is easily available if you got thr wedge. Rather wear fjall. Back in the day if someone wore a SI jacket you knew they were a lad, now every fu\*\*\*ng tom dick and abdul are wearing it thinking there a hooligan. Sh\*tc\*\*ts."* The aggressive tone clearly shows the frustration about Stone Island being not exclusive anymore to lads that are members of the *firms*. Chavs are tainting the symbolism of the brand and violate the sense of brotherhood it gives them. On the other side, for the Casuals (Consumer Group B), the hooligans are the ones diluting the brand. In his blog, the Casual representative Thedorf complains, *"You were once a thing of beauty cherished and adored by a select few. A Paradigm of what a garment should be - Beautiful, hardwearing and timeless. Then you became too famous for your own good and unfortunatley was abused and raped by people who only wanted you for what they thought you represented, the hooligan element, instead of a*

*beautiful piece of untainted craftsmanship that you are.*” Also others agree and start classifying Stone Island not as a Casual look, but as a uniform, everybody wears. It can be seen that the different consumer groups all considered themselves as the brand’s rightful owner, minifying the other groups’ relationship to the brand and seeing them as a threat. Wipperfurth would regard this Stone Island’s appropriation as a serendipitous hijack, in this case from two groups at the same time. As stated in the literature review, the term brand hijack will not be used in this paper as it is not enough to grasp the nuances of unintended consumer segments.

#### **5.4.2 The virtual market place**

As with any other online brand community, Stone Island groups and forums are an environment where trade takes place regularly. Schau et al. (2009) refer to this as *commoditizing*, which is the community practice related to the marketplace in terms of distancing or approaching it. Consumers who engage in this kind of practice appeal to the commercial aspect of the brand relationship, either with other consumers or with regards to the company commercialization. In the case of Stone Island, that has currently five flagship stores and sells mostly through a network of distributors, it is utterly common to find posts of people trying to sell or buy these garments; and it is the kind of post that appears as most repetitive in such forums. The non-official Stone Island group on Facebook is a good reference because of the abundance of seller/buyer posts. This type of posts are short and specific, and they are the beginning of a bilateral relationship with other consumers in their private emails. User St Franck’s message is a clear example: *"Selling a few Stone island jacket size medium or small, message me if yar interested."* Often, these posts lead to EBay results, such as Daniel Millar’s that links to his EBay seller profile, or to other stores, both online and offline, for example Ape&Apple’s that links to their own vintage boutique.

There are only few public responses to seller/buyer posts; therefore it’s very difficult to determine whether this trading methodology is successful. At first glance it seems so, because these forums are formed by people that are already interested in the brand and thereby provide a strong base of potential customers. But at the same time, the pre-eminence of indifferent attitudes towards these posts give the impression that users have better reasons for engaging in community practices than just *buying* products. Considering the multiplicity of values behind brand users’ associations, it’s plausible that they feel that forums and blogs should be a space free of commercial connections, so that the true brand aficionados can interact in a non-transactional way. However, something different happens when users are offered to share their opinions: the FOUND\_NYC forum opened a discussion about Stone

Island shops and online stores, and users responded with pictures, descriptions and recommendations of their favourites. Most of them highlight the shop's brand expertise and their close relationship with the owner. For instance, Casual Clothing in Copenhagen gets great reviews: *"The owner Jonas is a great guy and also a member here, VIM. Seem to have a great selection and very reasonable prices for an official stock list. If I lived in Denmark would be shopping there more often". "Many thanks to jonas, bought the above from jonas, unbelievable price, got the two for less than the price of one stoney, even sent the peacoat out to me before I had paid, top man, top shop and top service."*

### **5.4.3 It's picture time**

Another clear trend within Stone Island user groups is the pleasure that consumers get in taking and sharing pictures of themselves in the brands' garments. Among all the brand community practices described by Schau et al. (2009), *badging* is the one that seems most suitable to understand this need for visual self-expression, because it refers to a semiotics component: the symbolic representation of the consumption milestone. The authors give the example of MG cars community members sharing pictures of trips and other driving activities. In the case of Stone Island, the virtual community MySpace is very illustrative on the power of images. For example, the user Stoneislandsoldier publishes numerous pictures of men wearing all kinds of the brand's items, all sharing one particular feature: they all pose with an aggressive attitude, as though they were demonstrating their strength and masculinity. They display the Stone Island badge on the garment as the centre of the image and the body language leaves no space for doubt, even for children: arms crossed, tight fists, chin up, firms or clubs flags in the background. Some members cover their faces with scarves, boosting the intimidating effect that they clearly wish to project. Even women understand the attitude: although they are not supposed to wear the brand, they send photos in suggestive and provocative poses with Stone Island jackets, clearly understanding that they will be more than welcome by brand fans. These kinds of brand users are visibly identified with what was before described as Consumer Group C, because of their fondness of violence symbolism and hard-core football fanaticism.

On the other side, it is possible to identify other users with a profile closer to that described for Consumer Group B, because although they understand the football influence in Stone Island, they emphasize the style component of the brand. These users are very present in the gallery thread of the FOUND\_NYC forum, where they share pictures of the brand; but instead of portraying themselves in aggressive poses, they display their own garments or themselves wearing the garments on various occasions. It seems that the collectible aspect of the brand relationship, as described earlier, was more

important to these users, who value casual elegance over anything else. This can especially be seen in the Facebook group *Football Casuals*, where members put together an outfit and upload pictures of it. Other members comment on the assembly of items, appreciate the owner's taste or criticise certain brands or products. Others also ask if items were for sale or swap.

#### 5.4.4 Big moments

Stone Island users do not only express their devotion to the brand by posing in their gear or composing outfits. They also engage in a practice called *milestoning*, which refers to illustrating important events or achievements in brand ownership (Schau et al., 2009, p44). Stone Island fans are proudly posting pictures of their collections, with every single item being perfectly orchestrated. The badges all face the same direction, some sort their gear by colours and others dedicate an entire closet strictly to their Stone Island gear. The owners don't hide their pride and are glad that they are among like-minded people who can understand and appreciate the achievement. A typical reaction, in this case from the FOUND\_NYC forum, would be *"Vintage pieces, white badges, Shadow pieces, reflectives... What more can a man ask for? Great collection there mate!"* Another important milestone for devoted Stone Island buyers would be the first purchase for their children. On Facebook various pictures can be found, posted by fathers who try to pass on their passion for the brand to their sons. In the unofficial Stone Island group Paul Skuddy Newman uploaded a picture of his baby boy pointing out that *"He's proper naughty in this ... not even 1 year old and swaggers down the street in his SI. The top is meant for a 2 yo but fits him like a glove!"* One and a half year later he posts the next pictures of his son, in his second Stone Island jacket.

Another significant moment in a devotee's life is getting the Stone Island logo permanently tattooed on his body. On YouTube a young man can be watched tattooing himself; others upload pictures of Stone Island badges tattooed on their left upper arms. Tommy Faulkner shows the new compass rose on his back on the Stone Island Facebook group. Furthermore he announces that he would be *"(...) getting the circle round it and "chelsea on tour" where the stone island would be."* In that case the *milestoning* practice is even enhanced by a *customizing* practice; that is modifying the brand in order to suit group-level or individual needs (Schau et al., 2009, p45). In the case just displayed, the user combines his favourite brand with his favourite football club, emphasising the football symbolism of Stone Island. In fact this is not unusual but a common fan art; the club's *firms* tend to integrate the Stone Island logo into their own emblem and there is even a market for badges, which can be bought by fans and collectors. For example on [footybadges.co.uk](http://footybadges.co.uk), badges for the Chelsea firm (*Head-hunters*) can be found,

incorporating the Stone Island compass rose. It is the fans themselves, not the company that are designing and producing these badges. This overtaking of the brand's logo is a visible reference of the on-going co-creation practices that make some authors claim that companies should be more flexible regarding trademark rights (see section 3.2.2).

#### **5.4.5 Brand encyclopaedias**

For genuine Stone Island aficionados, posting pictures or commenting about the brand is not enough: they want to tell their own side of the story. This gives place to many websites that describe the brand history and values, characterize each of its key designers, and explain the origin of brand elements such as the patch, the actual brand name and its association with football, often in contradictory versions. Schau et al. (2009) would understand this behaviour under the practice of *documenting*, which occurs when brand community members construct a narrative of their brand experience.

Committed consumers such as the members of the County Lads forum want to share their knowledge about the Casual culture in general and Stone Island in particular. They also understand the value of images over words, so they provide a brief description of the Casual style evolution over the decades, complemented with a visual aid: images of football table characters dressed in the different brands and garments.

Another example of this behaviour is the Stone Island History by Marc the Baptist, who analyzes on the *dooyooCommunity* the brand's first years, defines his preferences on its various designers, gives out tips for identifying fakes, and compares the garment quality over the years. Like the former blog, he is very serious and detailed in his brand analysis, and is definitely a good source for outsiders that want to understand the role of Stone Island within the Casual movement.

It could be said that through this documenting activities, users are also engaging in another community practice that is *evangelizing*: they are inspiring others to consume, and preaching the brands advantages.

The former presentation of community practices around Stone Island provides a vivid illustration of the way consumers interact among themselves, adding content and creating meaning for the brand. In other words, they are co-creating Stone Island, and this brings back to Cova's (2007, p4) already presented conclusion that "(...) *Consumer Tribes rarely consume brands and products – even the most mundane ones – without adding to them, grappling with them, blending them with their own lives and altering them*".

## 5.5 Stone Island's view on its association with football

After the previous netnography analysis, it is undeniable that the association between Stone Island and the Casual culture, including hooliganism, is solid and omnipresent. The following section will focus on the company's view on this phenomenon.

Company owner and creative director Carlo Rivetti remembers that he first heard of his brand involved in the football culture in 1992, after Manchester United player Eric Cantona gave interviews on UK television wearing a Stone Island jacket. This spontaneous advertising made the brand very well-known in the UK, and after that football fans and players followed quickly. However, Rivetti soon realized that although the football allure explained the sales boost in many European countries, there was a downside to it; the hard-core fans that engaged in hooliganism practices. As explained before, hooligans became the focus of media attention from the early 1980s and the violent episodes became known and rejected by the general public.

When asked whether the hooligan component may affect the brand in a negative way, Rivetti is emphatic: *"When we heard about it, the first thing I felt was shame. I hate violence. It's terrible. I'm a football fan and I love sports in general. I'm Italian and I'm very passionate, but I have a very British approach [to sports]. (...)You have to beat the other team, but when the game is finished, it's finished. This is my approach towards sports so you can easily understand that hooliganism is something that I really hate. And we understand that this association of the brand with the hooligans could be a problem. For example before the World Cup in Japan/Korea 2002, the Japanese police called my Japanese distributor, asking him to teach their policemen, how to recognize Stone Island jackets. In order to identify hooligans. This was not good news to us. (...)I was in Brussels when there were the riots between Liverpool and Juventus supporters. 44 people were killed and I saw everything with my own eyes, so you can imagine what I'm thinking about hooligans."*

Clearly, Rivetti understood that hooligans were not what could be considered the best company for his brand, even if it wasn't the company's strategy to go after this segment. *"There was also a movie about ten years ago that became a cult. It's called "Hooligans" [O.T.: Green Street]. And in the most important scene, the main actor goes down the subway station and is wearing a beige Stone Island raincoat. And we still got calls every two months, asking where they can buy the coat, they saw in the movie. The main actor was always dressed in Stone Island. We were not involved. We only discovered that when the*



*movie was broadcasted.” And at some point, he thought it was necessary to take actions against it. For instance when he was told that the Kevlar jacket’s solid fibre structure was seen by violent gangs as resistant to knife attacks, the company decided to stop its production. So for many years, Stone Island thought it was better to run away from football and avoided addressing the topic of hooliganism.*

*Eventually, this perspective shifted a little: “(...) I started thinking. Because many years ago I had a book, written by a British anthropologist, which was called “The tribe of football”. Because it’s a tribe, a tribe all over the world. Like I always say, we speak different languages, but if you are in a park and there is a ball we become all friends. (...) So in the last two years, I said OK. Of course we didn’t choose the hooligans, they chose us. But not only the hooligans, but it’s the whole football tribe that likes Stone Island. So I don’t think we have to be ashamed of football. Hooligans are only a part of the football tribe, not the only part of the tribe. So instead of running away from football I chose to - I don’t like the word use- let’s say go close to the football philosophy in general.”* In this paragraph, Rivetti acknowledges the fact that hooliganism is not representative of the football culture as a whole, and it would be unfair to treat all football fans as hooligans. This complies with the previous statement that being a Casual doesn’t necessarily mean being a hooligan, but simply a football fan appreciating style. Of course there are football fans that go to the extremes, but the culture as a whole is bigger than that.

Understanding the positive power of the sport, Stone Island realized that they could leverage on football supporters and began to advertise in the *Gazzetta dello Sport*, which is a mainstream Italian sports newspaper. In a similar direction, the company’s official website hosted a football blog with a more intellectual approach towards the sport as compared with the existing TV and radio shows. Rivetti recalls one particular anecdote that made him aware of the significance of Stone Island for this group of people: *“I just remember when we first opened our shop in Milano [2002], there was a Champion’s League match between Milano and a British team, I think it was Manchester. And we knew that there would be a lot of supporters. So obviously there also could be hooligans among them. So I was afraid about my shop. So I put some private security in front of my shop, and I also went to the shop myself, because I wanted to understand. And so I met them. And I don’t know if they were hooligans or if they were supporters, but individually, or in small groups, they are unbelievably sweet. And they went into my shop, which was the first Stone Island store worldwide, and were behaving like deeply catholic guys who had the opportunity to visit St. Peter’s in Rome. And especially in England when they know who I am, they ask me to do photos with them, they hand me their children, they want autographs. I am like a rock-*

*star. And individually they are perfect. But put too many men together, and you don't know what will happen."*

Essentially, the Stone Island strategy towards the hooliganism association evolved from the initial shock and rejection, to a more complex approach where the benefits of the football culture could be maximized. The company does not admit to design its collections giving football a special role; and if football players are embracing the brand it's because of their own taste and not for endorsement reasons. However, Stone Island has not taken a clear stand against hooliganism differentiating it from the main football culture. Rivetti admits that they deliberately avoided the topic because they don't consider it as something to be proud of, but this position may change in the future. *"I'm sure that sooner or later, there will be something. Or somebody will ask me officially on the website about my point of view. (...)The journalists who work for the press, they are older and know everything about Stone Island. So they know about the hooligans and they may ask about it. In printed paper you find my position. But if nobody asks, I will not talk about it, because of course that's nothing I'm proud of."*

In a nutshell, the case of Stone Island is the story of a company that through a social identity product, developed a strong user base. This user base consists of three different consumer segments, each with their own opinions of the brand. Although these Consumer Groups are different, it is still too early to attempt an answer to this paper's research question by determining whether any of them is unfavourable for the brand. Therefore the following analysis will analyze the impact of the different segments on the brand in order to understand if any of them are unintended and in that case, if any of them is unfavourable.

## **6 Analysis**

In previous sections, a series of theoretical concepts were presented, and the Stone Island case was introduced as the core of this paper's analysis. In the next chapter, the brand identity prism will be used to reveal the co-existence of a multiplicity of Consumer Groups within Stone Island's user base. This co-existence will be the basis for introducing the concept of *unintended consumer segments*, and its corresponding categorization. Furthermore, various action paths will be described as the strategies of companies that actually experienced the phenomenon of unintended segments.

## 6.1 Brand Analysis

Following the theoretical approach outlined in chapter 3.1.1, Stone Island will be analyzed through Kapferer’s brand prism. This tool allows for an in-depth understanding of the brand’s identity from both the message sender’s and receiver’s point of view. The brand prism divides the brand into six facets, and can be read both vertically and horizontally. Illustration 2 displays Stone Island’s brand prism. Furthermore the single facets will be explored in greater depth.

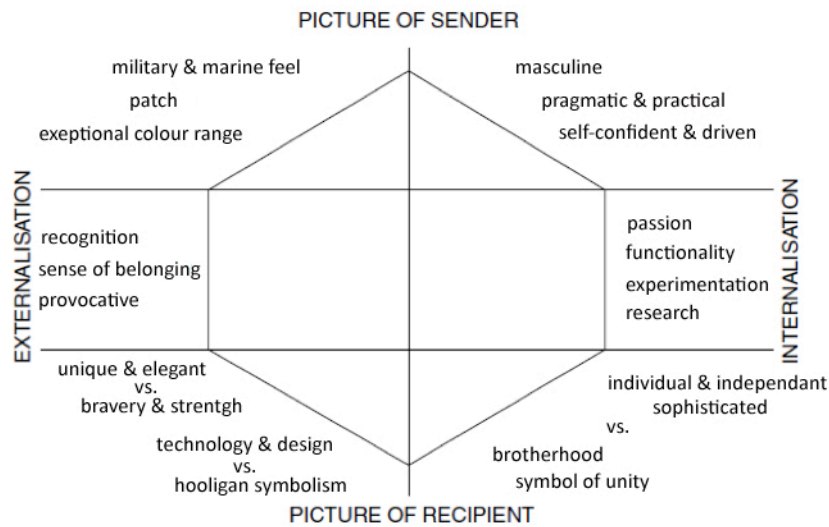


Illustration 2 Stone Island Brand Prism

### 6.1.1 Brand physique

The original inspiration for the first Stone Island garments has not faded away: the military and marine feel is still very visible in every single piece. From the beginning, it was the buttons, the colour range and the straight cut that transmitted the military and marine resemblance. Carlo Rivetti, company owner and creative director, explains that this influence is not only about the look, but even more about functionality: *“If you look at army garment, you will never find a pocket or a particular style of jacket only because it’s beautiful. Everything must be functional.”* Other influences come from the working world: *“We started in the 80s only with militarinaro, now we also look at people who work at the airport, people who work outside.”*

Another special feature of Stone Island garments is its iconic detachable patch. It identifies the item as a Stone Island product, and for brand users it is so crucial that it could be compared to the devotion that

Mercedes Benz owners feel for the silver metal star on the front of the car. They convey such a powerful symbolic message, that they are often stolen as a trophy, exactly like the Mercedes star.

One of the most striking characteristics of a Stone Island product is its exceptional colour range. The reason behind this feature is the company focus on the development of dyeing techniques. The Sportswear Laboratory of Colour is proud to claim that over 60.000 recipes of dyes have been developed throughout the years.

Overall, all these features combine into making Stone Island items an instant eye-catcher. Both brand fans and non-connoisseurs react to the display of one of these garments, and even if some may not recognize the brand, it is undeniably striking. Craig McNeil for example, a dedicated brand fan, states in an interview with Vice magazine that he discovered with Stone Island because he noticed *“people wearing these different coloured jackets in and around London”*.

### **6.1.2 Brand personality**

If Stone Island was analyzed as if it was a human being, it would be predominantly masculine. Not only is it exclusively designed for men, but its functionality is directly linked to men’s pragmatic and practical approach to clothing. As Haj-Najafi writes online for Vice Magazine *“Stone Island’s over-engineered, fancy, technology-advanced coats (...) reinforce the hyper masculine appeal of that shoulder-mounted label”*.

As a person, Stone Island would also be self-confident and driven: a man that does not ask for permission, who is always in the search for the next thing and is aware of his impact on others.

### **6.1.3 Brand culture**

Carlo Rivetti describes the history of Stone Island as inspired by passion. The company is absolutely dedicated to improving the craft and techniques behind its products. *“When we start the research we don’t know yet what we will be able to obtain. And if we are able to obtain something we will put it in the next collection. We don’t do research and say, OK we do this research for the next collection. Sometimes we need three or four years to develop an idea. There is an unbelievable amount of work behind the key fabric.”*

As stated before, functionality is the key value behind the design of Stone Island lines. That is the condition that designers must follow in order to work for the company, because they see themselves as selling a product, not a lifestyle. *“Other companies advertise a lifestyle. I advertise a product.”*

Stone Island as a brand was born as an exercise of experimentation, and the spirit of constant research continues to be a fundamental guideline for its management. Experimentation is the backbone of Stone Island, and it may be said that it is not a means to an end. In this case, the journey is its own reward.

#### **6.1.4 Brand relationship**

Stone Island's striking visual impact establishes an immediate relationship of recognition among users. Brand fans describe it as a sort of recognizing nod and wink when fellow "stonies" see each other on the streets. This recognition comes from the fact that using the brand and understanding its meaning, evokes a sense of belonging to the Stone Island tribe. They know that the clothes they are wearing demand a certain mindset and values, and they acknowledge this in others. As Rivetti explains, *"What I noticed is that when two men are walking down the street, wearing a SI jacket, they notice each other. We look each other in the eyes and we recognize a sort of club."*

But the brand also draws the attention of people who are not acquainted with it: Stone Island is essentially provocative and triggers responses. A *stonie* may get all kind of reactions, ranging from appreciation, admiration, and disapproval to rejection. The interviewed brand fan explains: *"I have reactions all the time. Mostly from people that I know. Like "Ohhhhh, are you a hooligan?" or "Why are you wearing that brand?" A lot of comments. People just joking with you or asking serious questions. But also people I don't know are asking me questions."*

#### **6.1.5 Customer reflection**

In this facet of the prism the shortcomings of traditional branding models are revealed. While the latter portrays consumers as a single, homogeneous group, the experience of Stone Island shows that in some cases a multiplicity of customer reflections are coexisting in the same brand. Customer reflection refers to the way consumers wish to be seen. And in this particular case, two consumer groups with different demands for the brand can be identified.

For those consumers who appreciate the brand in itself and not because of the hooliganism association (Consumer Groups A and B), the customer reflection is related to be special and distinct from others. They would like others to see them as unique and elegant, but in a casual, relaxed way.

On the other side, those consumers who identify themselves with the hooliganism culture (Consumer Group C) would like to portray an image of bravery and strength. They also appreciate the comfort factor, but in general terms, their main goal is to appear powerful in the eyes of the relevant beholder.

All three of these groups emphasize the need to show off the fact that they are in-the-know; that they are connoisseurs of the brand. But this means something different for each group. For the Groups A and B, it means that they recognize the uniqueness of Stone Island, that they value the technology, the design and the style behind the garments. For Group C, this knowledge refers to their understanding of the Stone Island hooligan symbolism. They acknowledge that wearing the brand conveys a message that comes with certain responsibilities towards the brotherhood. As Daniel Ågren claims on the unofficial Stone Island Facebook group: *“Boys and girls, if you want to have a stone island you MUST stand up for it and fight! That's what its for”*.

This collision of customer reflections evidences that, as explained in chapter 3, consumers are not sound, compact actors and tensions arise as they engage in co-creation practices. Each group brings its values to the brand, and eventually tries to appropriate it. This appropriation process will be further analyzed on the subsequent sections of the present paper.

#### **6.1.6 Self-image**

As in the previous facet, Stone Island experiences simultaneous self-image projections from the different Consumer Groups. For Consumer Group A and B, wearing the brand makes them feel individual; like they are their own person because of the independent choices they make. This is directly related to the connoisseur factor as described by Bordieu (1986): they feel that not everyone has the cultural capital to appreciate the brand. They however are sophisticated enough to cherish Ostis's heritage. Consumer Group C doesn't buy Stone Island because it makes them feel individual, but for the exact opposite reason: it makes them feel being part of a brotherhood. In this segment, the sense of belonging is more determining and they wear it as a symbol of their unity. Again, a tension between the three groups within the same prism facet can be spotted in the Stone Island case.

Stone Island's case shows that traditional branding tools such as the brand identity prism are no longer sufficient to explain the complexity of today's co-creation reality. The Sender's part of the prism is relevant to make sense of the multiplicity of motivations behind brand's appropriation, but as it will be further analyzed, marketers must develop other kind of skills to allow a better grasp on the phenomenon.

## 6.2 The co-existence of consumer groups

From the previous brand prism analysis, the co-existence of multiple customer reflections and self-images arises as a significant peculiarity of Stone Island. This demands explanation through the theoretical concepts that were presented earlier in this paper.

### 6.2.1 The occurrence of co-existence

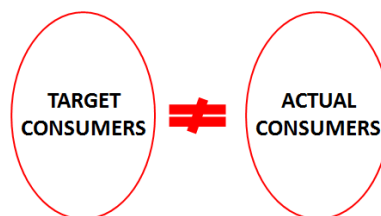
McCracken (1986) refers to the phenomenal world as organised into cultural categories that create a system of distinction. These categories are supported by material objects. As explained earlier, consumer products often have a meaning that goes beyond their utilitarian aspect; some categories of consumer goods, such as fashion, also carry cultural or social meaning. In chapter 3.3.2 the notion of consumer tribes was introduced, which helps to understand that individual consumption relates to group dynamics and as a result, stylistic choices are heavily influenced by social relations and codes. Clothing can for instance distinguish between men and women and thereby reveals the nature of differences that supposedly exist between those categories; in that case e.g. delicacy vs. strength. However, postmodern society does not only consist of obvious categories but of a multitude of partly overlapping consumer tribes. As a result clothing, style or brands are not necessarily a significant medium anymore to display the diversity between consumer groups. Instead meanings established through styles are rather open to interpretation and representation by other *authors* and *readers*. This is exactly what happens in the case of Stone Island: the brand is interpreted in different ways by the coexisting *authors/ readers* of Consumer Group A, B and C. As Stone Island has a distinct cultural meaning to each group, their members have different motivations for the adoption of the brand.

Hooligans have very masculine characteristics and values, and it is understandable that they also adapt their appearances to this image. As explained earlier, Stone Island garments are a very masculine product. They are strongly influenced by military style and functionality. And also company owner Carlo Rivetti suspects that hooligans understood that Stone Island items are made for real men and therefore adopted them. Stone Island gear became the iconic symbol of their brotherhood, their army; expressing power, strength and unity. Consumer Group A and B however have different motives for purchasing the brand. For them it's not about masculinity and brotherhood, but about the design and the sophistication, the brand conveys. To sum it up, Stone Island has coexisting consumer groups interpreting and associating heterogeneous cultural meanings within the brand. An important thing to understand is that *author* (the one wearing Stone Island) and *reader* (the one seeing somebody wearing Stone Island) can be members of opposing Consumer Groups. As an example, a common person may

spot somebody wearing Stone Island and classify him as a hooligan (Consumer Group C). However the user might just be somebody liking Stone Island for other reasons, and has nothing to do with the hooligan or even football culture (Consumer Group A). What happened is that the reader just applied the image and cultural meaning that he personally connects to the brand. And which image a common person applies, is strongly dependant on the power or presence of the dominant consumer group. In the 1990s this dominant consumer group was the hooligans. Therefore the brand held strong associations with hooliganism, especially in the UK. However in other countries such as France, the dominant consumers are rather Consumer Groups A and B. As a result the meaning conveyed by Stone Island for these groups is rather sophistication and maybe status, than hooliganism and violence. As explained before, neither Group B nor C was explicitly targeted by the company, and they constitute Stone Island's unintended segments.

### **6.3.2 The constitution of an *unintended consumer segment***

Following the logic behind the theoretical framework presented in the Literature Review, it could be said that an *unintended consumer segment* appears when there is a lack of coherence between the target consumers defined by the company, and the actual consumers who are using the brand. The target segment is identified by the company as the most appropriate for the allocation of resources and marketing efforts. Yet the unintended segments arise independently from these company strategies, formed by consumers who engage with the brand even if it was not specifically designed to be appealing for them. The following graphic illustrates the absence of intersection between these two sets of consumers.



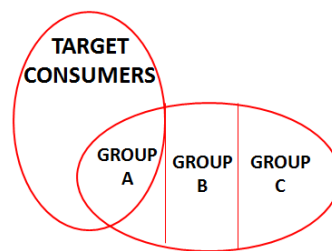
**Illustration 3 Unintended Segments**

After this analysis of Stone Island's strategy, Consumer Group A will not be regarded as an unintended segment because it is the one that most closely resembles the company's intended target. On the contrary, both Consumer Segments B and C are unintended for Stone Island because initially they were



not even considered as a target audience. However, as it will be analyzed over the next sections, they are not necessarily unfavourable for the company.

Of course, Illustration 3 is a black-and-white situation that may not be so common. In reality, there are always nuances and the case of Stone Island is an example of that, because there is an intersection of Consumer Groups with the target, but this intersection is far from complete and that is where unintended segments can be located. Illustration 4 represents the case of Stone Island and its coexisting Consumer Groups.



**Illustration 4 Stone Island Consumer Groups**

This brings back to another fact already described in the theoretical review: market segmentation does not necessarily have to be born from a deliberate, conscious analysis from practitioners. It can also be the result of other company actions, where marketers work in an intuitive manner: market results serve as input for segmentation, and vice versa. This is what is often referred to as *emergent strategies*, which are at the core of the organic school of strategy: *“Much of what organizations do and many of their stable patterns of actions were never formally planned. This large set of actions simply emerge without anybody having made a formal analysis and decision in advance: these actions are what Mintzberg<sup>14</sup> calls “emergent” strategies in a proper sense. It is only when one considers both the “deliberate” and the “emergent” strategies than one can have a fuller view of what an organization actually does, that is, its “realized” strategy.”* (Baraldi et al., 2007, p 886).

Under this perspective, it is perfectly possible that companies can complement or even modify their segmentation strategy with the information and results that they receive from the market. Therefore, the appearance of unintended segments should be understood as a relatively plausible situation for companies, and practitioners should be able to manage this phenomenon.

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<sup>14</sup> Henry Mintzberg’s views on strategy are considered as a reaction to the linear and rational view that was dominant until the mid 1980s. He is regarded as the outstanding representative of the organic or incremental school of strategy.

### **6.3.3 The difference between *unintended segments* and *undesirable segments***

The difference between *unintended segments* and *undesirable segments* is that although they're both the result of emergent strategies, the latter may eventually have a negative impact on the rest of the brand's user base.

In the previous paragraphs it was underlined that companies influence society developments through brands and products. The same can be said the other way round: consumers play a major part in the evolution of brands. In fact, this is the very essence of the co-creation paradigm, meaning that beyond marketers' strategies, consumers provide meaning and content to brands.

In the case of Stone Island, the association with football has become so embedded and well-known that today it cannot be separated from the rest of its identity. The values behind football fanaticism seem to fit with the brand's own, such as masculinity, passion and strength. However, in the extreme cases of football fans represented by hooliganism, there seems to be one common denominator that constitutes its central value. This value that differentiates them from the rest of football supporters is their acceptance of violence, and it's so omnipresent that it could be illustrated under the metaphor of *cultural black holes*. The latter is a concept introduced by linguist Richard Lewis and refers to an "*undiscussable core belief of such intense gravity that it transcends or distorts any other beliefs, values or set of principles that enter its vicinity and absorbs, indeed swallows up, its 'victim'.*" (Lewis, 2003, p117). Therefore it could be said that for the mainstream vision on hooliganism, violence is the dominant feature of this group, the one that predominantly jumps into attention. And indeed it gets attention, because it has often been said that it has been media and politicians that built hooliganism into a social threat, by giving it so much publicity. Fair or not, it is true that the association with violence is always negative and for a brand with values such as Stone Island's, it is clearly undesirable. Such powerful negative values carry the risk of absorbing other positive values, operating like a cultural black hole.

### **6.4 Understanding the different degrees of desirability**

It has been explained that unintended segments are the result of a lack of alignment between the ideal target consumer and the actual consumers of the brand. It has also been clarified that unintended segments are not necessarily unfavourable. Illustration 4 provides a practical tool to determine the degree of desirability of an unintended segment once it has been identified.

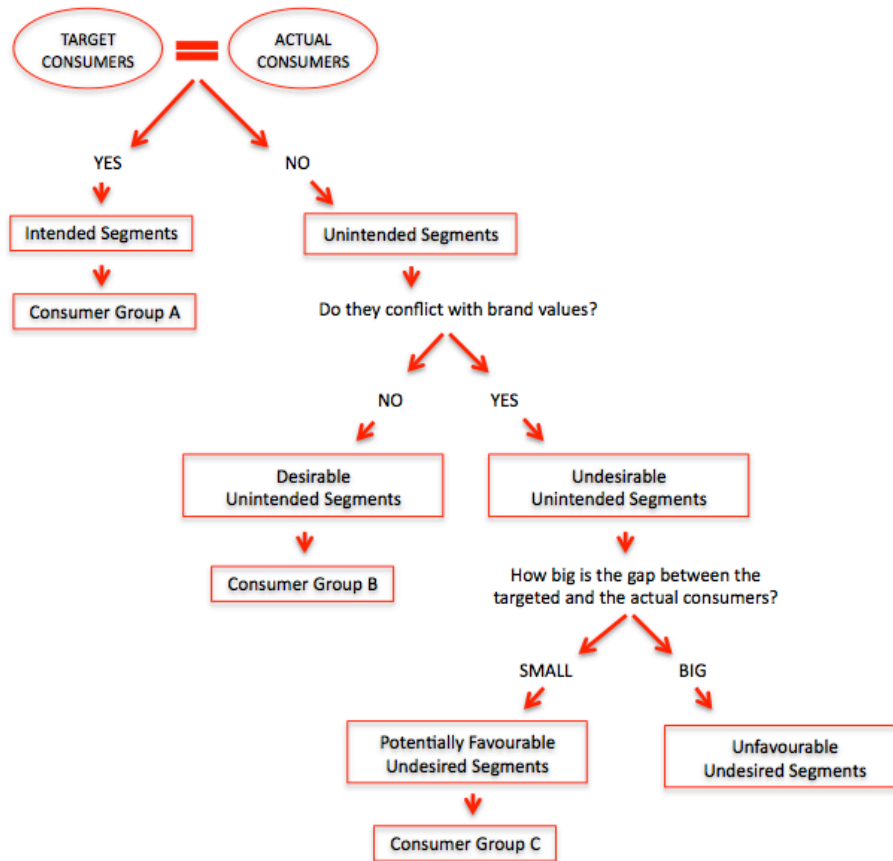


Illustration 5 The degree of desirability of unintended segments

#### 6.4.1 The unintended segment

The first step is the comparison between the target that was defined for the brand and its actual consumers. If there is a correspondence, a significant similarity between them, the brand can be said to have its segmenting strategy properly aligned. In the case of Stone Island, the resulting group of consumers for this alternative is Consumer Group A. But if this is not the case, and here lies the core of this paper, an *unintended segment* can be identified. This means that there is a distance between the defined target and the resulting consumers. As explained before, unintended segments are the emergent result of marketing strategies, and this section will proceed to analyze the degree of benefit or threat that they pose on the brand.

#### **6.4.2 Desirable unintended segments**

Once an unintended segment has been identified, the next step is to determine whether the existence of this segment conflicts with brand values. Here, the *unintended segment* will be evaluated under the light of the existing brand values as expressed in company's manuals and guidelines. If the company has not been so explicit on the brand's values before, it is necessary to conduct an in-depth analysis with branding tools such as those described in chapter 3.1.1. If the unintended segments are not conflicting with the brand values, the company is in the presence of a *desirable unintended segment*. The Stone Island case gives evidence that Consumer Group B (Casuals) can be seen as a desirable unintended segment, because the association with football only started with Eric Cantona in the 1990s, making it clear that it was not part of the original brand strategy. Yet although unintended, Casuals are regarded by the company as not conflicting with their basic values of masculinity, passion and design. Rather, the Casual culture and its centrality of brands provide Stone Island with its own positive values and prestige, making it a very public icon of their style. Casuals were a source of free advertisement for the brand, and in Rivetti's opinion: *"There is no better advertising than a man wearing a cool and great quality garment. I think it's a long way to go, but there is no better testimonial than the man walking down the street"*. Therefore it is clear that these segments are unintended but also desirable, and in this case the emergent results turned out as beneficial for the brand.

#### **6.4.3 Undesirable unintended segments**

Back to the question of the unintended segments conflicting with values, the answer could also be affirmative. This scenario of an unintended segment that conflicts with brand values will be referred to as *undesirable unintended segments*. Even in this situation, this does not imply an automatic negative implication for the brand. Therefore, here, the key point for evaluation is the width of the gap between the intended target segment and the actual consumers, in terms of brand values and how they perceive the brand. The distance between these two groups presents a number of possible scenarios ranging from the very small to the very big gap, but for the sake of clarity this paper will focus on the two extreme poles of this imaginary scale.

##### **6.4.3.1 Potentially favourable undesired segments**

If the gap between the target segment and the actual consumers is small, the unintended consumer group is *potentially favourable undesired*. This means that although these two groups are different, they are not so to a point where they should be considered irreconcilable: the basic brand values are not jeopardized. As explained before, the paradigm of brand co-creation claims that consumers' own views

and values have a strong influence on brands, and therefore *potentially favourable undesired consumer segments* bring their own meanings and content to the brand. In the Stone Island experience, Consumer Group C (hooligans) is representative of this segment. As said before, Stone Island stands for masculinity, power and functionality, and it carries images of military style. These features comply with the way hooligans see themselves and want to be seen. Other brand core values such as experimentation and quality are not so relevant for the hooligan culture, but they are neither disruptive perhaps because they are not so visible for the general eye. There is however, one particular feature of hooliganism that is not a value for the brand, and that is violent behaviour. This element has been the cause of the company's initial concern, but eventually management realized that there is much more to the football culture than violence, and decided to focus on the positive consequences that it may have.

To illustrate the motivations behind this consumer behaviour, a quote from the interviewed brand fan is enlightening, because when asked if he enjoyed the tense feeling of being mistaken for a hooligan due to his outfit, he said: *"I think it's subconsciously that I want that feeling. When I'm thinking I'm like "No. I don't care. It was like that when I was younger. But I think by wearing Stone Island... well I wear it smart. I never wear it to a football game or when there are a lot of hooligans on the street ... I never do that. But still when I walk around in Malmö or other cities I put myself into risk that I might run into confrontation with other hooligans. So I would definitely say that, even though I don't admit it to myself, that probably I get a kick out of it. Knowing that someone might see me or say something. That's definitely it."* This comment evidences the special aura that Stone Island is surrounded by: in what can be seen as a mutual influence, consumers place meanings into the brand, and the brand carries significance when consumers wear it. This is, in essence the perspective of co-creation put into practice. For a brand that started as a niche product from a small company, its appropriation by hooligan groups provided a myth. This, in turn brought substance to the brand, allowing an organic growth beyond the initial company strategy, and it is clear for the management that the brand wouldn't have become so famous if it hadn't been for the hooliganism mystique.

#### **6.4.3.2 Unfavourable undesired segments**

Last, if the gap between the intended target and the resulting consumers is big, the unintended consumer group is *unfavourable undesired*. Again, under the perspective of co-creation, consumers are not to be seen as the passive object of marketing efforts, but as equally responsible for providing the brand with values and meanings. This means that the negative characteristics and behaviour of certain consumer groups can transcend to the brand, embedding it with values that are not compatible with its

essence. Just like particular social tribes become stigmatized by media and the public, the same happens with their flag brands, and therefore these brands start to share the destiny of their users. The brand becomes potentially unattractive for other consumers. In the Stone Island experience, none of the described Consumer Groups A, B or C constitutes such a wide gap compared to the intended target. Therefore, the illustration for the unfavourable consumer segment comes from another fashion brand: the British company Burberry went through this experience with hooligans as well. Hooligans took up Burberry as one of their favourite brands, and the company could not be less happy about it. *“But the popularity of the iconic check among less desirable patrons appears to have reached a head, and the designer label company has halted production of its distinctive baseball-cap headgear. The firm is understood to have decided to stop production of the hats a few months ago during a rash of publicity over Burberry-clad hooligans being barred from pubs, clubs and bars. The chequered headgear, once the preserve of the fashion elite, is now the uniform of choice for shell-suited wearing troublemakers.”* (Kelbie, 2004, online source). The main difference between Burberry’s and Stone Island’s experiences is the width of the gap of intended versus actual consumers, because the first had been positioned for decades as a luxury brand for wealthy customers. Burberry loyal ladies and gentlemen were not pleased when the traditional check pattern became a regular in football courts. That is why the company decided to take action and discontinued a product that had become iconic for the hooligan association, prioritizing brand essence over short-term profit.

An obvious question arises from the last paragraphs of this analysis: how is the width of the gap between the ideal and actual consumers measured? It is not within the theoretical scope of this paper to provide with specific tools for this evaluation. However, it is possible to say that this process is subjective to a great extent, and demands deep knowledge from practitioners on their own brand identity and its impact on society. Some recommendations from Wipperfurth's (2005, p38-39) brand hijack study seem appropriate in this context: *“Too often, brand owners try to identify the drivers behind serendipitous brand hijack through focus groups, quantitative studies, or expensive trend reports, but these methods simply do not reveal the real causes. The drivers are social in nature and evolve from a myriad of causes. (...) Study the historical context. Take the time to understand what a hijacked brand does for its users, and what social factors are driving the brand's success. Essentially, you will become a cultural anthropologist”*. Throughout his book, Wipperfurth emphasizes the need for a shift in traditional brand management and research, in order to work on the development of marketer's cultural skills. These skills will allow marketers to understand the cultural symbolism embedded in their brands, and identify the appearance of unintended segments. In essence, these cultural skills are more relevant in

the new context of co-creation than the old-school view of marketing as a mainstream message sent to a mass of homogeneous consumers.

The next section of this paper will present pertinent action paths for practitioners that are facing the discussed *unintended consumer segments*. Through examples from Stone Island as well as other social identity brands, the reader will see that the marketer's skills put into practice are the key to a successful management of this phenomenon.

## **6.5 Possible Action Paths**

The previous section of this paper presented a categorization of the possible types of unintended consumer segments. This section will complement the explanation of these segment categories with examples from various social identity brands including of course Stone Island, in order to shed light on plausible action paths for practitioners. Although it is not the purpose of this study to develop an exhaustive set of recommendations due to its explorative nature, a revision of companies' similar experiences may contribute to further clarify and illustrate the phenomenon of *unintended consumer segments*.

### **6.5.1 Action Path for desirable unintended consumer segments**

As the case of Stone Island has evidenced, the identification of an unintended segment within the brand's user base is far from a dead-end situation. For this company, the fact that Consumer Group B constituted by Casuals transformed the brand into their symbol, influenced sales and awareness in a positive way. Therefore, a suitable action path for practitioners is to embrace their unintended yet desirable consumer segments. Because even if they are not the result of a deliberate company strategy, they evidence that the brand has become relevant and meaningful to a particular group of consumers, and through a co-creation process they will co-build the brand. It could be said that they complement the marketing management's efforts, since these groups provide genuine cultural meaning for brands.

For Stone Island, this has clearly been the strategy towards Casuals, their own desirable unintended segment. When they understood that the football culture is not restricted to hooligans and that Casuals are style-minded representatives of that culture, the company realized the potential that this association may carry. Their stake on this topic is synthesized in this quote from the interview with Carlo Rivetti, owner and creative director of the company: *"Of course we didn't choose the hooligans, they chose us. But not only the hooligans, but it's the whole football tribe that likes Stone Island. So I don't think we don't have to be ashamed of football. Hooligans are only a part of the football tribe, not the*

*only part of the tribe. So instead of running away from football I chose to - I don't like the word use- let's say go close to the football philosophy in general."* They saw that the Casual's emphasis on comfortable elegance was aligned to their own view of fashion, in Rivetti's words on the company website: *"I strongly believed and still believe that the future of clothing is in sportswear and informal wear."*

But Stone Island has been careful in its approach to Casuals; they incorporated it into the company's horizons without compromising the brand's core values and identity. For example, although they developed a football blog on their official website, they did so with their own sophisticated perspective on the sport. They do not sponsor football players or tournaments, in an attempt to maintain the genuineness of the brand's bond to the sport. At the same time, they do not modify their product design to appear more attractive to Casuals, because the company management believes that there is a clear limit on market influence on their strategy: *"In general, the market and the customers, they desire what they know. But we always try to do something that is unknown. So, we listen to the market and try to get closer, but I don't want to listen too much. I don't want to be driven by the market. (...)If you always try to run to the market you will be always late. So we do what we think is correct. And sooner or later the market will arrive at my product. (...) We stick to our beliefs, and the philosophy of our brand and the market will follow. I think that integrity is a winning position in the long-term."*

However, there are also examples of companies that were not so prudent when facing a *desirable unintended segment*. One example is the experience of Helly Hansen; the Norwegian top-end brand, specialized in special gear for sports and work on the ocean and in the mountains. In the mid 1990s, the brand met a wave of unintended advertising fuelled by rap and hip-hop artists such as LL Cool J, becoming very popular among young followers of those music styles. Although these new users were far from the brand's function-specialized design strategy, the company decided to embrace the new segments. Helly Hansen, then, started to design clothes specifically for rappers, moving away from its tradition as the reliable choice for oil-rig workers, fishermen, mountaineers and commandos. The company expanded its line to include more fashion-oriented, less technologically sophisticated clothing. But this shift on the company's path would eventually emerge as a problem for its management, with the organization barely reaching break-even levels by 2000. In the words of Peter Sjölander, Helly Hansen's CEO, *"The company lost its way. What we did wrong was to develop clothing lines for this part of the market, the New York rappers, but then of course, their interest suddenly dropped and we were left with warehouses full of clothing that nobody wanted to wear."* (The Telegraph, 2008, online source) Apparently, the company failed to keep the fashion industry's lifecycles volatility in mind. Sjölander



joined the company with the specific purpose of returning the brand to its roots, anchored in marine sports and work wear, because they understood that their original target segments are a sensible direction in the long run: *“Before, the New York rappers did not pick up the clothing as having a connection with something special. Whereas with this approach now, our customers like the activity of sailing or the outdoors and then they are attracted to our products.”*

The contrasts between the paths chosen by Stone Island and Helly Hansen evidence that there is not a single approach to embracing desirable unintended consumer segments. Considering the results presented in the previous analysis, it seems that a sensible management that maintains the brand identity as a compass, allows a better fulfilment of the potential conveyed by this type of segments. In short, when in presence of a desirable unintended consumer segment, a suitable strategy is to embrace them in a measured manner. This is particularly true for fashion brands due to the industry’s fast lifecycles and volatility.

#### **6.5.2 Action Path for potentially favourable undesired consumer segments**

When a *potentially favourable undesired consumer segment* is diagnosed, marketers should consider not taking any action at all and just “sit on it”, observing carefully where this segment is taking the brand.

Stone Island did neither embrace nor fight the associations with the hooligan culture and followed exactly this strategy. The company took some actions to reduce the brand’s appeal to violent extremes. For example as mentioned earlier, they stopped the production of the Kevlar jacket, as soon as it became known that it was hyped as suitable for knife-fights in hooligan circles. However, the company never took a clear and official stand against the hooligan culture, for instance deliberately fighting the associations. Company owner, Carlo Rivetti rather tried to avoid the topic and create as little buzz as possible around it. *“(…) we avoided talking about hooliganism. (...) if nobody asks, I will not talk about it, because of course that’s nothing I’m proud of.”* The intuitive strategy followed by Rivetti turned out to be beneficial: the brand did not only survive the adoption by the hooligans, it even profited from them. As described earlier in the case of Stone Island, the gap between targeted consumer and the hooligans is rather small. Therefore, for this brand, it was the right choice to take a passive approach in that matter. The hooligans helped the brand gain popularity in Europe; they brought the brand to the stadiums where it was admired and adopted by other spectators. Another stream of Casuals, not engaging in violent behaviour, adopted the brand and gave it a key position in their brand-centred style choices. From the Casuals and their increasing display of the brand, it eventually found its way into the mainstream. In Britain this already happened, in Sweden it is just happening. As a brand fan in an

interview with the authors explained *“You can see famous people in TV, e.g. the anchorman of some programme. He sits there, being on national TV, in Stone Island. Or you see famous singers, wearing Stone Island shirts or jackets. (...) It’s the famous people who set the trends and now they have started to use it, I think that in a few years it’s going to be more common to wear Stone Island. Because up to a few years ago no one in Sweden would wear Stone Island if they were not a hooligan. But nowadays you see a lot of kids running around.”*

Especially young people are drawn to Stone Island. To them the hooligan association has a particular appeal and makes the brand even more desirable. As the interviewee indicates *“A lot of people you are passing by in the city, they look. And the younger kids, who are fascinated by the hooligan culture they would start whispering. It has happened to me, like ‘Wow. Look the guy has a Stone Island jacket’.”* However this newfound popularity is not to the delight of the hooligans who originally appropriated the brand and filled it with their own meaning. The increasing transition into the mainstream is tainting the symbolism of their brand and reduces its unique appeal. The brand fan adds *“I know that people get pissed off. E.g. when this famous singer Darin wore a Stone Island jacket, and he is actually a (...) Stockholm fan. I went to another teams website and they wrote ‘We saw that Darin is wearing Stone Island. I wonder if he’s prepared to stand up for it’. It’s becoming this bad. It pisses them off because the one and only brand that is like ‘their brand’ becomes ‘dirty’ as other people use it.”* As a result the original adopters will try to oppose the diffusion into mainstream. Also at some point it’s likely that the snob effect might bring the consumer group to abandon the brand when a certain threshold of mainstream consumers is reached. On Facebook Andrew Milton posts a picture of a rapper wearing a Stone Island jacket appealing to his peers on the Football Casuals group *“This is the Reason that Casuals Need to Leave Stone Island in the past where it belongs! Come on Lads... there’s plenty of New Labels out there, you just gotta look for them!”*. Also Josey Ince agrees to the tendencies of hooligans increasingly giving up the brand. In the Stone Island Facebook Group he clarifies *“Now in regards to footie, S.I. was a staple in the terrace culture for a very long time & the main factor in choosing S.I. was it's ability to stand the test of a row. 'Lads' & or 'supporters' these days who are really looking to represent their club or borough or housing estate know that Stone Island is no longer 'casual'. You might as well take a #1 to your dome, roll up some 501's, and lace up some steel's if you go around sporting Stone Island. in football grounds these days. You're no longer looking to fit in; you're looking to stand out.”*

Therefore it can be summarised that Stone Island underwent the typical diffusion cycles of subcultural leadership theory. The result is a brand that is surrounded by myth and an interesting history that is adopted by a variety of consumer groups for different reasons and due to its mystique finds more and

more adopters and fans. The hooligan association is still present to some extent; however it wore off and gave space to filling the brand with new meanings.

The experience of Stone Island and its successful strategy to just live through the bad company can also be found in another famous case: Harley Davidson. After World War II outlaw motorcycle clubs were formed on the West Coast. Media soon turned those clubs into barbaric communities beyond common decency; a threat to the American society. The bikers turned into media darlings and in 1964 the Hell's Angels became the focus of attention, featuring rape stories, and becoming the public incarnation of sex, violence, dirt and crime. Real media frenzy developed which turned the whole biker myth into a cultural force. (Holt, 2008, p163) The motion picture industry dedicated itself to the bikers, launching box office smashes like *The Wild One* or *Wild Angels*. Harley became an increasingly central figure in those stories and the biker myth also transcended to the brand. Nevertheless, even though being made the public enemy, the outlaw bikers were glorified by the youth; being celebrated as "the real thing". Having a Harley was an aspiration for every boy in the 1960s, just as "*falling-off the butt, baggy jeans were to boys entranced by "gangsta" culture, beginning in the late 1980s.*" Cultural developments transformed the outlaw bikers into reactionary gunfighters between 1960 and 1970. Their image was still dangerous and violent but at the same time they were also considered as conservative patriots that are willing to fight for nationalist values. That made them iconic for lower class, white men that compensated their identity anxieties with riding a Harley. "*They liked the idea that the outlaw bikers stood firm against the middle class hippies, whom they viewed as overprivileged sissies*". (Holt, 2008, p168) In the late 1970s the Harley myth was revised again and Harley found its way into the middle class. President Reagan and his ideals of manhood triggered a movement from gunfighters to a heroic men-of-action that could *single-handedly save the country*. During a recession in the early 1980s Reagan imposed heavy tariffs on heavyweight motorcycles to protect Harley's business. He also appealed to the nation to rescue the company from bankruptcy, as it was America's last motorcycle company. With its recovery in 1987 Harley symbolised a victory over the Japanese and became the icon of the revitalisation of the nation's economic power. Consequently older, wealthy middle class men began to adopt the brand, which led to extraordinary success in the 1990s.

Just as Stone Island became an icon for the hooligan culture, Harley became the symbol of outlaw bikers. Harley didn't take any particular action against this association, which turned out as a beneficial strategy. The company's management did none of the important marketing or storytelling. According to Holt (2008, p156) "*Other authors – the populist world of the outlaw bikers and the cultural industries-*

*turned Harley into an icon. Cultural texts – films, newspapers and magazines, articles, political speeches, newsworthy events- produced by the culture industries were the key to building Harley’s myth.”*

Would the company have decided to fight the seemingly undesirable associations it would have missed out on valuable opportunities of creating a competitive advantage. The Harley brand is loaded with a rich history and a mystique that is not imitable for competitors due to path-dependency and causal ambiguity.<sup>15</sup> And just the same can be said for Stone Island.

As a result it is important for marketers who spot the emergence of undesired segments that conflict with their brand values, to keep the long-term implications in mind. The width of the gap between the intended target and the actual consumers has to be carefully evaluated instead of impulsively fighting the seemingly undesirable segment right away. Marketers need to develop sociocultural skills and tools that help them to assess the situation and forecast alternative scenarios. In presence of *potentially favourable undesired segments*, marketers can take a step back and not take any action on the situation. However it is crucial to keep an eye on the developments, listen to the market and be prepared to take necessary actions instantly. Yet this plan of action is not applicable in the case of a wider gap between the two segments: in that case another action path seems more applicable.

### **6.5.3 Action Path for unfavourable undesired consumer segments**

Last, there is a certain type of unintended consumer segments that presents an extremely challenging situation for companies: those that are *unfavourable undesired*. This type of consumer segment, in opposition to the *potentially favourable undesired*, poses a threat so clear to the brand’s values that it cannot be dodged or contained. The wide gap between the brand’s target and these actual consumers make it impossible to reconcile both groups within a coherent marketing strategy. As explained before it’s the marketers’ cultural skills that allow them to identify this potentially harmful situation, and demands for a determined action.

The aforementioned experience of Burberry that also involved hooligan groups was a clear example of this type of consumer segment. Moreover, another case of *unfavourable undesired* segment constitutes a vivid illustration of the damaging reach of this phenomenon. This case is the story of Lonsdale, an English sports clothing brand, specialized on boxing wear. Although it had been around since the 1960s, the brand became controversial in the early 2000s, when it became popular among European neo-Nazis. According to Wikipedia, the clue behind this brand hijack was that a carefully placed outer jacket leaves

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<sup>15</sup> This insight is coherent with Barney’s (1991, p107) Resource Based View of the firm, which implies that a firm’s resources have to be imperfectly imitable in order to generate sustained competitive advantage. Imperfect Imitability can be achieved through unique historical conditions (path-dependency) or casual ambiguity between the firm’s resources and its success.

only the letters NSDA showing; one letter short of NSDAP, the acronym for Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, the German name of the Nazi Party. Wearing a brand with no Nazi links in order to express Nazi sympathies helped these consumers to avoid observation of the strict laws concerning the public display of Nazi symbolism. The appropriation of the brand by neo Nazi groups was so visible for the rest of the society, that in the Netherlands, Belgium, northern France and Germany, the term “Lonsdale youth” became widely used to describe teenagers with far right tendencies and a website called Lonsdalenews, was set up as a logbook for racist incidents.

The company began to feel despair and impotence, feeling that there was not much they could do since, as a Lonsdale spokesman explained in *The Telegraph*, “*Our name comes from the Earl of Lonsdale. The company started as a sporting club at the end of the 19th century. We can't change it. It's a name and it is certainly not associated or designed with neo-Nazis in mind. It was a family name well before fascism reared its ugly head in Europe.*” (Cleaver, 2001, online source). As Stone Island and Burberry, Lonsdale was facing a situation where a particular social group was expressing itself through consumption, and the brand was the symbol for these cultural meanings. But in the case of Lonsdale, the risk was significantly higher, because the gap between their target consumers (sportsmen and women, specifically boxers) and neo Nazis was enormous. In fact, neo Nazis are such a controversial and resisted group across all sections of society, that whatever target segment Lonsdale had determined would have been just as apart.

The potential risk for the brand became tangible when the Netherlands authorities announced plans to forbid students from attending schools in Lonsdale garments. Geurt Schotsman, the Lonsdale distributor in the Netherlands, said: “*It is bad for us because we sell the brand, but it is also a difficult problem from a legal and philosophical point of view to ban certain clothing. For bars and discos, I understand the ban on some clothing, but in schools I think you are on a slippery slope.*” (The Times, 2005, online source) It was by then evident that the neo Nazis anti-values of hate and discrimination were taking over Lonsdale’s own brand values of Boxing Heritage, British Culture and Iconic Style.

This conflict of values eventually became too strong, and the company’s management decided to take action. First, Lonsdale refused to supply products to German shops popular with neo-Nazis. As the spokesman points out in *The Telegraph* “*we make active attempts to try to prevent sale of our products to outlets which are specifically geared to that kind of customer - shops which have a military bias, for example*”. The company went further, and decided to sponsor immigrant and gay-rights campaigns, in an open challenge and rejection of the neo Nazis groups. In 2003, the brand launched a campaign called

“Lonsdale loves all colours” featuring the Lonsdale’s lion logo depicted in front of a huge rainbow, the symbol for the co-existence of colours. This campaign emphasized non-white fashion models, along with increased support for initiatives that combat racism. Besides, the company continued sponsoring boxers from diverse nationalities and races, just like it had done throughout its whole history.

It is still early to judge the success of this determined set of actions that Lonsdale delivered. The brand celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2010, with its eyes on the bright future ahead. It is arguable that without a strong public rejection to this extremely dangerous consumer groups, Lonsdale would still be in the eye of the storm of bad publicity. Lonsdale fought their unfavourable undesired segment, because it understood that inaction equalled leaving the brand adrift and ruining the efforts of the company’s trajectory. When facing a situation of unfavourable undesired segment, marketers should apply their cultural skills to attack the roots of this association and set the company’s position crystal clear for the rest of the society. As mentioned in the literature section, this is one of the situations where marketers need to reclaim the brand back, and deliberately intervene in the co-creation process to avoid brand values’ dilution.

From the outlined *unintended consumer segments* categorization and the analysis of examples of companies that faced them, a set of plausible action paths was presented. For *desirable unintended segments*, the strategy could be summarized as embracing in a measured manner. For *potentially favourable segments*, the strategy could be summarized as taking a cautious passive approach while being prepared to act. For *unfavourable segments*, the strategy could be summarized as fighting them with brand values as guidelines.

## 6.6 Discussion

This paper was structured around one specific research question: Is every customer favourable for the brand? After an extensive analysis, the answer for this question is negative, because there are consumer segments that are inherently unfavourable for brands. However, the nuances of the topic make the reasoning path just as important as the answer itself. A key idea behind this paper is that an *unintended segment* does not equal an *unfavourable segment*. The first occurs when the target consumer segment designed by the company is not aligned with the actual consumers that are purchasing the brand. An undesired segment also presents this lack of alignment, but beyond that, the segment of actual consumers is conflicting with the brand values. The conflict with brand values is the factor that differentiates a desirable *unintended segment* from an *undesirable unintended segment*. But even being

in presence of an undesirable consumer segment, is not necessarily the worst-case scenario for the company. Because when the gap between the target and actual consumers is relatively small, this segment can be considered *potentially favourable*: its outcome is strongly dependent on the company's management socio-cultural skills to manage this process. On the other hand, when the mentioned gap is wide, the segment can be labelled as *unfavourable*, and this implies that the threat posed to the brand is significant and demands the full attention from marketing managers.

The previous summary illustrates that there are, in fact, certain consumers, which are seemingly undesirable for the brand. But this paper illustrates that those segments are eventually not harmful if the company is up to the challenge. The ability to turn the challenge into an actual opportunity is correlated to the socio-cultural skills of the marketing team. Marketers need a thorough understanding of their cultural environment and its changes: unintended consumer segments cannot be understood without grasping the emergence of consumer tribes as a triggering force behind them. Consumer tribes are forms of social grouping around particular linking values, and the marketer needs to make sense of their dynamics if he aims to comprehend the appropriation processes that are providing new meanings for the brand. Tribes do not exist in a vacuum, they are in constant interaction with the rest of society, and therefore the meanings they bring into brands go beyond these groups permeating society as a whole. In today's markets, companies have to be aware of the way and the speed at which trends diffuse because this influences the path of action to be taken. This knowledge is particularly crucial for social identity products, as they contribute to the image-building processes of consumers.

The appropriation of brands by its consumers due to its cultural relevance has been described before as brand hijack. But the shortfall of this concept is that it implies that only consumers are responsible for the brand's evolution. If the traditional marketing paradigm placed the attention on marketers as the only owners of the brand, the hijack proposition oscillates into the other extreme of complete consumer control. This paper shares the co-creation paradigm perspective that views brands as the result of a shared interaction between companies and consumers: both are creators of meanings and values and it would not do justice to the complexity of the process to prioritize one over the other.

This is why this paper has claimed that the traditional branding models such as Kapferer's identity prism are outdated and don't have sufficient explanatory power in the current marketing environment. These models should incorporate the co-creation's perspective of customers as peer participants in the development of a brand. Co-creation as a paradigm shift is applicable to all product categories because it implies a new understanding of the value creation chain. But some categories in particular demand

more determination to apply this perspective into their business practices: social identity products go beyond the utilitarian functionality and need a richer approach that contemplates their roles in consumers' lives. This paper has focused on brands within this product category, and therefore it was not studied whether unintended consumer segments would be plausible for utilitarian product brands. Since co-creation is a perspective for the marketing discipline, at first glance the phenomenon should not be exclusive of social identity products. But it goes beyond the scope of this study to analyze the possibility of occurrence of this situation.

## **7 Conclusion**

This paper placed itself under the relatively new co-creation paradigm. It was stated that this perspective still has a long way to go in terms of its focus on branding. Therefore the topic of unintended consumers is necessarily new, because it is inscribed as an interest area within branding studies. Consequently one of the main contributions of this paper is approaching a phenomenon that is recent in existence, and studied it under the light of the theoretical perspective of co-creation, that seems to have the most explanatory power.

Once identified as a present marketing occurrence, unintended segments were analyzed in detail and a categorization of different types of unintended consumer segments was presented. This categorization aims to describe the nuances of these segments, and to display the impact they may have on companies' strategies. The categorization of unintended consumers is a solid contribution that this paper has provided and that is a starting point for further studies on consumer co-creation practices. In broader terms, a key contribution from this study was its questioning of the dominant logic of sales that any sale is an achievement: by asking the question "is every consumer favourable for the brand?" it illustrated that there may be cases when certain consumers are negative in the long run.

From a practitioners' point of view, this paper accomplished a similar contribution by shedding light on a phenomenon of increasing importance. Topics such as consumer tribes and brand communities are becoming centrally relevant in marketing management, and the identification of unintended consumer segments will provide a new angle on this complex matter. Besides creating awareness, this study has also described a series of actions that certain companies took while in presence of unintended consumer segments. Although they were not presented as sound recommendations, these paths intended to explore the different categories and their possible brand impact in further depth. Through a



detailed review on previous relevant literature, this paper drew on common marketing concepts and combined them, in order to make sense of the emergence of unintended consumer segments. However, it is also claimed that this marketing managers' theoretical base has to be combined with the cultural skills that allow a grasp on the new challenges the market is presenting them with. Therefore, the call for an enhancement on marketers' cultural focus is another pillar of this study.

The most relevant limitation of this paper is the fact that it focuses on social identity products and particularly on fashion brands. These are especially relevant to illustrate how consumers give and take meanings from brands, and how brands influence societies and culture. However, this paper does not touch upon the possible occurrence of unintended consumer segments within the category of utilitarian brands.

Also this study is centred on brands that target men, and therefore the consumer tribes described are inherently masculine in their composition and further on, their areas of interests exclude women from joining. This means that female tribes are not depicted in the paper and the topic of unintended consumers segments within these tribes was not explored.

Last, it is important to point out that Stone Island's position came from an interview with Carlo Rivetti, the company owner and creative director. It may be the case that other members of the organization have a different view on its marketing approach or on Consumer Groups B or C. Yet Rivetti's opinions seemed the most relevant, because his personal values are leading the company today. In fact, the corporate section of the company's official website features an article written by Rivetti under the title "My history, my company".

Regarding future research, it is important to allow a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon of unintended consumer segments. Therefore the motivations behind consumers' appropriation of brands should be further explored. This knowledge, combined with the aforementioned marketers' cultural skills would increase their ability to determine successful action paths.

On the other hand and as explained before, utilitarian products seem as the logical next step in the area of unintended consumer segments. This type of studies would be an opportunity to review the categories of unintended segments presented in this paper and extend them if necessary. Another area of potential investigation is the alternative responses given by other companies facing this phenomenon. Recommendations for practitioners could be the focus of future research, and that is why it is important to analyze as many cases as possible.

Last, this paper has highlighted that the traditional views on market segmentation could no longer be sufficient to describe the way in which consumers interact with brand proposals. Therefore, a new approach on market segmentation theories under the perspective of co-creation could be a revealing aid for the analysis of unintended consumer segments.

As a closing reflection, in the old marketing paradigm that was presented in the literature review known as a goods-dominant logic, the marketers' responsibilities had a clear scope. Marketers were supposed to come up with the best product they could achieve, and then develop the best way to present it to a mass of homogeneous consumers through a single message. The new reality of empowered consumers in an ultra-connected world has outdated this way of doing business. Therefore brand proposals are in constant interaction with consumer responses, and this gives rise to never ending challenges for marketers, such as the occurrence of *unintended consumer segments*. In today's scenario, marketers are supposed to be experts in their products, but also to develop the socio-cultural skills to be in constant observation of their environments. They have to be aware of societal developments, industry particularities and trends in consumption behaviour and question the current logic of doing business if necessary. Awareness and curiosity seems to be the key to sail these uncertain waters. The ultimate marketing knowledge set is unobtainable; yet accumulating relevant knowledge and keeping both eyes wide open provide a solid base for responding to new challenges, such as the one presented in this paper.

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## Appendix 1: Empirical Material - Literature

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## **Appendix 2: Empirical Material - Interview with Carlo Rivetti Stone Island Company owner and creative director - 6<sup>th</sup> April 2011**

**We analyse fashion brands and cases where consumers give so much cultural meaning to the brand that it's becoming a cultural brand and it's becoming a culture for certain groups, which are represented by the brand. It's like the brand has a life on it's own and it goes beyond what marketers intend to do and the brands become cultural signs for a lot of people. We came across the Stone Island case, which is amazingly interesting for us because it's so avant-garde, it has a smart design and it has such innovative techniques. At the same time it's very well known for casual brands in general, because it's identified with the football culture. So we're trying to find out why this brand, which has so innovative features, has become so meaningful and so relevant for this specific group of customers, which is the whole football culture.**

As you understand we have a long history. The brand starts in 1982. And one statement I want to make before. It is the most important statement for me. And it is: We are not a fashion company. So I don't want to compete in the fashion field. We feel much more comfortable, let's say talking about design. When SI starts, we owned another brand called C.P. Company. During an experimentation in 1981 we discovered a fabric, which is used building the back of trucks. (lorry tarpaulin) This fabric was very strong and didn't fit into the C.P. Company collection. But this was the wonderful 80's and so we decided to do, let's say, an unbelievable operation. We made a collection with seven shoulder pieces, one fabric, 12 colours. On one side there was one colour, on the other side there was another colour. In these days, the point of reference for sportswear collections was the army. If you look at army garment, you will never find a pocket or a particular style of jacket only because it's beautiful. Everything must be functional. So in order to pay a tribute to the army, the seven shoulder pieces had a strong army influence. On Italian army stuff we have on the collar, what we call "mostrine" (insignia). The mostrine is a piece of fabric in different colours. So if you are in the navy the colour is blue, if you are in the Alpine army the colour is green. It's to recognize the different specifications of the Italian army. This was an inspiration. But it would have been too strong to put it on the neck. So we decided to put a badge on the left arm. And we had to give a name to the collection. And one of the assistants of the designer said "Oh I'm reading a beautiful book", and the title of the book was Stone Island, Isola di pietra. So we thought that sounded beautiful and we chose Stone Island as a name. Another thing to decide was what to put on the patch on the shoulder. On the first page of the book there was a wind rose, yellow and green, with the Stone Island writing inside. And we simply took that. So there was no really strong marketing approach behind it. And from the beginning it was an unbelievable success. In the 80s my company was only able to sell in Italy. So we built the success of Stone Island in Italy. In the 80s the first young Italian male generation, ranging from 18 to 25, that was interested in fashion, were called "Paninari", sandwich-eater. They were the first generation that was really deeply interested in fashion. And they had some iconic brands. Timberland for shoes, Burlington for socks, Levi's for jeans, for shoulder pieces it was Montclair and the object of their dreams was Stone Island. Because also in these days, Stone Island was very, very expensive. And so we became one of the iconic brands for this generation, my

generation, more or less. And the 80s are also the decade, when “made in Italy” would go up and explode in the world. Before, Italy was not very recognised for fashion. It was France of course. When we started Stone Island, it was late for presentation. Therefore we never make any kind of presentations during the fashion week.

**How do you introduce your new collections then? We saw videos on fashion.tv in which you were hosting an event in your shop to introduce the S/S 2011 collection.**

This was actually the first time we did that. Now I want to improve the internet site. Because as I heard in five years, e.g. students won't use newspapers any longer. The second point is that 95% of the turnover of my company is made by multi-brand, independent boutiques. So I have a couple of filters between me and my final customer. One is agents and distributors, and the second one is the owner of the boutique. There is an example I like to tell because it describes the problem very well. In the past, we did the “Ice Jacket”, a jacket that changes colour along with the temperature. I met a gentleman who owned a boutique in Germany, which still got it on stock. Even though it was totally sold out worldwide. And I asked him “What happened?” “Oh this jacket, they don't like it”. And apparently they didn't know that it changes colour, because a lot of information is lost between us and the final customer. Therefore we have to make use of the Internet, to talk directly to the people. We have a beautiful story to tell and we want to let the customer know what's happening behind the scenes. We did those movies, which we uploaded on the website. In the second one e.g. Claudia is showing how the process of dyeing garments works. If we say “we do garment dyeing”, what does it mean to the customer? Garment dyeing. For me, it's my life. But to a normal, basic, Italian man, who is my final customer it doesn't mean anything. So I want to show them what we are capable of doing. And this is also an explanation for our high prices. But there is a content in this garment. Take e.g. the “Liquid Reflective Jacket”, which we launched last winter. The original jacket is white. And then they are painted individually, jacket by jacket. And then we put those jackets individually in the oven to fix the colour. So it's really handled piece-by-piece. In my opinion, that is unique in the world.

Thank god we are not a huge company. We are a small company. The turnover this year is 49 mio. €. It's a profitable company. Very profitable. And we don't pursue that. It's always like that. If you want to be profitable you lose money. (Laughing)

**If you had to describe the SI man, the person you actually design for. The person you have in mind when you create. How would you describe this person?**

I will be very clear with you. First of all we do only do men, not women. We don't have Stone Island donna. And we will never, never do donna. The type of customer that I think of is a man, very basic. A man is not a complicated system. It's not like women. We have three things: Sports, women, motors. So I want real men. Also if you look at Stone Island knitwear. It's for real men. And I know that this is not politically correct, but among the designers at Stone Island, first Massimo Osti, then Paul Harvey and now me with a team of designers, nobody was gay or homosexual. Not by choice. I don't have anything against homosexuals, but it's the story. So Stone Island is for real man. And I think today it's wrong to identify a target by age. Because there is a theory saying, now, men are forever 40. Older people like me are dreaming about being 40 again. Younger guys are dreaming of being 40 because of more money,

more power, more success. And in my opinion age is not really a good approach of thinking about a target customer.

Moreover our customer is somebody who appreciates quality. E.g. when dyeing clothes, the temperature will range between 80°C to 140°C under pressure. We are cooking our garment, so we can't stitch the garment as any other company. It would melt.

Like I always say, the average age of my shoulder pieces is 19 years, like a Volvo car.

**So, basically, your customer is a real man, with a basic male taste, but who can also appreciate the design and the time being put into the garments?**

Yes, but not with a fashion approach, but with a more technical approach. E.g. if you look at our advertising, the image is already very icy, minimalistic. It's illustrating young, normal guys. It could be a photo being made in a police station. But that was not the idea. The idea was after years of just taking the empty garment, we wanted to put a man inside. But a real man. And not the man you usually see in the advertisements. Other companies advertise a lifestyle. I advertise a product. So if you read about our garment, we want to be as close as possible to reading an instruction manual to a car. You will never find the word beautiful. It's a technical explanation.

**So your customer has to bring a certain kind of sophistication to understand and appreciate the product?**

Yes. But not the same kind of sophistication that you would need e.g. to choose a Giorgio Armani product. It's more an understanding. And what I saw in the recent years; When a guy decides to buy my product he will appreciate using it. And again: men are simple. We are not using a purse like women. Our pockets are very, very important. I know that on the left side I have my money, on the right side I have my phone, my cigarettes are also on the right but in another pocket. If I change my jacket, it's a disaster.

**We were about to ask with which other brands you are competing. But with your emphasis on the design of the product and not so much on aesthetics and fashion I think it's very difficult to say which brands you compete with. Your product is very specific.**

My customers, the owners of the boutiques always say, that if by any chance I go crazy and I stop doing Stone Island, they don't have another brand to substitute Stone Island. This is one aspect. And the other aspect is, that in my opinion competition is everybody else that makes garment in general. You can choose to buy a Stone Island jacket or someone else's. If you e.g. spend your money in a D&G shop, you don't have the money left to buy a Stone Island jacket. So competition could be everyone and nobody. I don't know.

**We have seen an interview, where you explain that you do marketing top-down. That you chose the customer and he does the advertising for you. So you think that there is no better advertising than a man wearing a cool and great quality garment?**

I think so. I think it's a long way to go but there is no better testimonial than the men walking down the street. What I noticed is that when two men are walking down the street, wearing a Stone Island jacket, they notice each other. We look each other in the eyes and we recognize a sort of club. That's also a part

of the reason why I don't want to do a line for women. Because I think that these types of men, they don't want to see their Stone Island men product worn by women.

**But you have a Stone Island kids collection, right?**

Yes, Stone Island junior. We introduced it because it's very useful. The timings of the kids collections is totally anti-cyclic with the men's collection. So from left-over fabric we do the same style like the main collection but smaller. And with the same structure we can do two collections, because the timing is totally different.

For the last two years we only do advertising in the *Gazzetta dello Sport*, the most sold daily newspaper in Italy. We call it the pink bible because it's printed on pink paper. And it's 45 pages of only sport, every day. And the target of Gazzetta is from 7 to 99 years.

**Speaking of the *Gazzetta dello Sport*, we wanted to ask about Stone Island's bonds and association with football. How and when did those develop, or when did you first become aware of it?**

We discovered that around 1992. In England there was a very famous football player, Eric Cantona. He played for Manchester United. And the guy gave an interview on a Sunday after the match, on national UK television. And he wore a Stone Island jacket in three interviews. And he bought the jacket in our shop. Without a discount. We didn't intend to use him for marketing reasons; we just got lucky. All of a sudden we became very well known in the UK.

The brand was so visible in Italy that a German distributor arrived and so we started selling in Germany. And then the company was bought by GFT, which in those days was the most important fashion company in Europe. This company distributes around the world. So Stone Island was also starting selling around the world. So in 1989 we were already selling in whole Europe, plus Japan and the US. And the link between football and the hooligans starts with Eric Cantona. And then a lot of football people followed. And it just happens to be the type of product that football players love a lot. I don't advertise that but we have a couple around Italy. We have Milano and Roma. There are a lot of football players that are customers at my shop. I never tell anybody, because I don't want to use them for advertising. So they feel free to come and buy and we don't ask anything from them. We don't give them the whole V.I.P. treatment, they come because they want.

**And when you saw that the football people loved the brand, and sometimes they made the brand visible when they got out of the line, e.g. in England, when hooligans engage in violence and fights. Did you ever feel like this might be dangerous for you as a brand?**

When we heard about it, the first thing I felt was shame. I hate violence. It's terrible. I'm a football fan and I love sports in general. I'm Italian and I'm very passionate but I have a very British approach. I was president of an ice hockey team in Italy and I'm always surprised that there is some sports... E.g. it's the fourth time that we play against another team. But after the game we are sitting together, drinking and talking and become friends. It's a very civilized way of doing sport. You have to beat the other team, but when the game is finished, it's finished. This is my approach towards sports so you can easily understand that hooliganism is something that I really hate. And we understand that this association of the brand with the hooligans could be a problem. E.g. before the World Cup in Japan/Korea 2002, the Japanese police called my Japanese distributor, asking him to teach their policemen, how to recognize Stone

Island jackets. In order to identify hooligans. This was not good news to us. So for many years we ran away from football. And then I started thinking. Because many years ago I had a book, written by a British anthropologist, which was called "The tribe of football". Because it's a tribe, a tribe all over the world. Like I always say, we speak different languages, but if you are in a park and there is a ball we become all friends. Gather 10 men from all over the world and they will do a football game. My daughter plays football as well, because she went to an American school. It's weird the men don't play football, but the women do. That's a whole different tribe. But you know, we don't sell in the US. It's terrible but they don't understand my product. They don't play football and they don't understand my product. So in the last two years, I said OK. Of course we didn't choose the hooligans, they chose us. But not only the hooligans, but it's the whole football tribe that likes Stone Island. So I don't think we don't have to be ashamed of football. Hooligans are only a part of the football tribe, not the only part of the tribe. So instead of running away from football I chose to - I don't like the word use- let's say go close to the football philosophy in general. Ready to answer to difficult questions about hooligans. Talking about that, I just remember when we first opened our shop in Milano (2002), there was a Champion's League match between Milano and a British team, I think it was Manchester. And we knew that there would be a lot of supporters. So obviously there also could be hooligans among them. So I was afraid about my shop. So I put some private security in front of my shop, and I also went to the shop myself, because I wanted to understand. And so I met them. And I don't know if they were hooligans or if they were supporters, but individually, or in small groups, they are unbelievably sweet. And they went into my shop, which was the first Stone Island store worldwide, and were behaving like deeply catholic guys who had the opportunity to visit St. Peter's in Rome. And especially in England when they know who I am, they ask me to do photos with them, they hand me their children, they want autographs. I am like a rock-star. And individually they are perfect. But put too many men together, and you don't know what will happen. I was in Brussels when there were the riots between Liverpool and Juventus supporters. 44 people were killed and I saw everything with my own eyes, so you can imagine what I'm thinking about hooligans.

The phenomenon, that football supporters choose Stone Island, travel around Europe, France Germany. And I discovered that these types of things move from football supporter to sport supporter. So Stone Island is not only for football supporters or hooligans – of course they are not all hooligans- to basketball for example. So it's the type of garment that is useful for people who attend sport events. This is my only explanation. The other explanation is that they understand that this is a product for real men. E.g. on the archive on the Internet you can find a jacket made four years ago, made out of Kevlar. And if you use a lot of Kevlar, e.g. the bulletproof vest is made out of Kevlar. And after three weeks we found a site in England, which was talking about the Kevlar Jacket. And they said it was an anti-knife garment. So we stopped the production.

It's difficult because you cannot choose your customer. But in the last two years I said, OK we have a very specific target, football supporters, and I have to use it. So I do the advertising only in the *Gazzetta dello sport* and these type of things. During the World Cup 2010 in South Africa we have done a football blog. (but now it's closed). With the blog I wanted to check if the Internet as a media would help me in my job. In Italia we have football on TV every day. So you have to listen to it everyday for hours, and they only talk bullshit. So we wanted to make a blog is more intellectual and goes beyond football. Talking about the architecture of the stadium, about the story of Italians like Mr. Eto'o, who has a beautiful

story behind him. We won the Championship in 1982, so we interviewed players who were on the team at that time. Just not talking about football in a usual way but from a sophisticated point of view.

**We have interviewed a lot of Stone Island fans, and they also made the distinction between liking the sport and being a hooligan. They love the sport and they love what Stone Island means for football but they don't support hooliganism and violence. They wondered if you have considered sponsoring football teams or in general go more directly towards football. You just like the association and that's it? You don't like to change your designs just to be closer to football?**

No. When we start to design we never talk about football. Pay attention. Sportswear is not active. So my competitors are not Nike or adidas. The usage is not an active one. I hate sweat. We design for civil use; to go and enjoy the game. Not to actually play.

**And before you said something about the Internet and that you want to understand how it could be useful for your brand and your company. Do you pay attention to blogs and forums and to what consumers are saying about Stone Island on the Internet?**

Yes, we control, we look, we read, but we never say a single word. I think that my point of view is stated on my site. If I entered a discussion it would be a mess. I would look like I wanted to control. But I don't want to control anything.

**Do you think that those opinions are an important input? Do you listen to your consumers incorporate them into your designs or market strategy? Or do you follow your own plans and just use those opinions for information?**

Saying the truth. In general, the market and the customers, they desire what they know. But we always try to do something that is unknown. So, we listen to the market and try to get closer, but I don't want to listen too much. I don't want to be driven by the market. You can understand the position of my marketing managers. They want to sell. And they are always talking to me about stuff that is already on the market. And in my opinion it's stupid to do something that is already on the market. Somebody has already done it before and I cannot do a stupid copy. So I have to find my own way. I never run back to the market and also I think that the market goes up and down. E.g. look at trends in fabric. It's always pending between man-made fabric and natural fibre. If you always try to run to the market you will be always late. So we do what we think is correct. And sooner or later the market will arrive at my product. I wait for the market to come to my product. I don't need to generate a huge turnover. We are a small company and we are very flexible. So I don't need to sell a lot. So this is very convenient because you don't have to run after opportunities. We stick to our believes, and the philosophy of our brand and the market will follow. I think that integrity is a winning position in the long-term. And my dream is to create a jacket bottom-up. We started talking to our customers on a blog ([found-nyc.com](http://found-nyc.com)), and the idea was to create a jacket together with the bloggers. So I choose three fabrics and then they vote for the fabric. Then I give them three styles, and they vote again. So I wanted to build a jacket for them, by them. But then the blog closed, and everything went down the plan (laughing). But it's a beautiful idea. Building a jacket, talking to the customer and giving them the opportunity to build a Stone Island jacket. That's a dream for me. And I would still lead the process, which allows me to stick to my philosophy. And you know I'm Italian. And if you put ten Italian men together, you will get eleven different opinions. So if I



gave them too many choices, they would never be able to choose. E.g. sometimes journalists ask me, which would be the best fabric we ever made, I have to answer: I don't know. Everything I have done, feels like children to me. My favourite fabric is always the one of the next season. And I've been in my shop today. And we sell S/S 2011 now, but we already designed and closed the sales for winter 2011. And we are already drawing for the next S/S collection. So I was in the shop and I saw the summer collection we drew one and a half years ago. It's terrible to me. Terrible. It's old. Mamma mia. I hate it. I'm always focused on next year/ next season. I like all the old stuff in the same way, because they have a story. You know, we do real research. When we start the research we don't know yet what we will be able to obtain. And if we are able to obtain something we will put it in the next collection. We don't do research and say, OK we do this research for the next collection. Sometimes we need three or four years to develop an idea. There is an unbelievable amount of work behind the key fabric; the piece of conversation, everyone of my customer knows. The key fabrics are all the same to me. There is not one I like more. E.g. handmade, I really like handmade. Because there are not many companies in the world anymore, which are able to do things handmade. So I'm very proud of it. The camouflage jackets e.g. are individually hand-painted after a picture of WW I.

**Our interviewees said that they could still feel the military influence on the Stone Island brand. And they like it because it makes them feel powerful and strong when they go out in something that has this military appearance.**

Yes, military is a 100% function. We started in the 80s only with *militarinaro*, now we also look at other disciplines. People who work at the airport, people who work outside. Take e.g. the tragedy that happened to Japan. You see people working, trying to close this unbelievable nuclear plant and you can see what they wear. We are influenced by other sectors, not only the army. But for next winter we will again work on camouflage. And we are looking at camouflage around the world and it's unbelievable how camouflage was changing in the last years. So it's a very interesting field of research.

**So just to sum up and make sure that we understood your position towards the football culture: You enjoy that the brand is appreciated by football fans, and that they are comfortable and that they identify with the brand. You dislike the whole hooliganism and violence aspect of the football culture but you understand that the football culture goes beyond that.**

Exactly.

**So would you say that the whole association with football was positive for the brand over the years?**

In my opinion, yes. Very helpful.

**But did you feel any negative influence of customers associating the brand with hooliganism?**

Sometimes I did. But that was more in the past. Because in the past we were not involved in the whole football/ sport area, and so we avoided talking about hooliganism. And so nobody understood. Now I think it's more clear, when I talk to you directly, and you understand that we don't work for the hooligans. We work with other things in the part of the family of football and sports. Because there are more sections than hooligans, but I cannot choose my customer. In my opinion it's much more clear. There was also a movie about ten years ago that became a cult. It's called "Hooligans". (OT: Green

Street) And in the most important scene, the main actor goes down the subway station and is wearing a beige Stone Island raincoat. And we still got calls every two months, asking where they can buy the coat, they saw in the movie. The main actor was always dressed in Stone Island. We were not involved. We only discovered that when the movie was broadcasted.

**So you are not asked to give permission to those people to use Stone Island in the pictures?**

Exactly. So it gets me completely by surprise.

**And you don't feel the need to write explicitly on your website that hooliganism is not something you support? You just stay silent and wait until the association will eventually wear off.**

No, I'm sure that sooner or later, there will be something. Or somebody will ask me officially on the website about my point of view. And now that I'm talking with you I just had an idea. Every year we do a sort of lottery in the London shop. And the 7 final customers won a trip to Milano. So they spent three days with me, my son, the designers in the company, and we had dinner together... And on the last trip there was this guy who was a former hooligan. One of the two guys in the UK who got a lifelong prohibition to the stadium. So I think one of the worst men in the world. No he isn't any longer a hooligan and he wrote a book. And at the end of the book he wrote: If read the book and you are still thinking that being a hooligan is a good thing, you should start reading the book again. Now he is married, is totally in love with his wife, has two children, doesn't touch alcohol at all, doesn't smoke. He is a very normal man. And he said that Stone Island was the only thing that was clean in his former life. And just now you gave me the idea, of making a video with the gentleman, explaining the story.

**That's a beautiful idea. Because when we were trying to find out about Stone Island's opinion on hooliganism we found nothing on the Internet.**

Yes, it's all in the newspaper. Let's say I made an interview through the Internet and the Internet journalist is very young and doesn't know Stone Island. So they are very impressed by Stone Island. The journalists who work for the press, they are older and know everything about Stone Island. So they know about the hooligans and they may ask about it. In printed paper you find my position. But if nobody asks, I will not talk about it, because of course that's nothing I'm proud of. But now you gave me this good idea.

### **Appendix 3: Empirical Material – Interview with A.A. Brand Fan – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011**

#### **How did you first learn about Stone Island?**

When, I was younger, around 16, I started to go to a lot of football matches, and I didn't even know what Stone Island was. I remember a friend pointing and saying "Look there is a guy wearing Stone Island", I asked "what is Stone Island?", he explained "It's a brand, it's a very expensive brand. It's the brand only the firm wears". And I was like "What is the firm?" And that's when I started to learn about the firms and that they are wearing these kind of brands. And I developed an interest for casual brands or hooligan brands.

#### **So first there was the interest for the hooligans. Then you developed an interest for the brand?**

Yes, I would say so.

#### **You used hooligans and casuals as synonyms Is there any difference between hooligans and the Casuals and the lads?**

Lads is a slang words for guys, who are in the firms. If you see someone being a part of a firm you would say, he is one of the lads. They use that in England. We in Sweden have other words like "ligister", which would mean something like outlaws.

A Casual style is just a style of clothes, they wear. Anyone can be Casual dressed or be a Casual. That actually has nothing to do with being a hooligan. Regular supporters dress Casual as well, because it's part of the football culture. But the hooligans, they wear the high-end brands of the Casual clothing, e.g. Stone Island, that a regular supporter probably wouldn't wear. There is a few that wear Stone Island, even though they are not hooligans, because they are just dedicated to the Casual style. But mainly it depends which part of the hierarchy you are in. The hooligans wear the high-end casual brands and the other ones wear the lower Casual brands.

#### **What kind of distinction is that? What are higher casual brands?**

There are some exceptional brands. E.g. Stone Island. I would even say that Stone Island is probably the only brand that is taboo to wear if you are not a hooligan. All the other brands people can wear, without being hooligans. Like supporters, or just somebody who came to watch the game. They (hooligans) wouldn't do anything if you're just wearing Lacoste or Henry Lloyd or any kind of these brands. Aquascutum is also kind of a higher brand. It's mainly the scarf or the shirts that people buy. Or maybe a cap. That's typical for a hooligan to have that. Maybe C.P. company I would say. But C.P. company is such a discrete brand. They don't flash with their brand. In the same colour as they shirt they would have written C.P. Company. No one notices that.

But definitely Stone Island. They're saying that if you're going to a football match and you're wearing Stone Island, you have to be prepared to stand up for it and be prepared to fight. "Do you have the balls to wear Stone Island" that's what they say.

#### **About the Casual style. As it is a type of style, do you think other people might adopt it, even they are not interested in football at all? But just because it's a cool style?**

Yes, I would say that I'm like that myself. Because I'm not so dedicated to support the culture. I think it's interesting to read about and to talk about. But it's nothing that I put my time into. I'd rather sit at home, doing something with my friends than to watch a football game. I'm not dedicated. But I love the Casual clothing style because it reflects my kind of personality. I've always been into sports. I like to

dress proper, but in a sporty way. Like mixing nice clothes with comfortable shoes. The sneakers are the typical casual shoes. They're very comfortable. You don't need to wear nice shoes, like the ones you would wear to a suit.

There is also other people who are adopting the style. But I would say that probably 99% of the people adopt the casual style because they see associations with the hooligans and they are fascinated about it. Or they think it's cool.

**What do you think is the appeal of Stone Island for the general public? Not speaking of the hooligans.**

Power! Power and fear! And excitement! You can see famous people in TV, e.g. the anchorman of some programme. He sits there, being on national TV, in Stone Island. Or you see famous singers, wearing Stone Island shirts or jackets. You can see that it's becoming very powerful and that it has a meaning. And people see it as a way to become cool. Because so many people talk about it and you can see it everywhere: newspapers, blogs, on the internet... And there is so few people that actually wear it. But when you wear it, you become the centre of attention for people. So I think it's that. And many people like the status it gives. It's the same thing as buying an iPhone. Because an iPhone is the high-end brand to have if you have a Smartphone. Everyone wants to have the Apple iPhone. And it's the same with Stone Island. It gives another status.

**Do you think that now that even people on TV are wearing Stone Island, that Stone Island might go mainstream. That soon everybody wants to have it? Like e.g. the Brats?**

Actually that's what's happening. That is their fault. It's the famous people who set the trends and now they have started to use it, I think that in a few years it's going to be more common to wear Stone Island. Because up to a few years ago no one in Sweden would wear Stone Island if they were not a hooligan. But nowadays You see a lot of kids running around. They have rich parents or they are spoiled or they work a lot and buy it themselves. I bought all my clothes myself. If I told my parents how much my cloths cost, they would kick my ass.

**So you think there will be a shift in the kind of person who uses the brand in a few years?**

Yes I think so. When people are seen wearing it nationally it becomes more accepted. But I know that people get pissed off . E.g. when this famous singer Darian wore a Stone Island jacket, and he is actually a (...) Stockholm fan. I went to another teams website and they wrote "We saw that Darian is wearing Stone Island. I wonder if he's prepared to stand up for it". It's becoming this bad. It's pisses them off because the one and only brand that is like "their brand" becomes "dirty" as other people use it.

**Do you think the company behind Stone Island is aware of the hooligans using their brand in that way?**

I definitely think so. (...) I have seen at least two famous Hollywood movies about hooligans and you see the Stone Island badge being flashed in every kind of scene. And if Stone Island didn't want to be associated with hooligans they'd put a stop to it and tell them "We will sue you, that's our brand in the movie"!

**So they are aware of it but they wouldn't necessarily say it's the wrong crowd?**

I think it gives them a lot of presence, a lot of attention. It starts as a hooligan thing and the press is writing about it. Now famous people adopt it. And when famous people adopt it then regular people adopt it, who want to be like famous people. And eventually it will become a famous brand, like Gucci and Prada. It will be a high-end, who everybody who has money will buy.

**So it will not be identified so strongly with the hooligans anymore?**

Probably not. I just think that they are using the hooligans to make the brand well-known. And to get free PR.

And actually nowadays, everything that is connected somehow to violence is just getting bigger. If you just look at MMA, mixed martial arts, the UFC that they show on television. You mix all kinds of martial arts like karate, kick boxing, Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu. They are in a cage and instead of boxing gloves, but something different so that their hands are free. So it's both standing fighting and fighting on the ground. And nobody cared about this sport five years ago. It was nothing. And nowadays it's so big. And it's getting bigger and bigger and bigger. And it's connected to violence. Same here with Stone Island. I believe that it's a strategy. They are using the violence to make their brand more desirable. More appealing. They're turning the negative part into something good.

**You have been wearing this brand for quite a few years now. Have you ever had any reactions from people around you?**

I have reactions all the time. Mostly from people that I know. Like "Ohhhhh, are you a hooligan?" or "Why are you wearing that brand?". A lot of comments. People just joking with you or asking serious questions. But also people I don't know are asking me questions. Like one time I was sitting there after class and a guy came up to me and asked me "Can I ask you something? If you wear Stone Island, is it still like that, that you have to fight?" And you have to give them the story and that I'm not a hooligan because I don't want him to think that I'm a hooligan. So there are a lot of questions. A lot of people you are passing by in the city, they look. And the younger kids, who are fascinated by the hooligan culture they would start whispering. It's happened to me, like "Wow. Look the guy has a Stone Island jacket".

**Would you say that you are involved in the brand beyond just purchasing the products? Do you use forums, or do you blog? Are you informing yourself about the brand?**

I would say that I investigate a lot. I'm not blogging though. It's not my kind of thing to write a blog. But I would say that I'm interested in fashion, at least the brands I like; not every kind of fashion. But brand I like, I want to read a lot about it. Like what kind of fabrics they use, how they do it, the history behind the company...So in that sense I would say I do. But not further than talking to people about it. Only people that are interested though. But I don't write on a blog or tell somebody "Hey! Look at my shirt! You know what it is?!"

**You said you read about fabrics. Do you have a particular feeling about Stone Island in that sense? I sit any different?**

That's actually what fascinates me the most about the brand. It's actually my favourite brand. It's mainly because it's a high-end designer brand. And they use all kinds of fabrics no one else dares to use. E.g. they have a jacket that is made out of Japanese parachute material. They have the Ice Jacket that changes colour depending on the temperature outside. They make all those crazy things and have nice details on their clothes. Everything is different. I haven't seen any kind of brand that makes the same kind of clothes they do. For me it's not only about the brand. It's what they do with the brand. But I know a lot of people who buy Stone Island and don't know anything about it. They don't even know about the material. They just see that it's Stone Island and they buy it. But for me it's not like that. I'm more into the history and what's actually behind the fabric.

**Have you travelled with your Stone Island jacket outside of Sweden? And did you have any particular reactions outside the country?**

Yes, I travelled with it. Actually I haven't been to the, what you would call the sensitive countries, with it. I've been to Asia. But that doesn't really count because nobody knows what it is. I've been to France. I

got some people looking at me. But the Casual style is not so adopted in France either. They adopt more the Italian style of the "Ultras".

They know what it is, but it is not so imprinted like it is e.g. in England or Sweden. I'm going to London next week and we will see what happens. But actually I met people from the UK when I was travelling. And they were wearing Stone Island. And I could tell from the rest of their style that they were not hooligans. And I even talked to one guy and I asked if he was interested in football and he said "No, I only care about the money". So in the UK, even though they have a lot of hooligans, it has happened what's happening right now in Sweden. There is a lot of people using it because it's a fashionable brand. And it's an expensive brand. I don't think it's going to be any problem for me in London. Only on match day, or you wandering around in an area where there is a football game, or if you go to a football stadium in Stone Island. Then you can get into serious trouble. But not on a regular day if you're walking around London city. I don't think anybody will come up to me, trying to pick a fight because I wear Stone Island.

**Besides the fact that more people know about the brand here in Sweden than several years ago. Have you noticed any change in design, quality or fabrics used by Stone Island in the last years?**

No I wouldn't say that. The only thing I noticed is that it's easier to get a hold of Stone Island. Before it was very difficult to even buy Stone Island. To find a shop where they were selling it. And when they started selling it they had very limited lines. But nowadays as it's getting so much more popular in Denmark and Sweden, and people from Sweden are buying from Denmark, you will see that what the shops offer is much wider and much more than before. It's such a big difference. Before you could see one model of shirt in two colours, one pair of pants and two jackets maybe. Now they have like 5 different jackets, ten different shirts. And they have so much more sizes

**Being more available also means that more people will buy it. Does that upset you?**

It does a lot. Even though I'm not a hooligan, I sort of think that they have. If I see a guy in the city walking around in Stone Island, and I see it's just some sort of loser, that uses his daddy's credit card to buy an expensive jacket, I just feel like walking up to them and telling them "Are you prepared to stand up for the brand now?". Just messing with them. Just to see what he's going to say because to be honest: Yes! It pisses me off. It does. Because I know what's it about. And I would say "Yeah, I'm prepared to stand up for this!" if anybody wants to do that with me. But I know for these losers, it's only a thrill to wear the brand. They become cool because it is expensive. It's kind of taboo to wear it. People look at you. They only do it for attention. And that irritates me, yes.

**So there are certain characteristics of the brand that are very appealing. And people who don't have those characteristics, but who are actually wearing the brand they would need a certain personality?**

Oh yes. It has a very strong characteristic, this brand. And there's a lot of people buying this brand only to get this point of view in life. They want people to look at them in this way. And they want this kind of attention. And you will see that a lot of casual brands, nobody knew before, are being adopted by the Brats. An example would be Hackett. They make polo-shirts, very similar to Ralph Lauren, which is known for being a Brat's brand. But Hackett was unknown a few years ago. But nowadays, when you go out you will see all the Brats wearing Hackett. And that pisses me off a lot, because I was happy wearing a brand nobody else would wear. It was a nice polo-shirt, much nicer than Ralph Lauren, but now I don't know if I want to buy Hackett anymore because it's becoming a Brat's brand. It's just annoying.

**You were saying earlier, before the interview, that you knew how the whole association of those Casual style brands which hooligans started?**

From what I've heard, from people who are in the scene, the whole Casual style started off in England, several years ago. In the early years no one was wearing special clothes, everyone was wearing their football team's match shirt and scarves in colours that were associated with the football team. It was getting very easy for the police to spot those hooligans because they were like a Christmas tree. So they started to wear regular clothes so that it would be more difficult for the police to spot them. The history says that in the early days it was very expensive to watch a football game in England, it still is, it was only the rich people who have the money to go to the games. And because they were wealthy, they had nice clothes. Because they were wearing the clothes they were wearing in normal life and that's how the casual culture started. That's what I've heard. I'm not 100% sure it's right but it sounds reasonable. Actually a hooligan probably wears clothes worth 5 times more than a regular guy. A Stone Island jacket ranges from €300 to €1,200.

**And you think people are wearing it, even if it's outside their price range?**

Yeah. The really dedicated ones that care about the Casual culture, when they are hooligans and really care, they could have a regular job in e.g. a restaurant and they use maybe half of their month's salary to buy a jacket. Because that's the culture that they live for. If you are e.g. very much into music and you play the guitar. You probably want to play on the most expensive and best guitar. It's the same here. It's a culture, it's a style, it's a lifestyle for people.

**Are your friends as well crazy about the brand?**

I have two really close friends that are very dedicated to football. They go to every game. And their life is all about football. About their team. And they are real supporters. They don't care about the firms, they don't care about going out and fighting. The only thing they care about is that their football team is winning and that the club is run in the correct way. In Sweden there is a lot of debate going on about if to privatise football. Nowadays it's co-owned. It's a member's club. Everyone buys a membership and it should be like a democracy and not being run by a private investor. And these guys they believe in that. They both like the Casual style. But none of these two wears Stone Island, because they can not go to the games wearing Stone Island. Actually they are ranging high in their supporter group, so they would be allowed to wear Stone Island. Nobody would question them. But they don't do it, because they follow the moral standards in the hierarchy they have.

**So not every supporter should wear Stone Island to a game?**

No. First of all if you are a real supporter, you don't want to be associated with those people. You care about the team, and you don't want other people to think that you are part of the stupidities they do: Go out fighting and ruining the games. And on the other side, the firm don't want any other people to wear Stone Island. I have seen that one member of the firm has told his own supporter, not to wear the Stone Island shirt and that he should take it off. It's not allowed coming into the pitch in Stone Island because it's the firm being allowed to wear Stone Island.

**So there are different levels of fans?**

Yes. It's actually the police that categorise them like this. It's called category A, B and C. Category A would be the firm, real hooligans. Category B are real supporters. They are prepared to fight if they have to. And category C is just regular supporters that never fight. In Sweden and England they call it the firm, it's the English kind of style for hooliganism. Every bigger football team has a firm, and those are the hooligans. And those are the top ones to fight for the club and nobody wants to question them because they are the craziest ones. If you question them you might get beaten up.

**Would you say that the hooligans are not so much into football and care more about the fighting?**

Sometimes. Some hooligans actually are passionate about their team. And they have a philosophy for themselves. By fighting they are protecting the colours of the team. It's like if somebody in your family gets beaten up. You would stand up for your family. It's the same thing. It's the philosophy that they have. But of course there are a lot of people who just like the fighting and the violence. And that's their main reasons to join the firms. But I think it's kind of easy to see, because if there is a guy who just cares about the fighting. He's usually not too much into the Casual style, he doesn't care about the football team. A guy like that would usually not wander off buying a Stone Island jacket because they are too expensive. I've seen these guys and they don't wear Stone Island, but just cheaper Casual brands. It's a way of showing who you are in the football culture. You show very clearly where your position is. And what you're prepared to do.

**Have you seen anything done by Stone Island to deliberately attract football fans. Like creating a football line. Having a football forum? Customise the Stone Island logo for specific clubs?**

Yes, I've seen the firms using it in their logos but it's nothing very common, I haven't seen it that much. There's nothing that I noticed that the brand deliberately did.

I have seen people being hurt because of the brand. A friend of a friend of mine got beaten up in Malmö, by the Malmö firm because he was wearing a Stone Island jacket. And he is not part of the firm. And they told him very clearly that he should not wear Stone Island if he's not a hooligan. And the next time they see him around wearing Stone Island they will kill him.

**Do you bond with other people because of wearing Stone Island? Like e.g. the Harley Davidson drivers greeting each other? Is there any peer recognition?**

Actually it's quite the opposite. If I see another Casual that I don't recognise, that might be from another firm, or if he might be from another club, there might be rivalry. You tighten up and you're waiting for something to happen. You get tense.

**If you had to describe Stone Island's target group? How would you describe it? Who do they design for?**

I'd say mainly men, as they only design men's clothes. Ranging from 18 to 40 or 38. I'd say that they don't attract any men older than that because they don't have a line that is more smart. Their style is very casual and it's from the beginning very associated to military wear, with the patch on the arm. So if something is military I'd say it's probably more for a younger crowd.

**The military elements are very interesting in itself. Do you see any associations between the military style and the hooligans adopting the brand?**

Yes definitely. The structure in the firm is the same as in the military. You have a leader, the top boy, and there are like four or five guys underneath him, who are also highly respected but he is telling them what to do. It's like a pyramid. Top-down. The same as in the military. Just like in a gang, or the mafia. They have the same kind of structure.

**You said before that if you walk around and see a guy wearing as well a Stone Island jacket it makes you kind of tense. Are you searching for that feeling? Is part you getting a kick out of it?**

I think it's subconsciously that I want that feeling. When I'm thinking I'm like "No. I don't care. It was like that when I was younger. But I think by wearing Stone Island ... well I wear it smart. I never wear it to a football game or when there are a lot of hooligans on the street ... I never do that. But still when I walk around in Malmö or other cities I put myself into risk that I might run into confrontation with other hooligans. So I would definitely say that, even though I don't admit it to myself, that probably I get a kick out of it. Knowing that someone might see me or say something. That's definitely it.



### What about women and Stone Island? Do girls like them?

I don't know many girls who know what's behind it. I know a few. And I think that if a lot of girls knew what it was and they had a bad feeling about it of course I wouldn't wear it. I wouldn't want girls to get disgusted by me. But I also know a lot of girls that are attracted to guys in the firm. Like I've seen in or outside matches that guys from the firm are getting a lot of attention by certain girls. Those who are looking for excitement. It's like with girls who like rock-stars or gang members.

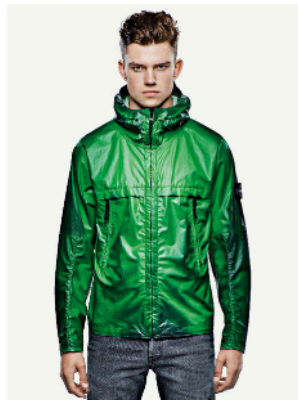
### Appendix 4: Empirical Material – Pictures

#### The famous Stone Island badge



#### Iconic Pieces: The heat reactive Ice Jacket

The Ice Jacket features a heat-sensitive coating, which changes colour at low temperatures. The molecules of the micro pigments encapsulated in the external coating change the direction of light and vary in tone depending on temperature.



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### Iconic Pieces: The Reflective/ Liquid Reflective Jacket

The Reflective Jacket reflects light from even the weakest sources. The fabric is coated with thousands of glass microspheres. The jacket is then spray painted by hand and placed in an oven to dry.



### Attracting Attention: Stone Island's extensive and spectacular colour range

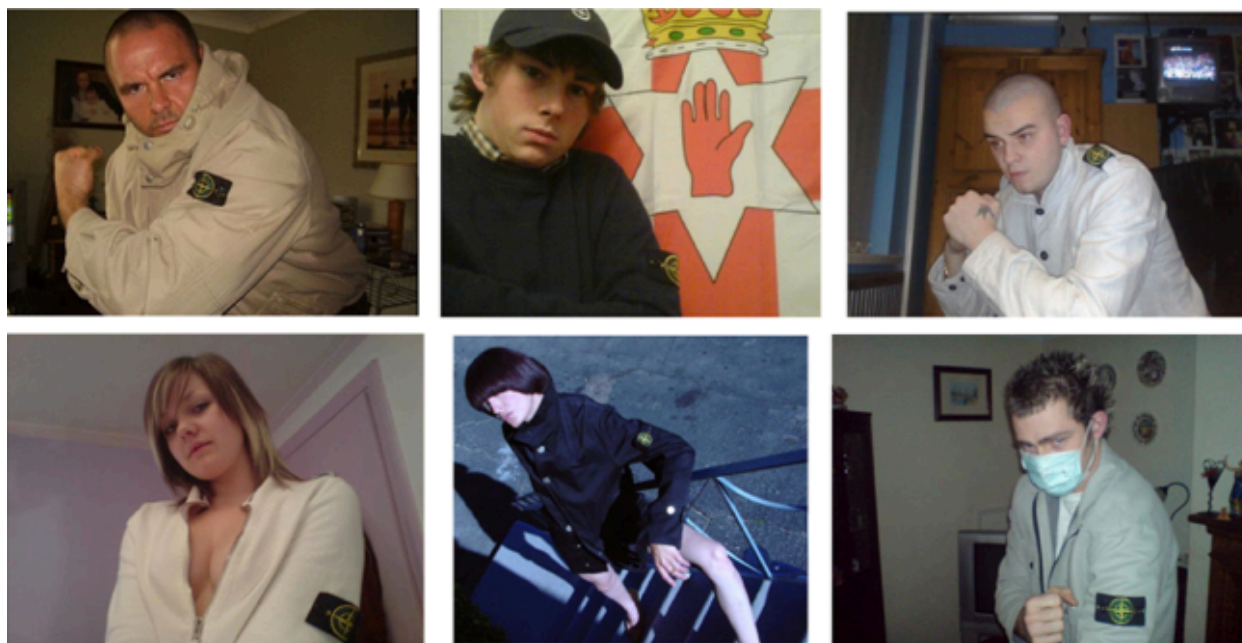


Visible from the early days until now: The marine and military influence on Stone Island items



Trends in Consumer Practices

Showing attitude: Pictures uploaded by Stoneislandsoldier on his MySpace profile (cf. 5.4.3)



What you think of that outfit, lads? Pictures uploaded on the Stone Island Facebook Group (cf. 5.4.3)



Big moments – Showing off the collection (cf. 5.4.4)



Big moments –Kids and Tattoos (cf. 5.4.4)

