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The rational aspects of an irrational whim

A qualitative study exploring the motivations
behind consumer impulse buying in a socio-cultural context

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Abstract

Title	The rational aspects of an irrational whim. A qualitative study exploring the motivations behind consumer impulse buying in a socio-cultural context.
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Course	BUSM08 Degree Project in International Marketing and Brand Management- Master Level
Key words	Consumer research, Impulse buying, Self-identity, Brand Preferences
Purpose	The purpose of the research is to analyse the consumer's underlying motivations for behaviour and decision-making in an impulse buying context, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the drivers behind impulse buying.
Method	The study is conducted with an explorative approach. A combination of self-administered diaries and semi-structured interviews were chosen to collect the empirical data.
Theory	The theoretical framework of the study is mainly based on socio-cultural theories within consumer research that illustrate the symbolic meaning of possessions, as well as describe how the consumer's self-identity and life situation can be linked to her buying behaviour and brand perceptions.
Analysis	In the analysis the participants of the study are presented as well as the dominant themes within the empirical material. The first theme indicates that the consumer is well aware of her incapability to resist an urge as it occurs and therefore tries to control and plan when to allow herself to engage in impulsive buying. The consumer tends to have expectations on the impulse buying activity that needs to be satisfied, otherwise the consumer will develop negative feelings towards the event. An additional theme in the empirics concerns the way the consumer uses impulse buying to express the self. The empirical material indicates that the consumer's impulse buying behaviour can be seen as rational in relation to the individual consumer as it helps her create meaning to her life. The final theme stresses the influence of brand preferences on the consumer's impulse buying as it limits the scope of the impulsiveness and directs the consumer to choose from an evoked set.
Conclusion	The study concludes that impulsive buying involves far more rational aspects than suggested by previous research. By putting the impulse purchase in a wider context and viewing it as one sequence in a larger pattern of sequences evidence is found that suggests that the impulsiveness is dependent on the consumer's perception of the self and the life situation.

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Appendix 1: Diary manual

Appendix 2: Interview guide

1. Introduction

Imagine yourself strolling down the streets in the city centre of Lund, or any other city for that matter, with a friend of choice on a beautiful spring day. Whilst talking to each other you every now and then enter a store and browse through their selection. As you are not really interested in buying anything you do not pay much attention to any of the offerings presented. However, when entering a random store, you lay your eyes upon a certain product and you start to feel something different. A sudden craving for the product occurs, an urge that you do not know where it came from and that you feel needs to be satisfied instantaneously. Without too much hesitation you pick up the product and head for the registry.

Now imagine yourself sitting by a computer during lunch break, mindlessly surfing on the Internet. Whilst browsing through your favourite blogs and newspapers, you are suddenly presented with an ad for a certain product that seems almost too good to be true. You click on the ad and end up in an e-store, and just to verify if the offering really is as good as it sounds you place the item in your shopping cart and click for the check-out. When presented with the summary of your shopping cart you once again start to feel this irresistible desire for the product that you neither can explain nor understand, but you quickly enter your payment details and complete the purchase.

1.1. The background of impulse buying

Many people recognise themselves in the situations described above, as subjects to the phenomenon of buying out of impulse. In the field of marketing this area started to be explored during the 1950's, however in order to get an understanding of what makes us act on impulses we need to enter the realm of social psychology.

In the 1950's, the research on impulse buying within the marketing field focused on identifying and understanding the actual behaviour of the customers. Applebaum (1951) provided an early definition of impulse buying as "buying that presumably was not planned by the customer

before entering a store, but which resulted from a stimulus created by a sales promotional device in the store” (Applebaum, 1951, pp.176). Most of the studies conducted during the 1950’s adhered to this view of impulse buying and were accomplished through questioning customers about what their shopping lists contained before entering the store and then comparing it to the outcome of the purchases (Clover, 1950). It was discovered that customers tended to buy products that that they did not intended before entering the store, and measurements by following studies showed that the sales derived from unplanned buying accounted for a large part of retailers’ total sales (Applebaum, 1951). The area of impulse buying thus started to gain more attention, and further research were aimed at understanding what actually triggered this behaviour within the store.

During the 1960’s questions started to be raised as how to define impulse buying. Up until this point the term had been used synonymously with unplanned buying, but although accurate the term did not account for what researchers saw as a larger phenomenon. Stern (1962) presented the *Impulse Mix* where he identified four different classifications of impulse buying; pure, reminder, suggestion and planned impulse buying. Through this classification he argued that unplanned buying influences some of the classifications, but that pure impulse buying is a different aspect that clearly distinguishes itself from the normal buying pattern. He thus suggested that impulse buying was separated from unplanned purchases and was instead to be seen as a separate phenomenon, a distinction widely debated until the mid 1980’s when most researchers seemed convinced of its importance (Rook, 1987).

The field of impulse buying continued to grow during the following decades, and branches started to spread in different directions. In-store promotion and stimuli where Applebaum (1951) had laid the foundation were further researched with studies concerning aspects such as in-store atmospherics (Kotler, 1973) and retail space allocation (Cox, 1974). The research on impulse buying in general also shifted focus from being centred on the in-store behaviour of the customer to classifying products according to their respective impulse or non-impulse buying likeliness, a perception that is still widely debated to this day (Dittmar & Druvy, 2000).

However, during the 1980's the research once again shifted focus. Rook & Hoch (1985) criticised the existing thoughts regarding what is to be classified as impulse products by stating that any product could be bought on impulse. They stressed the psychological factors affecting the consumer by concluding that the impulses are subject to the consumer, not the product (Rook & Hoch, 1985). Rook also distinctively distinguished impulse buying from unplanned purchases by incorporating the psychological factors from his earlier work into a narrower definition:

“Impulse buying occurs when a consumer experiences a sudden, often powerful and persistent urge to buy something immediately. The impulse to buy is hedonically complex and may stimulate emotional conflict. Also, impulse buying is prone to occur with diminished regard for its consequences.” (Rook 1987, pp. 191)

Since the mid 1980's the research on impulse buying has mainly been focused around the consumers' behaviour in relation to the felt urge, based on alternations of Rook's (1987) definition. In the quest to establish what influences and triggers this urge researchers has since examined the environment and atmospherics of the store (Abratt & Goodey, 1990); situational variables such as time and money available (Beatty & Ferrell, 1998); individual variables such as mood states (Rook & Gardner, 1993), personality (Dittmar & Druvy, 2000; Han, Morgan, Kotsiopoulos & Kang-Park, 1991; Verplanken & Herabadi, 2001) and normative constraints (Rook & Fischer, 1995).

1.2. Problem discussion

As stated above, the existing research on impulse buying is very much focused the behavioural aspects of consumption. Extensive research has been carried out to understand how the consumer behaves in the store. Researchers have noticed that the consumer's buying behaviour change while in the store and that the consumer frequently ends up buying more than originally planned. (Baker, 1992; Kotler, 1973; Rook, 1987) We believe that the underlying explanations of the behaviour have not been given enough attention in the impulse buying literature. The behaviour is commonly explained as consumer response to in-store stimuli such

as point-of-purchase promotions, shelf allocation and store atmospherics (Applebaum, 1951; Baker, 1992; Kotler, 1973) and the characteristics of the consumer are sometimes put forward as influential factors (Rook & Gardner, 1993; Stern, 1962). The impulse behaviour is explained very narrowly directing the majority of attention to the near context of the specific purchase. The research assumes that when an urge occur, triggered by in-store stimuli, the consumer will ignore all pre-purchase stages in the buying process and without any self-control go for the product that created that immediate desire. The impulse buying behaviour is assumed to be a result of the influential aspects that are present in the store when the consumer is making the decision to buy a product on impulse. (Rook, 1987; Abratt & Goodey, 1990) Little efforts have been taken to understand the consumer's behaviour in relation to a wider context.

Imagine again that you are standing by the cash desk, ready to purchase that product that evoked such cravings within you. Take a look at the product that you are holding in your hands, can your attachment to the product be explained solely based on stimuli within the store and your personal mood? We believe that the consumer's impulse buying behaviour not exclusively can be understood on the basis of what happens in the narrow context of the impulse purchase situation. By ignoring the wider context within which the action takes place we believe that some important and interesting aspects of the phenomenon are disregarded. To understand the motivational factors behind the impulse purchase we need to put the concept into a wider socio-cultural context and include more aspects of the consumer's life. The phenomenon does not exist as a complete and separate entity and we cannot distinguish it from its context. To understand the consumer we need to include the environment in which she lives and interacts. (Thompson, Locander & Polio, 1989)

Levy (1959) means that consumers show a variety of logics in their efforts to explain their consumption behaviour and the reason behind it. In the modern society goods are essentially psychological symbols of personal attributes and goals, social patterns and strivings. They need to possess a personal and social meaning in addition to its function. Belk (1988) goes further by arguing that identity sometimes lays more in the extended aspects of the self, than in the actual

unextended self. He means that objects, such as purchased goods, make the consumer capable of doing things that she would not be able to do otherwise. Objects also play the role of convincing the consumer that she will be another person as possessor (and probably a better person), than she would be without the possessions (Belk, 1988). Taking into consideration these ideas it is difficult to imagine that consumption can be an act without active reflections, as it has such great influence on the individual's perception of the self and its capabilities. As a consequence, we find it substantiate to challenge the validity of the belief that an impulse purchase event can be explained as an irrational whim. We find it surprising that the impulse buying research has not focused more attention on the potential influence of pre-constructed conceptions but most often rather assumed that the consumer can respond to an urge without taking any wider interpretation into consideration. We believe that a further understanding of the underlying motives for impulse buying requires an investigation of the potential influence of symbolic aspects on the purchase.

We believe that the lack of attention given the wider context is a limitation of the present research on impulse buying. We do not imply that the existing perceptions of motivations for impulse buying are false or misleading, but we do believe that the results are restricted resulting from the phenomenon only being studied as an isolated event. It can be assumed that a more in-depth understanding of the motivations can be found if the phenomenon is investigated from a broader view, perceiving the impulse purchase as one sequence in a larger pattern of composed sequences. By including an interest for the consumer's socio-cultural context in the investigation we believe that we can contribute with a deeper understanding of the phenomenon in question.

1.3. Theoretical contribution

From the literature summary we can conclude that more or less all previous research on impulse buying has been conducted from a Cartesian viewpoint, meaning that researchers have had a logic positivistic view of epistemology. In accordance with the Cartesian view, researchers have assumed that the impulse buying event can be put out of its context and studied in isolation. Previously mentioned research has not given any interest to dimensions that are outside the narrow sphere of the impulse buying event. This is not surprising since the Cartesian view is the dominant paradigm within marketing and consumer research (Thompson et al., 1989).

Nevertheless, we believe that the Cartesian viewpoint restrict the understanding of the underlying factors that motivate consumers to buy on impulse. We do not seek to dismiss the existing explanations or question the validity of prior research. Instead it is in our interest to contribute with a further understanding of the consumer's underlying motivations for buying on impulse by investigating the phenomenon from a different epistemological foundation. The Cartesian viewpoint is one way to view the world, but it is not the only way (Thompson et al., 1989). In this study we will embrace the premises put forward by the existential-phenomenological approach (Thompson et al., 1989). The purpose of the research is to understand the impulse buying in a wider context by including the consumer's social sphere in the investigation. In accordance with the existential-phenomenological view we believe that a deeper understanding of the consumer's underlying motivations only can be found if the phenomenon is put in a wider context. Even if the phenomenon can be conceptually distinguishable it does not exist in a complete and separate entity from the surrounding context. (Thompson et al., 1989)

The purpose of our study requires an open-minded qualitative approach towards data collection. In previous studies researchers have commonly referred to third-person descriptions to understand the impulse purchase event. The research has been based on the assumption

that one impulse purchase event is equivalent to another, and little efforts have been attained to understand the specific context of each impulse purchase. The emptiness of third person descriptions results from the lack of attention given to the experience of the consumer (Thompson et al., 1989). Our study will be based on qualitative in-depth interviews and supplementing self-administered diaries. By attaining first-person descriptions we will be able to understand the impulse purchase in a larger context, as the consumer will be encouraged to include personal experiences into the descriptions. The aim is to put a large attention on the social sphere and present rich contextual data that is absent in the previous research. We believe that we will fill a theoretical gap in the existing research by including the consumer's social life and interactions, and furthermore contribute with a deeper and richer description of the motivations that encourage the consumer to buy on impulse.

1.4. Practical contribution

The percentage of total consumption that derives from impulse purchases is considered to be up to 50 per cent (Gutierrez, 2004). The awareness of the large revenues generated by impulse purchases has led practitioners to put a lot of efforts into creating an in-store atmosphere that they think will encourage the consumer to buy more. The efforts have mainly been various attempts to use lighting, colour and promotion activities to create a favourable store atmosphere (Baker, 1992; Hausman, 2000). We believe that in order to maximise the sales of the company, marketing professionals need to understand the consumer and the process leading up to an impulsive purchase. Our aim is to stress the need for each company to understand its specific target group, as we believe that a greater knowledge of what motivates the consumer in life can help the company to develop more customised activities within the store. We are also aiming at giving a realistic notion of what is attainable for the company in the moment of impulse buying, and how the activity can be supported in advance and outside the narrow sphere of the purchase event.

1.5. Purpose and research questions

The purpose of the research is to analyse the consumer's underlying motivations for behaviour and decision-making in an impulse buying context, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the drivers behind impulse buying.

With regards to this study's purpose our main research questions are:

- How does the consumer's self-identity and life situation influence her perception and handling of the impulse purchase activity?
- How does the socio-cultural dimension influence the consumer's decision-making in the impulse buying context?

1.6. Disposition of the thesis

In this first chapter of the thesis the aim has been to provide a context for the object of study, by summarising the existing research on impulse buying and present the reader with an extensive problem discussion to pinpoint the theoretical gaps that we are aiming at filling. In Chapter 2 we will continue the study by motivating the methodological standpoints that constitute the foundation for the study. The purpose is to provide a notion of the type of knowledge we intend to attain from the study. The chapter will also include a thorough presentation of the data collection method. In Chapter 3 we will present the theoretical framework for the study. The chapter will include prominent theories on impulse buying and traditional buying behaviour, although the main focus will be to present theories that are founded in a socio-cultural context. In Chapter 4 we will thoroughly present the empirical data attained from our study. The findings will be linked together with the theoretical framework and methodological considerations for a deep and rich analysis. The purpose of this chapter is to present and discuss possible answers to the problem formulated in the initial chapter by including the wider context of the respondents in the description of the phenomenon. Finally, Chapter 5 will include a conclusion on the main findings of our study as well as proposed areas for further research.

2. Method

The purpose of this chapter is to present the methodological choices and considerations that have guided us when conducting this study. The chapter will thoroughly present our views on the methodological choices and the implications and reasoning behind the respective choice.

The chapter is divided into five sections. First, we discuss our view on theory in relation to our research, and present how we have used an abductive approach in this study. In the second section we present our thoughts on epistemological and ontological considerations, where we argue for the use of an interpretivistic view on knowledge as well as a social constructivistic view on reality. The third section covers our choice of research design, where we start by presenting our choice of qualitative method. The section continues with a thorough presentation of our choice and application of self-administered diaries and semi-structured interviews as data gathering methods, as well as descriptions of the processes of sampling and transcription. In the fourth section we present and motivate our choice of analysis methods, which are inspired by grounded theory and hermeneutic circle as well as Thompson & Haytko's (1997) narratological model of understanding text. The fifth and final section we argue for the study's trustworthiness and authenticity, as well as describe the experienced problems with our methodological choices and language issues.

2.1. The relation between theory and data

We have chosen to use an abductive approach in this study, as we believe that it is by far the most suitable view of the relation between theory and data for our type of research. Abduction combines the elements of the two distinctive ways of viewing the theory-data relation, induction and deduction, and adds other dimensions to the equation. The empirical data is successively developed and the theory is constantly adjusted to the findings, which gives us as researchers a focus on underlying patterns that neither induction nor deduction can provide. The research process itself begins with the data collection, and combines the findings with

existing theory in the analysis in order to provide a better understanding of the phenomenon studied (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009).

The inductive way of viewing the relation between theory and data involves entering the data collection process with an open mind and then trying to identify a general pattern. Theory is thus viewed as the outcome of the research (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). Since our specific view of the phenomenon of study has not been covered within the existing literature, we have initially been forced to adhere to an inductive approach. However, as our research guided us into theoretical areas in the near proximity, the limitations that follow a strictly inductive approach could not be overcome. We believe that the theoretical gap that we are aiming at closing cannot be fully grasped in itself, but instead needs to be understood in the light of theories concerning brand preference, identity and impulse buying.

A deductive approach on the other hand involves the researcher deducing a hypothesis based on the existing theory within a certain field. The hypothesis is then subject for testing and ultimately becomes either confirmed or rejected (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). The deductive approach with its background in the natural sciences is well suited for testing and measuring observable connections or patterns. However, when the focus of the study concerns the underlying dimensions that dictate certain behaviour, the procedure of trying to deduce a hypothesis would fall short. This is where the strength of abduction really reveals itself, as the constant movement back and forth between theory and data allows us to partake the wisdom of those before us and combine it with our own thoughts and empirical findings in order to close “our” theoretical gap.

2.2. Epistemological & ontological considerations

We find it important to disclose the study’s epistemological standpoints in order to present what type of knowledge that we striving for. Epistemological considerations revolve around the question of what is to be viewed as acceptable knowledge in a certain field. Within the realm of social sciences there are primarily two dominating fractions, positivism and interpretivism. We

have chosen to use an interpretivistic epistemological approach in our study, since we believe that it is the most suitable orientation for our type of research. Interpretivism proclaims that the research of social sciences needs to be separated from the laws of nature and emphasizes a focus on the underlying meanings of social action. The phenomenon of impulse buying is highly subjective to the individual, and as we aspire to achieve a deeper understanding of the underlying motivations for this behaviour an interpretivistic approach is the most conclusive (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

The other dominating fraction, positivism, is derived from the natural sciences and proclaims that in order to classify *true knowledge* a set of principles must be adhered to; it needs to be able to be confirmed by the senses, it should permit the explanation of laws and knowledge is achieved through the collection of facts. The difference between the two main epistemological orientations can be seen as where the positivistic approach tries to explain a certain aspect of human behaviour, the interpretivistic approach instead aspires to understand it (Bryman & Bell, 2007). We believe that if we were to adhere to a positivistic approach we would not be able to grasp the subjective aspects of our phenomenon of study, since they are neither measurable nor confirmable in a positivistic sense. As our purpose of this study is to understand certain behaviour, not to quantify its occurrence, we believe that an interpretivistic approach is better suited for this study.

Still, as Thompson et al. (1989) have noted, our approach do not exclude us from sharing some logical positivistic epistemological concerns. In accordance with positivism we believe that “conclusions should be empirically based; research should strive to be free of personal biases, prejudices and dogma; other individuals should be able to agree that the conclusions are justified by the data: and criteria should be provided for evaluating competing knowledge claims.” (Thompson et al., 1989, pp.142)

Ontological considerations revolve around the question of whether or not social entities have a reality external from social actors, or if the reality is constructed by the actors themselves. This

question outlines the two main contrasting ontological positions, objectivism and social constructivism (Bryman & Bell, 2007). We have adhered to a social constructivism orientation due to the nature of our research, as we believe that both brand images and buyer decision-making processes are constructed through interaction and does not exist on its own. This also entails that we as researchers are not objective to the research of the phenomenon, but part of its constant construction and reconstruction.

2.3. A qualitative research design

We have chosen to use a qualitative strategy in this study, as the research design is ultimately derived from the question of what type of data that is needed in order to fully investigate the purpose of the research. The qualitative research design generally proclaims the use of an inductive approach to theory, and is thus commonly linked to an interpretivistic epistemological orientation as well as a social constructivist ontological orientation (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Our study is aimed at understanding a certain type of behaviour, as well as the influence the socio-cultural environment has on this behaviour. In order to understand these various psychological and social factors, a deeper insight into the respondents' mind is needed, which thus requires a more interpretivistic epistemological approach. As stated above we also believe that a social constructivism ontological view is needed in order to grasp the width of our object of study, which thus leads us to use qualitative research design. We have used a combination of self-administered diaries and semi-structured interviews in order to collect our empirics. The combination of methods resembles what Bryman & Bell (2007) refers to as triangulation, where the researcher combines several methods in order to increase the quality and trustworthiness of the study. The usage of triangulation works as a way to ensure that the collected empirics are well supported and facilitates the interpretation. A more thorough presentation of the qualitative methods and why they are suitable for our research is presented further down, in section 2.3.1 onwards.

The other type of research design, quantitative strategy, proclaims a deductive approach to theory, a positivistic epistemological orientation and an objectivistic ontological orientation is

proclaimed (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Much of the earlier research made within the field of impulse buying has had an at least partly quantitative approach, and one can argue that it would be applicable for us as well. A research design that combines a larger survey, for instance comparing shopping intentions with shopping outcomes, and deeper interviews could be an appropriate, triangulating, research approach.

We however believe that surveys would not be beneficial for our study due the nature of the data they would provide. Surveys in general are useful for collecting vast amounts of data on a specific topic, but are more problematic when the aim is to reach beyond the shallow surface of the respondents mind. Even though one could ask the respondents to for instance express their attitudes towards a specific phenomenon by using a scale from one to ten, the accuracy of the answers is highly questionable. What differentiates an eight from a ten? How does the respondent motivate their stance? What sort of feelings does the phenomenon evoke? These types of emotions and intentions are beyond the grasp of surveys, but are central to our understanding of the phenomenon of study. And even if we were to use surveys to find interesting respondents that for instance showed high impulse buying frequencies, there is no guarantee that they would contribute with any deeper explanation for their behaviour than someone with a lower impulse buying frequency. We thus believe that surveys could potentially be used as a selection criterion for respondents, however its use for researching this study's purpose is very limited.

2.3.1. Self- administered activity diaries

In the first stage the respondents were inquired to complete a diary during a seven days period. The instructions for the diary were sent out by email to the respondents the 12th of April 2011. The respondents themselves decided on the exact period for the accomplishment of the diary, resulting in diary notes that are spread between the 13th of April and the 21st of April.

Self- administrated diaries, where the respondents complete the diary as they go about their daily routine, is considered to be an appropriate method when studying activity patterns

(Crosbie, 2006). Also, as the name of the concept 'impulse buying' indicates, it can be assumed that the consumer has not given the event any extensive consideration before it takes place. It can therefore be difficult for the consumer to accurately recall the situation and the adherent thoughts at a later stage. By letting the respondents complete a diary we believe that they were better prepared for the interview situation. They were given the chance to reflect on their shopping behaviour in advance to become aware of how they feel and think in the situation. The diary increases the reliability of the information received by the respondent and it is a useful method to build other data collection methods upon. Corti (1993) argues that the diary is a suitable method to use as supplement to interviews "... the diary keeping period followed by an interview asking detailed questions about the diary entries is considered to be one of the most reliable methods of obtaining information". Bryman and Bell (2007) have noted that diaries can be appropriate to use to identify minor psychological aspects that otherwise would not be seen as significant. Furthermore they argue that diaries can assist in providing contextual information about factors that influence the participant.

2.3.1.1. Diary format

The reliability of the research method very much depends on the commitment of the respondents (Corti, 1993; Crosbie, 2006). To facilitate the respondent's accomplishment of the task the respondents were given a manual on how to fill in the diary. We decided to use a semi-structured approach to the format of the diary. The structured format, which implies that all categories are predefined, did not fit our study since it limits the respondent's ability to make descriptions unreservedly. Since the area of research is previously unexplored, we believed that structured categories would lead to a biased result based on our presumptions and that important aspects risked being unrevealed. At the same time, the diary format needed to stress aspects related to subject of study. We believed that an entirely open structure where the respondent was free to record events without any guidelines would lead to collection of an extensive amount of data that would be out of reach of our research project. An unstructured approach also risked resulting in a lack of commitment and support of the research by the respondents. They could experience the workload as too heavy and therefore decide to only do

short notes or even resign from the commission (Corti, 1993; Bryman & Bell, 2007). To avoid such outcome, we decided to structure the diary around some key words. We also included instructions in the diary to facilitate its completion and to ensure that the respondents understood the purpose of the diary in more or less the same way. The diary was sent to the respondents by email encouraging them to print the diary and use it as notebook. A copy of the diary is to be found in Appendix 1. The respondents were requested to describe all purchasing occasions during a seven-day period. The length of the period was chosen to assure that the respondents were faced with at least some situations of impulse buying, but still keep the respondents from getting bored.

2.3.2. Semi-structured interviews

To supplement the diaries we decided to use semi-structured qualitative interviews. The interviews were conducted between the 27th of April and 10th of May, 2011.

Interviews were chosen with the purpose of our study in mind, the method is considered to be the most powerful mean for attaining in-depth understanding of another person's experiences (Thompson et al., 1989). In comparison with observations the interview can obtain deeper and richer data, and it is possible for the researcher to direct the interview and collect extensive data on the specific aspects that are perceived to be the most interesting for the study. In the situation of observations the researcher is more or less dependent on her own observations and cannot decide where to fast-forward and where to slow down. Observations imply a third person perspective and are inappropriate for investigating people's experiences, thoughts and feelings. To get close to the consumer's underlying motivations we need to ask questions to reveal what is not visible for the eye. The interview supports the collection of first person experienced data, which we believe is necessary to describe experiences. (Thompson et al., 1989)

Our thesis is inspired by the phenomenological approach towards interviews and we are aiming at attaining descriptions of the world as it is experienced by the participants, with the

assumption that the important reality is what people perceive it to be. The qualitative interview supports the information gathering of important aspects to our study. The qualitative interview focus on the everyday life of the respondent, and it seeks to interpret meaning of central themes in the respondent's life world. The idea of the qualitative interview is to focus on some specific themes, and generate specific descriptions rather than general opinions. (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009)

2.3.2.1. Striving for a reflexive approach

Even though we consider our choice of method to be the most appropriate given the prerequisites we find it important to keep a critical perspective towards the collection of empirical data. In accordance with Alvesson's (2003) recommendation we are aiming for a reflexive approach towards the interviews. We will put in conscious and consistent efforts to view the subject from different angles and be aware of the problems related to qualitative interviews. In his article, Alvesson (2003) has categorised the challenges into eight metaphors, among them we believe that four is of great importance for our study.

First of all, we need to be aware of the role we, as interviewers, play in the production of answers since the "interplay between two people, with their gender, ages, professional background, personal appearances, and ethnicities, puts heavy imprints on the accounts produced" (Alvesson, 2003, pp. 19). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) also stress the influence of the interaction between the interviewer and the respondent, they explain the interview as an inter-change of views between people conversing about something of mutual interest. The interviewer and the respondent must be seen as co-constructors of knowledge based on the social and inter-subjective nature of a conversation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). We disagree with Schneider (2000, in Alvesson 2003) on the idea that the interview is solely a production of meanings in itself and therefore only can be analysed for its own purpose. We reject the idea of any objective reality that can be mirrored and mapped by using an objective research method (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). We believe that the interview is an appropriate method for this study as it pays attention to the consumer's way of making meaning to her own lived world. By

reflecting upon our own influence on the situation and value the information critically we believe that we will be able to find patterns on a phenomenon that takes place outside the interview context.

The assumption that the respondent develops ideas about the purpose of the interview in advance also needs to be given awareness (Alvesson, 2003). Generally this problem is referred to as the interviewer effect (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The basic notion is that the respondent develops ideas about what the interview is about and tries to respond to these ideas regardless of the study's actual purpose. This may influence the data received from the interview as the respondent will focus on the aspects that she believes is most important. This may be a difficult challenge to overcome without ending up asking subjective questions. As said previously in the section it is important to try to view the phenomenon from different angles, and also encourage the respondent to reflect upon a specific event from several angles. (Alvesson, 2003)

Further on, the role of the respondent may influence the information received. Alvesson (2003) argues that people have multiple identities, changing depending on the situation. A person can for example be woman, manager, and middle-class, and what role the person takes on in the context of the interview influences how she behaves and responds to the interviewer's questions. There is also a possibility that the respondent feel a need to defend, repair or present a favoured self-identity, not necessarily a true identity. (Alvesson, 2003)

The final metaphor that needs to be given awareness in our study is the impact of cultural schemes. Alvesson (2003) means that the inherited orientation towards concepts implicitly presents in the language will influence the information received. Alvesson (2003) takes the example of hierarchy, that he means is a positive charged word in some cultural contexts, but purely negative in others. In this study concepts such as 'impulse buying' and 'consumption' need to be viewed with sensitivity to this matter. What are the respondent's attitudes towards these concepts and how will it influence their answers? In relation to language it is also important to be aware of the limitations of the spoken language and the difference between

the nature of the empirics and the nature of the findings we are aiming for. The empirical data are the respondents' *descriptions* of their feelings and thoughts, not necessarily their actual feelings and thoughts (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). To overcome these challenges we find it important to use follow-up questions and encourage the respondent to describe phenomenon from several angles. We will also pay attention to non-verbal language such as gestures and body language in order to identify aspects that are unpronounceable verbally.

2.3.2.2. Interview format

We decided to conduct interviews on a semi-structured level since it corresponded with our purpose as well as our pre-understanding of the subject. Bryman and Bell (2007) mean that a semi-structured approach is appropriate when the researchers have a fairly clear idea of the topic. Throughout the study we did extensive readings on the existing literature related to impulse buying, consumer buying behaviour, consumer culture and branding. As a result we had a fairly good notion of the existing theories in the area. Still, the specific object of study in our thesis was previously unexplored. As a result, we needed to provide a context for the interview, but still let the respondent freely describe her experiences in detail.

We considered totally unstructured interviews to be a poor choice since it would have left us unable to influence the interview and encourage the participant to develop their thoughts when they touched upon something of great interest for our study (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Also, having an idea about the interview structure helped us to keep some equivalence between the interviews. Bryman and Bell (2007) argue that it is advantageous to have some type of framework when several researchers are involved in the study since it facilitates the comparability of the interviews.

2.3.2.3. Design of the interview guide

In accordance with our choice to conduct semi-structured interviews we decided to design the interview guide based on five different themes; general demographic questions, attitude towards consumption in general, impulse buying, planned buying, and brand perceptions (see Appendix 2). The themes were used as general guidelines for all interviews, and were then

customised on the basis of the data attained from the individual diaries. The dairies provided additional themes to touch upon based on the individuals' experiences. The diaries also provided us with knowledge about the language used by the respondents and helped us to prepare the interview guide in a language that were familiar to each respondent. By using the choice of words and definitions articulated by the respondent we aimed at creating a familiar context and facilitate the process of acquiring in-depth data. Based on the premises of the phenomenological interview we designed descriptive guiding questions. We tried to avoid questions that would generate general answers, and questions that could be perceived as critical towards the respondent and her behaviour.

2.3.2.4. Interview context

In accordance with the phenomenological interview we aimed to create a conversation based on equality. We put a lot of effort into creating a notion of the respondent as the one in possession of knowledge, and tried to keep the respondent from viewing the interviewer as the expert. Follow-up questions were mostly of a descriptive nature, asking the respondent to describe a situation when a specific aspect occurred. Why- questions were avoided, partly to avoid defensive response and partly to keep the respondent from becoming a "naive researcher" trying to explain her own behaviour in general terms. Descriptive questions based on the course of the dialogue also helped to keep the interview on a relevant language level. By adopting the terminology used by the respondent the interviewer avoided being too abstract or theoretical in the approach. (Thompson, 1989)

The settings where the interviews took place were mainly decided by the respondents, to give them the opportunity to choose a familiar place where they would feel comfortable. If the respondents did not know of a suitable place or simply wanted us to choose one, we put forward several suggestions and let the respondent make the final choice. All of the interviews were conducted in the central parts of Lund, mostly in various cafés but also in study areas provided by Lund University. These settings were characterised as neutral, friendly

environments where the respondents could feel calm and the interviews took the form of a normal conversation, in accordance with our previous statements.

2.3.2.5. Transcriptions of interviews

In order to ensure that we would not miss any relevant information during the interviews we used a computer to record them. By using recording software and the built-in microphone we have been able to record all of our interviews with a satisfying sound quality, which enabled us to transcribe them later. We believe that this type of interviewing technique where we have been able to solely focus on the respondents and their answers has enabled us to be more active in the conversation as well as allowing for a more natural pace of the dialogue than if we were to constantly take notes. The recordings have also enabled us to listen and re-listen to the interviews in order to give a correct declaration of the respondents' statements.

The transcription process has in accordance with our later proposed analysis method been started directly after the completion of the interview, in order to categorize the content. We have transcribed the interviews in their whole, although with the exclusion of different more or less commonly used speech quirks such as "ehm".

2.3.3. Sampling

Our procedure of sampling is similar to the method generally referred to as convenience sampling (Bryman & Bell, 2007). For this study we believe that method of sampling is of less relevance for the quality of the study. We are using a qualitative approach where we do not strive for knowledge that can be generalised, nor are we aiming for comparability between the respondents. In contrast, our aim is to gain deep understanding of the mental constructs of the respondents. As a result, we have used a random sampling method, choosing respondents from our near vicinity. Our only criterion for sampling has been the respondents' confirmation on time available for the study. The study requires relatively extensive effort and commitment from the respondents, who needs to dedicate time during a longer period to complete the diary, as well as be subject for a deep interview. We found a limited number of people that had

the willingness and possibility to devote the time needed during an intensive period of time, especially without any compensation.

In accordance with our analysis method we have continued with our interviews until reaching saturation of our empirical categories. In accordance with Bryman and Bell's (2007) reasoning the interviewing process continued until we reached a state when we considered further interviewing would not contribute with any further input to the categories. Ten respondents were originally involved in the project and completed the diary. Out of them, eight respondents were interviewed and five of them are presented in the study. The respondents' anonymity has been guaranteed by using feigned names upon request. An extensive presentation of the respondents will be found in Chapter 4.1.

2.4. The analysis approach

The most commonly used analysis theory within the field of business research is grounded theory (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Its foundation lies in Glaser & Strauss work from 1967, to which a study in itself could be conducted in order to fully disclose its potential. We will here try to outline its main arguments and put them in relation to our research.

According to Alvesson & Sköldbberg (2009) the process of grounded theory starts with the identification of a specific area of interest, where the researcher him/herself does not have any pre-existing knowledge of the subject. The researcher thus approaches the problem with an open, unbiased mind. The data gathering process then initiates and can be conducted using a variety of methods, both quantitative and qualitative, but normally has a qualitative perspective. The collected data is then subject to coding, a procedure where the researcher thoroughly and repeatedly goes through the material in order to identify categories, into which the empirical material then is sorted. This process continues until the researcher considers the categories to be saturated based on the data collected. The researcher then moves on to theoretical sampling, which contains the continuation of data gathering. Based on the findings from the previous gathering the researcher identifies where more data is needed in order to

get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon studied. This stage is commonly called “constant comparison method” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, pp.68), where the content of the existing categories is compared with the newer data until once again theoretical saturation is achieved. The final stage then involves the transition from categories to theory, which normally is done using one of three tactics. The first tactic revolves around the researchers’ notes and memos taken during the coding process. From these notes the theory can be seen evolving through the research process and is ultimately considered done by the researcher. The second tactic involves the localisation of a core category. The researcher identifies a category that can be seen as the midpoint on which all the other categories centres around. Finally, the third tactic is perhaps the most commonly used one in business literature, where the researcher explicitly shows how the different categories is interlinked to each other by drawing a model (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, pp.69).

However, even though the use of grounded theory is appropriate for our research, the framework claims that the researchers should start the academic process without any pre-existing knowledge. The researchers should be unfamiliar with the subject and start their work based on empirical findings. One could debate if this is ever possible since most researchers tend to perform research within their respective academic field, where they understandably already have pre-existing knowledge of many if not all phenomenon. The same argument applies to us, as we during our education have had the opportunity to familiarize us with the fields of brand preference and consumer buying-decisions. With the argument in mind we believe that there is a need for complementing our use of grounded theory with another analysis method, which brings us to what Alvesson & Sköldbberg (2009) call hermeneutic circle.

Hermeneutics has its roots in the interpretation of text, and the hermeneutic circle constitutes of the basic assumption that “the meaning of a part can only be understood if it is related to the whole” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, pp.94). At the same time, the whole can only be understood through its parts, thus the use of the circle analogy. How the analysis process works can be seen by using the following text and book metaphor. The part and the whole can be

seen as the specific text, i.e. the part, and the book, the whole. However, the book needs to be seen in its own context, and thus becomes the part for another whole, the author, which in turn is a part of an even greater whole, the social context. Ultimately the analysis comes to include the entire world. The purpose of the hermeneutic circle is thus to gain understanding for the object of study in relation to a wider context.

Our analysis method has also been greatly inspired by Thompson & Haytko (1997) and their way of interpreting qualitative textual data by proposing a narratological model of understanding. They suggest that the narratological understanding is based upon *the personal history as a text*, which combined with *the personal cultural frames of reference* provides the researcher with the ability to assert *interpreted meanings* through the respondents consumption stories. By arguing that consumers are self-narrators who selectively highlight important aspects of their life events, they mean that it is possible to interpret the personalized meaning of a specific consumption story in the light of the person's wider life history. (Thompson & Haytko, 1997)

We have chosen to use these methods for several reasons. The hermeneutic circle perspective allows us to put our pre-existing knowledge on various brand-related topics and impulse buying to use, and thus enables us to use a theoretical foundation guiding the research process. It also emphasises the importance of constantly evaluating the findings in relation to a greater context, which is specifically significant for our study of the underlying factors of impulse buying. It also provides us with a distinctive framework for the analysis of the respondents' diaries and the transcriptions of the interviews, in combination with Thompson & Haytko's (1997) narratological model. Grounded theory stresses the importance of the constant comparison between the empirics' found and the emerging theory, and outlines the process of the analysis in a greater sense. The combination of these methods has thus enabled us to engage in the process of analysis in a structured and organized manner, which we will here give a brief description of.

2.4.1. Our analysis process

Our analysis process began with the collection of the completed diaries from the respondents. After reviewing their answers we were able to highlight certain topics and events that occurred during the week of its completion and start to organize the data into different categories, ranging from “impulsive behaviour” and “rational decision-making” to “brand preferences”. After conducting the follow-up interview and transcription we re-evaluated the collected data and put the categories in relation to the respondents’ descriptions of their lives and history, in order to evaluate the relevance for the respondents’ wider context. This process was then repeated as we interviewed more respondents, and the categories and data was constantly re-evaluated in the light of new findings until we felt that we had reached some sort of saturation (see Chapter 2.3.3). Ultimately we reached the stage where we felt able to present this study’s findings (see Chapter 5).

2.5. Methodological considerations

2.5.1. Trustworthiness & authenticity

Throughout the study we have found it important to stress the quality of the study. Reliability and validity are important aspects of assessing research that traditionally has been associated with quantitative studies. However, Bryman & Bell (2007, pp.410) argues that the terms are applicable to qualitative research with some adjustments, and presents a number of interpretations made by different qualitative researchers. The most prominent view is probably Lincoln & Gubas’ (1985), where they propose two main criteria: trustworthiness and authenticity.

Trustworthiness accounts for four aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, which we will assess in the light of this study.

- Credibility entails ensuring that the research is carried out in accordance with accepted standards, as well as allowing the respondents to confirm that the researcher has understood them correctly.

- Transferability is concerned with the application of the study's results into other contexts. This is typically not the case with qualitative contextual specific research, however by providing the reader with a thick and detailed description of the context, the researcher opens up the possibility for applying the results to other environments.
- The third trustworthiness criteria, dependability, suggest that the researcher should adopt an auditing approach where all the stages of the research process are well documented and accessible.
- Lastly, by confirmability Lincoln & Guba means that even though complete objectivity is not possible when conducting research, it should be evident that the researcher has not let his or her personal values affect the research process or its findings. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

We have to our best extent tried to ensure that our research has lived up to these criteria. By this methodological chapter we aim to provide the reader with sufficient and elaborate information on how the research has been conducted. Through following accepted academic disposition standards combined with the valuable insights from our supervisor and fellow peers, we believe that this study lives up to the trustworthiness criteria. However, a criterion that requires some further elaboration is transferability, also more commonly referred to as generalizability. Since our way of studying the phenomenon of impulse buying is from a consumer perspective in a western context, the generalisation of its results will of course be limited and context specific. We do however believe that our results will shed light to new variables in the impulse buying literature that are applicable to other milieus, and we hope that our findings inspire future research to do some testing thereof.

Lincoln & Guba's (1985) other main criterion for evaluating qualitative research is authenticity, where the intention is to raise issues of the research on a higher level. Authenticity, like trustworthiness, consists of several criteria:

- Fairness, which entails whether or not the research fairly represents different perspectives of the members of the setting.

- Ontological authenticity, which concerns if the research helps the members to better understand their social setting.
- Educative authenticity, which involves if the research helps the members to better understand each other within the setting.
- Catalytic authenticity, which concerns if the research has triggered the members to change their setting.
- Tactical authenticity, which entails whether or not the research has inspired the members to take the steps needed for action. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

The authenticity criteria's relevance and use has been debated (Bryman & Bell, 2007), however we believe that even though some of the sub-criteria are very similar and somewhat hard to distinguish, it still serves to a greater purpose. It helps the researcher to consider and maintain the focus of the research to the actual subjects thereof, and proclaim that the outcome of the research should be meaningful for the members of the studied setting, not just for the researcher or the research itself. We thus hope and believe that our research is carried out in accordance with these criteria, and will be proven useful for consumers in their everyday shopping practices.

2.5.2. Reflections on the data collection

During the interview process and the later transcriptions thereof we have encountered a number of issues that we will address here. The first issue revolves around the interview setting and the relation between the interviewer and the interviewee that does not show on the recordings. People use non-verbal communication such as body language or facial expressions in various amounts to emphasize or show feelings that correspond with their statements. These aspects do not get recorded, and unless the interviewer makes a note that they occur or remembers the situation when transcribing, they and their meaning gets lost. Irony is another example of similar phenomenon where the actual words spoken do not represent the respondents' intentions. Even though their words get recorded, the meaning behind them does not match the transcription. A third similar aspect is when the interviewer understands what

the respondent is trying to express even though it does not get verbalized. This also leads to a situation where a quotation from a respondent can appear to be imprecise when it actually contains much more substance. In these circumstances we have tried to encourage the respondent to elaborate on their thoughts by using follow up questions, in order to ensure that we have fully grasped their intentions. If there have been any doubts when later using quotations that can be misinterpreted, we have used [] where we add or explain dimensions that are not clearly formulated.

Another issue that we have encountered is the complexity of commonly used words such as shopping and purchasing (Swedish: shoppa, handla), although they can contain conceptual differences. Shopping can refer to a joyful activity for some while it is possesses negative connotations for others. As we have seen from our interviews buying (Swedish: handla) seems to refer to more a mundane behaviour, while shopping (Swedish: shopping) refers to something more spectacular. This was a problem for us when formulating questions during the interviews as well as when writing the guidelines for the diaries, since it could unintentionally stipulate the respondents' initial thoughts and feelings. We have dealt with this by consequently use shopping or shopping behaviour in our communications with the respondents, as we believe that then at least the same condition applies to all the interactions. We are aware that this could be a problem, however we hope that we in the interviews have identified and addressed such issues.

2.5.2.1. Language issues

One major implication that we have encountered whilst working with this study has been the translations back and forth between Swedish and English. Since the both of us are native Swedish speaking, as were all of our respondents, conducting the interviews in English would limit their potential as the language itself would become a barrier. Instead we have chosen to translate the citations into English. We consider ourselves as being competent for the task, although we are by no means experts on translating between the two languages. There is a

margin of error and the possibility that some words or phrasing are incorrect, but we have to the best of our extent tried to ensure its accuracy.

3. Theory

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a theoretical framework to assist the development of interesting interpretations and credible analysis of the data generated by the study. We will join together impulse buying research and socio-cultural theories in order to facilitate the investigation of the impulse purchase from new and previously unexplored angles. As a result of our choice of method, the selection of theories has emerged as we have worked through the empirical data. The theories presented below aim to contribute with an understanding of the dominant themes in the empirical data.

The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section we will present a definition of impulse buying in order to distinguish it from other types of purchase behaviour. We will also, try to illustrate the scope of the concept by using Stern's (1962) classifications.

In the second section the cognitive and the rational approach towards the consumer buying decision process will be presented. We find it important to include the cognitive model in our thesis to be able to illustrate in what ways the results of our study agrees and rejects the implications made within this dominant approach towards buying behaviour. The section also includes the affectual approach towards the consumer buying behaviour in order to illustrate the criticism of the traditional model. The theory emphasise the influence of emotions on purchase decisions and argue that the buying decision is dependent of the consumer's self-identity and social context, rather than decided through a rational process.

In the final section, self- identity and symbolism will be further highlighted in order to describe how the impulse purchase and the wider context can be linked together. The purpose is to illustrate how the consumer's attitudes and motivations in the buying environment can be linked to her self-identity and life situation. The aim of the section is to present how the linkage between impulsive buying and the consumer's social and mental context is illustrated in

consumer theories. By doing so we create a notion of how we will approach the empirical data further on in Chapter 4.

3.1. The scope of impulse buying

Although this is a thesis within the field of social science, we will start off the chapter by digging into the field of psychology in order to understand the nature of the impulse, and create a foundation for the understanding of impulse buying.

3.1.1. The impulse

Impulses affects human activity and are simulated by both psychological and biochemical impulses. Biochemical impulses function through the nerve system and trigger a mental response, while psychological impulses motivate agents from both conscious and unconscious activity. Within the psychological field impulses are described as a strong, irresistible urge that prompts act without hesitation, and that it is not consciously planned but arises when confronted with a certain stimulus (Goldenson, 1984; Wolman, 1973). However, all behaviour that occurs swiftly is not necessarily impulse, as outlined by Rook (1987). Habitual or routine behaviour occurs rather immediately, but are more likely a learned automatic response than impulsive. Also, behaviour in emergency situations is more likely instinctively rooted than impulsive (Rook, 1987).

The impulses effect on human behaviour has been thoroughly researched in various disciplines, although its basis lies within Freud's work on delay of gratification (Mischel, Shoda & Rodriguez, 1989). The argument is that impulses can be seen as the outcome of the competition between two principles; the pleasure principle and the reality principle. Impulses may be difficult to resist due to the pleasure principle, where immediate gratification is anticipated. However, the reality principle inflicts with a more long-term, rational, goal-oriented prospect that instead inclines delayed gratification (Freud, 1956 in Rook, 1987). The trade-off between them is subjected to the individual's personality and can even be seen as defining the 'self' (Mischel et al., 1989).

3.1.2. Impulse buying

The most prominent and influential research on impulse buying is as earlier mentioned Rook's 1987 article "The buying impulse". In his work he incorporated the psychological aspects of impulses with the clear distinction that impulse buying is not synonymous with unplanned purchases into the most cited definition of impulse buying to date:

"Impulse buying occurs when a consumer experiences a sudden, often powerful and persistent urge to buy something immediately. The impulse to buy is hedonically complex and may stimulate emotional conflict. Also, impulse buying is prone to occur with diminished regard for its consequences."

(Rook, 1987, pp. 191)

Rook states that there are several key traits of the impulse purchase that clearly distinguishes the phenomenon from other types of purchases. It is perceived as something extraordinary and exciting, compared to more regular buying, and it is triggered by a forceful and urgent impulse on which the person acts without hesitation. The actual purchasing event is likely to deviate from the person's regular purchasing behaviour, and tends to be more emotionally triggered than rational (Rook, 1987).

In addition to Rook's view on the actual purchase we believe that Stern's (1962) four classifications of impulse buying will further assist us in our analysis. The framework has inspired countless prominent researchers such as Hausman (2000), Beatty & Ferrell (1998) and Wood (1998).

- Stern's first aspect, *pure impulse buying*, constitutes of a purchase made without any prior planning. The purchase is most likely interrupting the person's normal buying pattern and is emotionally triggered.
- The second aspect, *reminder impulse buying*, occurs when a consumer sees a product while shopping and recalls that they do in fact need that product. The response can be triggered by either low stock at home (e.g. toilet paper) or by the sudden reminder of an advertisement seen beforehand. Stern stresses that prior knowledge of the product is what triggers the purchase.

- The third aspect, *suggestion impulse buying*, occurs when a customer for the first time sees a product and directly imagines a need for it, without any prior knowledge of the product. Stern differentiates suggestion buying from pure impulse buying by stating that suggestion buying can be entirely rational, whereas pure impulse buying most likely is emotional.
- The last aspect, *planned impulse buying*, occurs when a customer enters a store with a certain shopping list in mind, but with the intention of buying other products that for instance are on sale in the specific store (Stern, 1962).

3.2. Approaches towards buyer behaviour

The theory presented above illustrates how the impulse purchase can be categorised and how it has been distinguished from other types of purchases. To facilitate the analysis of our empirical data we believe that we also need to understand how the consumer handles the evaluation process of whether to purchase a product or not. As a result we will present two influential perspectives on consumer buyer behaviour that stands in contrast to each other.

The cognitive model presented in this thesis can be seen as an assembly of several earlier models (e.g. Bettman & Zins, 1979, Howard & Sheth, 1969; Sheth, 1974; Mittal, 1988; Sujan, 1985). This version of the buying decision process has received a wide acceptance and been adopted by researchers such as Armstrong & Kotler (2007) and Solomon (1996). The model is presented as a five stage process consisting of need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase behaviour. In accordance with Elliott and Percy (2007) we believe that the model needs to be seen as an ideal that is not applicable on reality where the consumer is influenced by factors in the context. The model presents the buying process as a rational, cognitive process and the consumer is also portrayed as rational, almost computerised in her way of thinking and acting. The model assumes that the consumer is able to evaluate different attributes of an alternative independently of the environment. (Elliott & Percy, 2007)

Armstrong and Kotler (2007) mean that the consumer needs are triggered by internal or external stimuli. Internal stimuli can be explained as the basic physiological needs in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, including feelings such as thirst and hunger. External stimuli on the other hand refer to stimuli that emerge externally, where advertising or a discussion with a friend can trigger the need for a certain product. (Armstrong & Kotler, 2007)

The brands that become available for the further decision process are likely to be a relatively small number of brands, only a fraction of the alternatives that the consumer is aware of, that in turn are only a fraction of the available alternatives in the market. The remaining alternatives are commonly referred to as the consumer's evoked set. The evoked set consists of alternatives that the consumer has come across by actively seeking information or through passive perception. If the consumer is familiar with the product category, she has likely formed a set of preferable brands that satisfies her needs in order to ease the actual purchase. When the consumer has gained experience about different alternatives she will evaluate them on different attributes to end up with a purchase decision. The general idea is that the consumer is able to evaluate the different alternatives based on some chosen attributes or mediators. The goal is to choose the brand that has the best potential to satisfy the consumer's specific need. (Howard & Sheth, 1969; Sheth, 1974)

The next stage in the process stresses the actual purchase activity. Armstrong & Kotler (2007) mean that it is important to be aware of the difference that can arise between the intentional brand decision and the actual brand decision. In the situation, attitudes of peers and situational factors such as in-store stimuli can influence the purchase decision. The model also includes a post-purchase stage in the process. In this stage the consumer is expected to evaluate the value of the product to decide whether she is satisfied with its performance or not (Armstrong & Kotler, 2007). The research on buyer behaviour as well as on impulse purchase implicates that the consumer afterwards put a lot of efforts to defend to herself that she made a good decision to buy, and therefore constructs rational arguments for why she need the product. The

justification is a way for the consumer to deal with potential negative post-purchase feelings such as anxiety or regret. (Elliott, 1998)

The brand choice theory presented above focuses exclusively on the cognitive aspects of the process and affective response are viewed as exclusively post-cognitive. The cognitive evaluation process is assumed to result in emotional responses that further on will lead to positive or negative attitudes and pro- or against behaviour (Elliott, 1998). The process is describes as a hierarchy of effects, in which cognitive activity is assumed to mediate emotions, while emotions mediate behaviour (Elliott & Percy, 2007).

The affective approach was developed as a response to the rational information processing approach, with the purpose to emphasise the role of emotions in the decision-making process (Zajonc & Markus, 1982; Elliott, 1998; Mittal, 1988). Zajonc & Markus (1982) were very sceptical to the importance given the cognitive aspects in decision-making and meant that emotional response can emerge with virtually no cognitive processing:

“If you say that you like John because John is intelligent, rich, and generous, you must have discovered-before making up your mind about liking John-that he is indeed intelligent, rich, and generous. It follows that the judgments of John's attractiveness should be predictable from the judgments of John's intelligence, wealth, and generosity. (...) In contrast, consider the possibility that the judgment and choice process can be quite the opposite. Under some circumstances, affect or preference comes as the first experience. The cognitions that have generally been taken to be the very basis of this preference can actually occur afterwards- perhaps as justification.” (Zajonc & Markus, 1982, pp.125)

The affective approach is based on three assumptions: the decision process is holistic, self-focused and difficult to verbalise. The holistic aspect refers to the consumer's incapability of separating individual attributes and evaluating them separately. It implies that the consumer forms overall perception of brands that cannot be tied down to separate attributes. (Elliott, 1998; Mittal, 1988) The aspect of self- focus refers to the consumer's tendency to project herself as brand user, she is considering as what type of person she will be perceived as by using a certain brand (Mittal, 1988). The affect of this assumption is that the direct judgement

is based on personal values rather than the features of the product (Elliott, 1998). As an example Elliott (1998) describes the expressive judgement as “That car is 'too flashy' reflects the values and personality of the judge more than any inherent property of the car” (Elliott, 1998, pp.96).

The affective approach separates emotions into two categories. Some basic feelings; surprise, anger, fear, disgust, sadness and joy are considered to be independent of cultural considerations and the same for everyone regardless of social situation. Other types of emotions are assumed to be constructed and located in a socio-cultural system. As a result, affective researchers argue that consumer emotions need to be studied in the light of the social and cultural context where they take place, and brand evaluation and consumption is ascribed a large symbolic meaning.

3.3. Buyer behaviour in a socio-cultural context

The theories presented below can be seen in the light of the affectual model, as they investigate the relation between the consumer and her possessions and brand preferences on the basis of a contextual understanding. In this section we will present some of the perspectives on how a consumer and her consumption pattern can be understood, in order to create a theoretical framework to assist in the interpretation of the dominant themes within our empirics.

In the first part of the section we will illustrate how the importance of possessions in relation to self-identity can be understood by referring to ideas about the extended self. The forthcoming sections will then focus on the meaning possessions can attain for its owners, the role they may play in helping the consumer to create meaning to her life situation and life history. The aim is also to show how prominent researchers have been able to create meaning from empirical data, by linking together the social world and brands perceptions.

3.4.1. Brands as extensions of the self

The common foundation for researchers that have approached brand related issues through a socio-cultural perspective is the underlying linkage that exists between consumption and identity (Dolich, 1969; Elliott, 1998; Elliott & Percy, 2007; Ross, 1971). The researchers mean that consumption has a symbolic meaning in creating and maintaining a personal and social world. The consumer is free to form the image of herself through her use of specific brands and products, but that freedom is unconsciously restricted by the social sphere wherein the construction takes place (Elliott, 1998).

The importance of consumption in relation to self-identity has also been highlighted by Belk (1988), who describe possessions as part of an extended self. He put forward arguments to convince the reader about the difficulties with establishing the differences between the extended self and the actual self. The human body is portrayed as an example of a possession that sometimes is referred to as unpossessive and unextended (“I am tired”) and sometimes referred to as possessive and extended (“I have a tanned body”). Belk (1988) means that if even the body that generally is seen as a part of the self can be viewed as a possession, then also goods that the consumer has bought herself must be realised as a part of her self-identity. He finds additional arguments for his standpoints in anthropological studies stressing the inseparability of possessions and person after the person’s death. The tradition to bury a person together with their possessions as practiced already 60 000 years ago, as well as the taboo in most western societies to use clothes and goods of a deceased person, shows that there is a strong relation between self and possessions. (Belk, 1988)

McCracken and Roth (1989) agreed with Belk (1988) on the assumption that products can transmit a range of information about the owner, such as demographics and life style status. In their study on how people relate to clothing codes they came to the conclusion that people share some general ideas of what a specific item symbolises, even though some people tend to have more knowledge about the shared codes than others. The large amount of knowledge

identified among young people was explained as result of them being more active in their information seeking. They have recently been given the ability to make their own choices on what to wear, and they are hypersensitive to fashion. On the contrary older people have no need to declare their belonging to a new or changing social group. (McCracken & Roth, 1989)

3.4.2. The linkage to life projects and life history

Through consumption the consumer tries to satisfy a number of aims, feelings, and wishes. In the modern society consumers do not primarily buy goods to satisfy a functional need, goods are rather seen as essentially psychological symbols conveying personal attributes, goals, aspirations and social patterns (Elliott & Percy, 2007). Already in 1959 Levy argued that when consumers discuss their shopping habits and the reasons behind, they bring to surface a variety of logics. The shopping pattern can be a result of convenience, family pressure, social pressure, economic reasoning, advertising or simply that the product has inherited “pretty colours”. (Levy, 1959)

More recently, Fournier (1998) has further expanded Levy’s (1959) thoughts by investigating how the consumer’s relationships with brands can add meaning in a psychological and socio-cultural context. The psychological aspect refers to the consumer’s personal history and self-identity. Fournier (1998) means that the self-perception alters as we enter new life projects:

“Life projects involve the construction, maintenance, and dissolution of key life roles that significantly alter one’s concept of self as with role-changing events (e.g., college graduation), age-graded undertakings (e.g., retirement), or stage transitions (e.g., midlife crisis).” (Fournier, 1998, pp. 346)

In these situations, relationships with brands can play an important role by adding significant meaning to the life of a person and also help to structure her operative goals such as career aspirations. The socio-cultural aspects are linked to gender, family, social network and culture. These aspects influence the drivers behind the brand relationship and decide on what type of relationship the consumer desires, how the relationship will be emotionally expressed, style of

interacting in the relationship and the ease with which the relationship is initiated and terminated. (Fournier, 1998)

In her study Fournier (1998) explores the relationship between the consumer and her brand choices by linking together brand relationships and the consumer's life situation. She identified that the three women that participated in the study all showed a linkage between their individual collection of interconnected brands and important identity issues. The consumer-brand relationships did not only vary in content between the respondents, but also in the number of brand relationships, the durability of the relationships and the emotional quality of the relationships. The presentation of Jean illustrates the relationship aspect and emphasise the linkage between the self-identity and brand choices in a comprehensive way:

“Jean’s brand relationship portfolio is composed of strong, committed partnerships that deliver meanings squarely devoted to the resolution of her existential life themes. Jean has developed over 40 strong relationships with packaged food and cleaning brands that experience has taught her are “the best” since this label guarantees favourable performance in highly valued traditional roles of homemaker, mother and wife.(...) they are roles in which she Continues to reaffirm her self-worth each and every day of her life. A never-ending search for a sense of belonging and stability has also led Jean to value heritage and tradition and to seek and maintain relationships with classic (and often times ethnic) brands in response.” (Fournier, 1998, pp. 359)

Fournier (1998) conclude that the participants in her study not only buy certain brands because they like them or think they work well. The brands also contribute with meaning to their lives, some meanings are functional or utilitarian, and others are psychological or mental.

3.4.3. The nostalgic aspects

The influence of life projects is also investigated by Belk (1988) who argue that possessions play an important part in creating a sense of past and future. A person's past has a great influence on the self-identity. Belk (1988) argue that possessions have an important part to play in our efforts to store memories and feelings attached to our past since they give a tangible aspect to the memories. A study of 315 families in Chicago recalled furniture, visual art and photos as important possessions that are linked to past experiences. The study showed that the

functional reasons or aesthetics reasons for the possession of the items were overshadowed by the importance of the memories they call for of other people, occasions and relationships. The aspiration to recall the past is a form of nostalgia. Davis (1979, in Belk 1988, pp.150) has explained the concept and its connection to self-identity:

“Nostalgia (like long-term memory, like reminiscence, like daydreaming) is deeply implicated in our sense of who we are, what we are about, and (though possibly with much less inner clarity) whither we go. In short, nostalgia is . . . a readily accessible psychological lens... for the never ending work of constructing, maintaining, and reconstructing our identities.” (Davis, 1979 in Belk, 1988, pp. 150)

The citation above indicates that possessions that evoke nostalgia not only are concerned with the past. By using products that are linked to the consumer’s past, she is also creating a sense of the future, her aims and who she perceives herself to be. (Belk, 1988)

3.4.4. The sacredness of consumption

In addition to creating an emotional linkage to the past and the future, possessions as well as experiences and situations can be perceived as sacred for the possessor. Belk (1989) means that consumption has become a secular ritual through which experience is transcended. The secularisation of has made the sacred concept applicable to a secular context. (Belk, 1989)

Belk (1989) include an extended range of variables when he tries to explain the meaning of the concept *sacred*. Firstly, he means that the concept must be understood in relation to its opposite, profane, which is related to the ordinary and everyday life. The sacred is not created but something that shows itself for those who believes in it. Furthermore, he means that the object attaining sacred status becomes an important part of the individual’s self-identity and receives a strong emotional attachment. The sacred can create ecstatic experience as it “adds to life an enchantment which is not rational or logically deducible from anything else” (James, 1961, pp.55 in Belk, 1989, pp.8). By representation in objects the sacred is concretized, and the objects that attain sacred status is given a greater meaning than it normally has in its everyday appearance.

The concept of sacred is transferred to several domains. For this study, the idea of the sacred time is an interesting aspect. Belk (1989) means that events that are cyclically during the day as well as episodically events can be given a sacred meaning to the person involved, such as the morning coffee or attending a sports event. The events involve rituals and some type of appropriate behaviour, as illustrated below:

“Museums are the churches of collectors. Speaking in whispers, groups of visitors wander as an act of faith from one museum gallery to another. Until the end of the nineteenth century it was customary to visit the Hermitage Museum at Leningrad in a white tie. The almost ritual habits practiced in the sales-rooms in London and Paris has been the same for two hundred years. The Hotel Dourot (an art auction site) is a sort of temple. It has fixed ceremonies, and its daily hour from ten to eleven has a completely religious atmosphere.”
(Rheims, 1961, pp. 29, in Belk, 1989, pp. 11)

The sacredness can also be manifested in tangible things such as icons, clothes and artefacts. Ordinary things can be made sacred through myths, rituals and signs. Belk (1989) exemplifies the domain by describing how the car attained a sacred position in the American society. It went from being a scarce element in the American society, to being mass-produced and always present in the environment. Taking care of the car in the weekend became a ritual activity, and people became willing to ‘risk their lives’ and make financial sacrifices to afford one. Belk (1989) means that not only exclusive and singular products can attain a sacred status for the owner. The uniqueness can also be linked to the brand, not necessarily the personally owned product. The product does not need to be unique; the uniqueness can be attached to the brand and its ability to stand out in the crowd.

Belk (1989) also put forward several ways for objects to attain a sacred status. The sacredness can be attained through inheritance. A family heirloom may help the owner to define who she is, where she comes from and where she is going. Objects can also attain sacred status by contributing to completeness. For individuals in possession of a collection of sacred status, items that contribute to the completeness of the collection will attain sacred status as they become part of the whole. Also, the hunt for the objects that will contribute to the completeness can in itself attain sacredness. (Belk, 1989)

3.4.5. Consumption as a creative tool

Holt (1998) proposes an interesting view on the relationship between consumers and mass produced goods. He argues that individuals can see themselves as connoisseurs that reconfigure the meaning of mass-produced cultural goods in order to express their personal style or their self-identity. This is done by applying a higher level of appreciation and understanding for objects that are ignored by others, even though the product is widely consumed. The behaviour is typically identified through the passionately and enthusiastically expressed descriptions as well as the concern for and detailed knowledge on quality within the product category. Holt also states that through eclecticism connoisseurs are able to create distinctive tastes even in categories where only conventional goods are available, such as food or clothing. As an example Holt mentions food, where an uninterested person would describe a favourite meal as 'chicken broccoli casserole', while the connoisseur vividly describes how she is making a full three-course dinner with a special array of ingredients. (Holt, 1998)

Thompson and Haytko (1997) also reject the notion that the consumer use consumption exclusively to reproduced hegemonic discourses. In their study on fashion they argue that the consumer is using fashion in creative and proactive ways to construct phenomenon that go against the ideological influences. The perspective on fashion is related to personal meanings, life goals and self-concepts. They mean that fashion can be related to future oriented meanings such as ideals and views of the good life as exciting career, travel and public recognition. It can also indicate if the consumer wants to be judged on the basis of character, ability and achievements. The appearance is thought of as a way to express an inner self, and contribute to the acceptance in certain social contexts. The self- identity is created and recreated in contrast to others as it is not a stable variable, but negotiated in the dynamic field of social interactions. A *bricoleur* combines and adapts culturally available resources to make something new, and by that creating a personal own style. To be creative and put together an ensemble from an array of brands and styles has a positive meaning, expressing creativity, organization, competence and conscientiousness. Being static on the other hand refers to adopting a prefabricated set

that communicates not only lack of fashion savvy but also an inability to put one's life together and control ones destiny. (Thompson & Haytko, 1997)

4. Empirical data and analysis

The purpose of this chapter is to present and analyse the empirical data generated by this study. The themes of the analysis are developed through the identification of dominant themes within the empirical data. As we are conducting an exploratory study with the purpose to discover and bring to surface previously unexplored patterns the previously presented theories are exclusively used to assist in our efforts to interpret and construct meaning to the empirically identified themes.

The chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section we will present the participants in the study and create an illustration of their present life situation and life history. The aim is to create an understanding of each participant to facilitate the comprehension of the linkage between self-identity and impulse shopping behaviour investigated in the forthcoming sections. In the following sections the three major themes in the empirics will be presented. Paragraph 4.2 will focus on the awareness and the level of control that the respondents seem to possess over their impulsive behaviour. We will describe the rational patterns we have found when investigating the impulse buying from a wider perspective, which indicates that the consumer in advance has decided when to allow herself to buy impulsively. In section 4.3 we will analyse how the respondents use impulse buying to express creativity and aspects of the self that are suppressed in everyday life. In section 4.4 we will put forward indicators that contradict the argumentation in previous sections concerning the consumers' freedom and independence, by illustrating how the consumer's impulse buying is limited by inherited and routinely created preferences. Finally, in section 4.5 we will tie together the analysis and discuss the implications of our study on a theoretical level.

4.1. Presenting the participants

The five participants given attention in the analysis will be presented below in the same order as they will appear in the forthcoming analysis. Here we will give a short introducing

presentation of their life situation, their background and their feelings and attitudes towards shopping.

4.1.1. Kate

Kate is a 26 years old woman. She lives in the suburb of Lund, one of the largest university cities in Sweden, together with her boyfriend. They recently moved to a new apartment, and even if Kate thinks it far away from the city centre, she appreciates it since “it has a dish washer and it has a washing machine”.

At the moment Kate is working as Student Representative at an organisation facilitating student housing. Before working Kate studied law for five years in Lund. She personally believes that she got the job because of her dedication to different student organisations and projects during her years as a student. At first she only thought of it as a first job, but now she really enjoys working in the organisation and she is hoping that she is able to continue when her current employment expires. She admits that she is already very loyal to the company.

In the future Kate is planning to apply for the district court, which she has planned to do since she started studying law. She says that her future goal is to be a prosecutor, even though she does not seem totally convinced of it happening. She knows that it is a long way to go, she needs at least ten years of experience before applying for the position. “Meanwhile you have to do something fun and take the chances you get”.

In her spare time Kate enjoys hanging out with her friends. They usually meet up in cafés or go shopping together. She also enjoys decorating her home, elaborate with photo albums and other types of pottering.

Kate grew up in Borås, a city of approximately 100 000 inhabitants, together with her parents and two brothers. She is the middle child. Her mother is working in the social care sector and

her father has his own law firm. Kate thinks that her father has influenced her choice of occupation. Her grandfather was also lawyer so it is a tradition in the family.

Kate's shopping expenditures mainly concern groceries and "things for herself". Kate means that she is trying to do weekly grocery shopping, instead of popping in at the local grocery store every day. The "things for herself" she buys when she is in the city centre to kill some time between two meetings at work. Kate describes herself as being very wasteful with money, even though her parents have put efforts into educating her of the value of money. She always saves enough to get through the month, but she is unable to save money without any explicit purpose. "If I have 500 SEK left in the end of the month I buy a sweater." Her overall attitude towards shopping is positive, even though she comments on its negative impact on the environment and that she should recycle and not always buy new things.

4.1.2. Julie

Julie is a 19 years old woman. She lives in a small city of approximately 30 000 inhabitants, together with her mother and father. Julie also has an older sister, who has moved out of the family home.

At the moment Julie is just transcending from one life project into another as she is studying her final year in upper secondary school. She is looking forward to her examination in the beginning of the summer. Her interest in technology has led her to study a three year programme focused on technology and engineering. In Julie's family, studying has always been seen as a key to the future and Julie is planning to go on to the university to attain a degree in engineering. Julie's parents have university degrees, her mother is working as a social consultant in the public sector and her father is working with management issues for an international energy company.

Julie lives an active life, and she fills her days with school, homework, handball and time to hang out with her friends. Lately she has also put a lot of effort into a school project resulting in a theatre play for children about environmental issues.

Since her parents support Julie her shopping is mainly focused on clothing and other types of fashion accessories. She usually does spontaneous purchases without having any clear idea of what she is looking for. Julie finds shopping to be a pleasurable and joyful activity, and she perceives shopping to have an important role in her social and leisure time. She describes shopping as a social activity that she enjoys doing together with friends, just as well as hang out in a coffee bar or watch a movie.

Since Julie lives in a small town with a restricted selection of shops available, she prefers to go to a larger city for shopping. As a result she means that her shopping tends to be accomplished occasionally.

4.1.3. Hannah

Hannah is 23 years old. She lives in a corridor in a student complex in the northern parts of Lund with 12 other students, where they all share the same kitchen and living room. She enjoys her living situation, although she admits that there are some disagreements every now and then when so many people are sharing a home together. Still, she does not perceive it to be a problem, since she describes herself as the one in charge.

She is currently a student at Lund University, where she is studying for a bachelor in political science. Her aim for her future career is still unclear, although she would like to work with some kind of aid work, preferably towards developing countries. Before enrolling in Lund she studied tourism for a year, where she wrote a paper on child sex tourism that got a lot of attention from different traveling agencies and sprung her motivation on helping the less fortunate. She has since also done voluntary work in South America, which further has strengthen her interest in the area.

Hannah is a woman with many interests. In her spare time she is the lead singer and guitarist in a band, enjoys playing video games, likes horseback riding and is a large fantasy literature fan. She describes herself as a “big nerd who likes Star Wars, Harry Potter and Twilight”. Another hobby is her herbal garden, which she is very proud of.

Hannah grew up in a mid-size Swedish town as the younger of two siblings. Her childhood was happy and carefree, and contained lots of traveling due to her father’s job as owner of a traveling agency. Her mother works with disabled children. She believes that it is evident that her parents have affected her greatly, that the many travels that usually went to “weird places, not the classic touristy ones” are probably the reason for her choice of education, along with her mother’s line of work.

Hannah’s attitude towards shopping is in general conscious, especially her food purchases. She does not believe in saving money on food and allows herself to buy what she desires, which usually involves fair-trade and locally produced goods. However, other types of shopping such as clothes do not attain the same level of interest, as she is mainly interested in their practical functions. She seems to have an irregular mind-set, as she describes how she sometimes desires to buy a nice dress for herself while she at other times cannot imagine how she could spend 400 SEK on a dress since it is “so much money”.

4.1.4. George

George is a 26 years old man. He is living in a small apartment in one of the student neighbourhoods in the northern parts of Lund, where he recently moved. He used to live further away from the city and really enjoys being closer to everything, especially “the shorter walk home after a night on the town”.

George is currently studying at the Faculty of Engineering at LTH, and he is aiming at a career as a property surveyor when graduation finally comes, although there are a couple of years left.

He has already planned his future career; he will start working in the public sector where he already has a foot in through his summer job, in order to get as much experience as possible. After a couple of years he will then move on to the private sector, “where the real money is”. The salary is not his only motivation though, as George believes that the private sector will provide him with a more flexible and creative work, without the more strict governmental regulations that rule the public sector. George also believes that his future job will determine where he ultimately settles down. If he were to decide, his ideal place to live would be a mid-size town since he believes that he would feel too anonymous in a larger city like Stockholm. Preferably it would not be too far away from family and friends either.

During his spare time George is a very active man. He likes to work out at the gym a couple of times a week, and is both coaching and playing in a floorball team. He started the team himself together with a couple of friends, and today they are representing one of the student unions at LTH in the south-Swedish 5th division. George cares very much for the team, even though it tends to take up a little too much time. “During the seasons, including games and practices, the team takes about 15 hours a week. A little more help would have been nice. The initial terms were that other people would help out more, but I guess people generally are free-riders”. Besides the team he admits that school takes up a lot of time, he feels like there is always a test to study for or an assignment to hand in. On top of all this there is the girlfriend, his friends and other social activities that also needs attending to.

George grew up in a suburb to Kalmar, a mid-size Swedish town located on the east coast. His family moved there from Oslo, Norway, when he was just a couple of years old, and his parents still lives in the same house. He describes his childhood as safe and comforting, and growing up with two brothers and lots of friends ensured that there was always something to do. His mother is working as a kindergarten teacher and his father as a marketing director. George believes that his older brother, Henry, has been his role model and that Henry’s choices have heavily affected George’s life. Henry is nowadays working as a fire-protection engineer, after

also studying at LTH in Lund, and is just about to move back Kalmar after working a couple of years in Norway.

The largest share of George's wallet concerns food expenditures, as he believes that in order to live well you got to eat well. He is particularly interested in foods that contain high amounts of protein, as he believes that it helps him in his training, and can spend great amounts of time in order to calculate which type of product that gives him the most protein per 'krona'. He does not mind to pay a little extra to ensure that the quality is high, although he feels restrained by the low student income and normally goes to the local store with an open mind looking for the weekly specials. Bargain seeking, or consciousness as George prefers, reflects his general attitude towards shopping where he cautiously plans and evaluate his purchases.

4.1.5. Susie

Susie is a 25 years old single woman. She lives in Malmö, the third largest city in Sweden, in a one-room apartment near the hip Möllan area.

Susie works for a one of the largest banks in Sweden. She is a personal banker, helping people with loans and other related issues. She has just started a new job within the company and she has to work long hours in order to keep up with her daily workload. Susie emphasise that she does not really have much free time, but when she is off duty she likes to spend time with her family and friends. Susie lives close to her family and they see each other every week, when she hang out with her friends they usually visit the gym, meet up at cafes or go clubbing. She also tries to go to the gym some times every week.

Shopping is not a priority in Susie's life. She does not like to spend an entire free day in the city centre on a shopping spree. She has a very functional approach to shopping, she does not seem to see any great joy in the activity. When she goes shopping she usually have a fairly good idea of what she is looking for and then she tries to complete the purchase as fast as possible. She usually go shopping on her own, it is not something that she enjoy doing together with friends.

The distinction Susie does between shopping and spare time activities show that she perceives shopping as foremost a utilitarian activity. Still, shopping gives her positive associations and she really enjoys the pleasant post-purchase feelings that arise when she has bought something new.

Before Susie started work for the bank she studied business and economics at the university in Lund. But it was not an obvious choice of education, Susie also considered being a teacher, like her sister, before she took the decision to study business. "I did not have a specific subject that felt like 'wow!', so I chose business. It is a broad education, and I am pleased with my choice."

Susie has lived in southern Sweden in her entire life, she grew up in a small town near Lund with her parents, a younger brother and an older sister. Her mother is working with accounting for a smaller company and her father is a lawyer working with legal aspects for the Swedish state-owned organisation for social insurances.

4.2. Controlled impulse buying

Throughout our empirical material we have identified rational patterns that influence the consumers' tendency to put oneself in situations where they are likely to behave in an impulsive manner. This behaviour takes different forms in the respondents' descriptions of their shopping patterns. In accordance with previous studies on impulse buying (e.g. Rook, 1987; Stern, 1962) we have identified patterns in the empirical material that indicate that the respondents perceive themselves to be unable to resist the urge of impulse buying when put in a certain situation. Kate's following citation describes how she impulsively buys a pair of trousers:

Kate: "Often I go into a store with the purpose to buy something specific, and then I leave the store with something completely different, or something additionally that I had not thought of in advance. Just because I think it looks nice, because I could not resist it, I wanted to seize the opportunity. (...) I can easily convince myself that I need stuff that I really don't need. I guess I thought that I could try them [a pair of trousers] at home and then return them, but you never do that... you never bother

to. And I could justify the purchase for myself, because when you wash them they will shrink.”

Once Kate finds herself in a familiar store she considers it hard to resist urge of buying impulsively. She is able to create rational arguments for buying a certain product even though she knows that she has no real need for the product. This way of behaving in a specific context very much resembles what Stern (1962) refers to as reminded impulse buying. Faced with the pair of trousers Kate suddenly experiences a need for the product. Similar to the post-rationalizing behaviour described by Elliott (1998) Kate is already in the purchasing moment trying to create rational arguments in favour of her buying the trousers, at the same time as she is trying to limit or leave out anxiety or any negative thoughts about buying the product. The reminded need she experience in the situation may not be true, when later reflecting on the purchase made Kate realize that she already has several pairs of similar trousers at home, but in the moment of impulse buying she ignore this type of knowledge.

However, in contrast to previous studies we found an interesting aspect in the respondents’ descriptions, indicating that they are well aware of their impulse buying behaviour. For Kate this is evident in her description of how she stays away from the city centre when she needs to avoid buying impulsively. In her description of why she purchase less than usual during the week of the diary completion, she explains how she tries to stay away from the city centre when she perceives herself to be short on money.

Kate: “Maybe it is wrong to say that I denied myself... I know that there will be a lot of things happening soon, it can be that I did not have time. But another week, maybe I would walk around in the city between two meetings to kill time and then maybe I would find something... But this week I did not go down to the city during the day. I shut myself off, because I knew that there would be a lot coming up.”

Even though Kate perceives shopping to be a joyful activity in itself and a pleasant way to spend unproductive time, she describes how she stays away from the city centre during the week to avoid being exposed to impulse purchase stimuli. The decision whether to expose oneself for the environment or not seems to have been made in advance. Susie is well aware of her

incapability to resist the impulsive urge in the specific contextual situation, and therefore she avoids an environment that is appealing when she perceives herself to be unable to perform impulsive purchases for some reason, such as due to financial limitations.

Putting the impulse purchase in a wider context we can see that the consumer has an awareness of when to stay away from an impulsive environment, but also when to allow oneself to engage in impulsive buying. The activity of being impulsive has been planned in advance, and even evokes certain expectations within the consumer. When the consumer experience the environment to be unable to trigger her want for a certain product feelings of frustration and disappointment emerge, as described by Julie:

Julie: “It can be when you been in the city centre for a long time and not found anything really. In the afternoon, the evening, then I can get a bit like ‘I want to find the best there is’. And it can result in these spontaneous purchases, mistakes, because I have to have something and it does not usually ends well.... always. Because then it is not ‘Oh, this was good!’, it is more like ‘Well, I guess this was ok’.”

Julie has in advanced planned to make impulsive purchases and is in the city centre with the specific purpose to buy something, although she has not decided on what type of item. The activity to shop is predetermined, but not the actual choice of products and stores. Julie’s behaviour can be understood in the light of Fournier’s (1998) connection between attitudes and consumer behaviour. As describes in the presentation of Julie she perceive shopping to be a joyful activity and a pleasurable way to spend leisure time. When she enters the shopping scenery she has no pre-existing ideas of what she is looking for, but is instead prepared to be dazzled by the offerings presented in the shopping environment. When the environment fails to present her with an inspiring context and appeal to her shopping impulses she feels disappointed. Julie’s frustration is not linked to the failure of not finding a specific product. In contrast, it is the failure of not completing any kind of purchase act that troubles her in the moment. As we can identify from the citation, Julie is chasing the thrill and pleasurable feelings of making an impulsive purchase. When the spontaneous attachment to a specific product fails to appear she feels forced to proceed with any kind of purchase, in order to attain some form

of pleasure. As illustrated by the citation the feelings that occur after carrying out a 'forced impulse purchase' ("Well... ok") are not as positive as those emerging from purchases made spontaneously ("Oh... good!").

As Julie describes above, the controlled outlets of her own impulsivity needs to be satisfied in order for her to feel contempt after a shopping tour. She explains how her desire to complete a purchase leads her to buy garments that she does not really want or even feels that strongly for. Instead her emotional state while she allows herself to be impulsive becomes a dominant factor in itself, and forces her to make a purchase just to satisfy the impulsive need. The impulsive purchase cannot be perceived as exclusively a sudden unproblematic crush on a product, the empirics show how the purchase is connected to a lot of anxiety and concern. As Julie describes, a lot of frustration emerges when she fails to complete an impulsive purchase. In similarity with the evaluation process of products (Howard & Sheth, 1969), the respondents also tend to evaluate the performance of the actual shopping activity. If the activity has not resulted in the intentional outcome the consumer feels disappointed.

Another indicator of the controlled aspects preceding an impulse purchase can be seen in Hannah's behaviour as she prepare herself for being impulsive when going on vacation:

Hannah: "When I go away I have almost always saved money in advance for shopping. And like when I went to Stockholm, a larger city where there are a wider selections of stores, I plan for shopping. Even though I might not find what I am looking for, like 'this garment is only OK', I buy it anyway, but if I had found it in Lund I would not have bought it."

As Hannah describes in her quotation above, one variable that significantly alters her attitude and shopping behaviour is travelling or being away from home. While she in her normal shopping behaviour is rather modest, although she occasionally buys herself something nice, her mind-set in these situations is totally changed. Hannah even describes how she saves money in advance with the sole purpose of allowing herself buy what she feels like while being away. The altered offering of stores and garments seems to be the variable that affects her

mind-set the most, as she feels an urge to take advantage of being in an environment that provides different offerings from the one she normally inhabits. Hannah describes how she visits her favourite store while in Stockholm;

Hannah: "I really enjoy spending money there [at Lush], and I actually feel bad if I do not. It is a weird feeling. But I guess that it is because they do not have a store here, no store near where I am."

As argued above, the situational factors are crucial for Hannah's behaviour. However, it is not the physical change of being in one place or another that affects her behaviour, but the psychic difference in how and what Hannah allows herself to feel based on the notion of being away from the environment that she feels comfortable in. In accordance with Freud's (in Rook, 1987) thoughts on delay of gratification, while at home Hannah is in control of her own behaviour and pursues more long-term gratification in accordance with her overall lifestyle. When going away from the home environment she instead lets the urge for short-term gratification take over. As displayed in her quote earlier the act of buying itself gives her the gratification needed even though she is not particularly fond of the garment purchased. Hannah's pursuit of short-term gratification even leads her to being afraid of not allowing herself to be impulse enough when she has the chance.

4.2.1. Performing the ritual

Hannah's described need for impulsiveness is also affected by the fact that she in Stockholm visits her favourite store. Her preference and attitude towards the store, Lush, is so deeply emotionally and affectually rooted (Elliott, 1998) that it can be seen as a sacred place for Hannah (Belk, 1989).

Hannah: "The first Lush store was a flop, it was dark and small, felt stale and had a bad assortment. I did not like it at all, because it was not the Lush experience I want. So I had to go to another [Lush store], but it was closed, which made me really sad, because I have been to that one before and it is really good. But then we entered the third store, and it was much better."

Interviewer: "What was better?"

Hannah: "The assortment was better, the store was bright, welcoming and spacious. All the soaps were at one place, in the other store they were spread out everywhere!"

As Hannah describes she has a clear notion of how she expects the shopping experience at Lush to be, and when the first store does not live up to the expectations she does not even consider buying anything there. This can be seen in the light of Belk's (1989) thoughts on rituals and experience, where Hannah's prior experience of Lush stores has made what she refers to as "the Lush experience" into a sacred ritual consisting of certain criteria that need to be fulfilled in order for her to feel content. The atmosphere of the store must consist of certain elements, the products must be presented in a specific way, etcetera. As the first store did not live up to these requirements, she simply rejects it and moves on to another store. When the second store, which Hannah has prior knowledge of is closed, she feels devastated not only due to the missed shopping opportunity but also because of the fact that her sacred place no longer exists. Luckily she is able to find a third Lush store that does live up to her requirements, which secures and reassures her faith in the store's sacred status.

Hannah's description for how she behaves in the store and interacts with the staff reflects Belk's (1989) illustrations of how social places of sacred status involve specific rituals concerning behaviour:

Hannah: "And every time I visit the shop [Lush], they always say like this... I always purchase quite much and then I usually get free complementary products, and I get super excited. I did not get any this time in Stockholm, probably I did not spend enough and I feel bad about it. I told my boyfriend, 'Oh my God, I did not get any free complementary products, should we go inside again and buy some more?' But he said, 'what the hell'... Anyway, they always say like this. 'Where are you from?' 'I am from Kalmar.' 'Aha, maybe we will open a store there soon.' And I get really excited and ask them where. 'Somewhere in the city', they always say. Hell yeah, I will apply for a job there I always think, I have tried all their stuff, I would be the perfect employee, I can really promote them. And I get really excited. But does it happen? No it does not. And this time in Stockholm, they said, 'Where are you from?' 'I live in Lund' 'Aha, maybe we will open a store there soon'."

After completing her purchase and leaving the store, Hannah feels as if she has not completed the ritual satisfactory as she did not receive any complementary products like she has before. She starts to doubt her own performance and if she really spent enough money in the store solely based on the behaviour and interaction with the staff. The citation also illustrates a conversation Hannah usually has with the staff in the shop, which contributes with comfort to Hannah since it helps her to feel safe in the situation. She also reassures that she is in control.

4.3. Expressing the self

The second dominant theme identified is concerned with how the respondents use impulsive shopping as a tool to express creativity and self-identity. The behaviour can be linked to either the respondents' personal interests or used as a way to vent suppressed aspects of the self. The linkage between personal interests and impulse buying behaviour is stressed in Kate's description of how she shops:

Kate: "I had no intentions of buying anything, it was more instinctively when I saw them [a pair of trousers]. They were not full length, and I thought they could be nice for the spring. They looked nice on the mannequin, so I tried them on and they fitted well. I do not know really why I bought them, I already have a lot of trousers in my wardrobe. And the cardigan, I have a lot of cardigans from Gina Tricot, so I thought it would be nice to have something in a different style. The quality was much better, if I could say so. I know that I have thought a lot about buying a new cardigan, when I look in my wardrobe I have a lot of cardigans but I rarely use them. And I know that I thought about it, but I do not know if I did it right there, but I know that I thought that this is a different type, I do not have this type of cardigan."

As illustrated by the citation above Kate constantly tries to link her impulse purchases to her current wardrobe situation. This behaviour is in itself not very impulsive but resembles the way Kate act in other types of contexts. Kate's behaviour can be understood in the light of Belk's (1989) description of the collector, who uses products to contribute to a completeness. Even though it may be exaggerated to assume that the trousers and the cardigan she buys individually will attain a sacred status, she explains her need for them by referring to the gaps in her wardrobe. The wardrobe in itself seems to have sacred status for Kate, creating a

connection between Kate and her self. By shopping clothes that she previously lacks, Kate is contributing not only to a more complete wardrobe, but also a more complete self. The clothes will become part of the sacred whole and the perceived image of the brand they present will influence Kate's perception of herself.

The collecting type of behaviour is present in other aspects of Kate's life. Referring back to the presentation of Kate in the 4.1.1, we can see that much of her leisure time involve collecting and creating completeness to activities. She likes pottering, elaborating with photo albums and decorating the home. This type of activities, when she is putting things together to create a new whole seems to have a valuable meaning for Kate. In the end, Kate ends up buying a pair of trousers, a cardigan and a blouse in the MQ store. The choice of purchasing a three-piece outfit also indicates Kate's interest in pottering. The decision to buy a complete outfit rather than a single item gives her room to be creative during the purchase activity and play with the different attributes to create a whole. Also in the aspect of the purchased items, Kate's strive for completeness is present. The same pattern is also present when Kate describes her visit to an IKEA store:

Kate: "It was an example of when I know what I am looking for. Boxes for storing that I have been talking about for weeks... But when we got there, they were out of stock. They just had a smaller size and that would not fit with the ones we already have. So we did not buy any boxes. And I know, you should just leave the store because that was the only reason why we went there in the first place. But IKEA has that impact on you, when you see something, you instantly like it and you want to buy it. So, I bought a vase, you can always hope that you will get flowers someday. And then I bought a pot in the bargain section for almost nothing."

The impulsive purchases that Kate ended up doing in the IKEA store were all connected to contribution of completeness to the personal home. Kate perceives all items that she buys to fulfil gaps that she has identified in her life. However, the identification of the incompleteness may not occur until she is presented with a "solution" in the store. Faced with an item that she likes, Kate can find rational arguments for buying the product by making herself aware of the incompleteness that she suddenly experience. Kate's need to put together collections can also

be seen in the light of Thompson & Haytko's (1997) ideas about the bricoleur who expresses herself through the assembling of individual pieces in order to portray a whole reflecting the inner self. Kate's behaviour becomes an outlet for her need to convince not only her surrounding environment but also herself about her creative and structured self. The collecting type of person that Kate's represents needs to collect and create a bricollage, otherwise they will perceive themselves as incapable of putting their own lives together. For Kate shopping is thus not something simply for the impulses to decide, but consists of a greater meaning to her creation of the self (Belk, 1988).

George also describes how the activity of impulse buying contributes with meaning. The act of shopping helps him to express aspects of his self-identity that lacks presence in other aspects of his everyday life. George presents an interesting reasoning when he describes how a trip to the grocery store is carried out:

George: "In one way, when I leave home with the shopping-list I may only have listed a number of basic groceries that I always buy. And then when I get there, I realize that they have some cheap pork sirloin and I decide to buy it. It is kind of an impulsive act, as I have not planned it in advance. I never plan my meals in advance, like 'this week I am going to buy this and that'. I rather go there and check it out, 'oh, cheap pork sirloin, cheap salmon' and so I buy it. It is a bit more fun as well, a bit more creative."

George describes how his weekly grocery shopping is greatly influenced by impulsiveness, through the fact that he has not planned in advance what he is going to buy in the store. Instead he claims that he is open for different types of in-store stimuli and that the shopping thus becomes a fun and creative activity. However, when relating this behaviour to George's life story, several underlying patterns emerge (Levy, 1959). Being the busy man that George perceives himself to be with a stressful everyday life where school, the floorball team, his girlfriend, the gym and friends takes up the most of his time, George needs to be very structured and carefully planned in order to make it all come together. His everyday life is not only based upon rather strict routines, he argues that it requires it. The act of grocery shopping

thus becomes an outlet for George to briefly drop his guard and give room for his creative side by letting his impulses decide on what to buy for the coming week. When applying Fournier's (1998) thoughts on lifestyle and consumption, George's creative grocery shopping adds meaning to his life. It becomes an outlet for his creative side that are pushed back in his everyday life where the pressure of being an aspiring student, a healthy man, inspiring coach and loving boyfriend results in a humdrum existence.

George's behaviour can also be understood by applying Holt's (1998) thoughts on connoisseurship. As seen in George's description, food and nutrition are areas of great importance for him both in order to express his creativity as argued above, as well as to facilitate his training. This interest for food and nutrition are used as a way for George to express his true self and distinguish his identity through being extra involved in what type of groceries he consumes and which type of meat that he believes has the highest quality. George expresses how he strives to find the best groceries in a price to protein ratio, with the aim of putting together a healthy delicious meal that both create and recreate the notion of him being an athletic man. George's connoisseurship for food thus allows him to make the everyday acts of grocery shopping and cooking into meaningful rituals, where he is able to express his true self. The connoisseurship is evident in George's impulsive behaviour. Even though he is impulsive in the sense that he goes shopping without a shopping list, his way of shopping and the products considered follows a certain pattern that reflects his view on nutrition and food. We can assume that he will not even consider for instance pre-made products in the impulse setting, as they oppose his view of himself as a connoisseur.

4.3.1. Transitioning into a new life project

Julie also expresses how she uses shopping to be creative and construct a sense of her self-identity, as seen in her description of her visit to the Urban Outfitters store during a weekend in Liverpool. Julie has saved up money prior to the trip in order to able herself to shop while away from home with her friends. She has not yet decided on what garments to buy, in fact she describes how she wants to keep her mind open to the stimuli from various items within the

stores in order to not miss out on anything. The trip to Liverpool resembles what Stern (1962) refers to as the planned impulse buying. When Julie arrives in Liverpool she has the intention to buy, she has saved money prior to the trip, she has discussed the trip together with her friends and she has prepared for the home flight by bringing an extra suitcase, but she has not made a specific shopping list.

Which shops she visits during the weekend in Liverpool are also up for impulsive influences, with one interesting exception. Prior to the trip Julie has planned to visit the Urban Outfitters store which she describes to be her favourite store. She has even decided in advance that she will buy both clothing and accessories in the store, without being aware of their current offerings.

Interviewer: "Can you describe when you went shopping in Liverpool? For instance when you came in to Urban Outfitters?"

Julie: "That store isn't available in Sweden, and I become really willing to buy when I enter it due to the atmosphere and feeling in the store, how they present the clothes, etc. I just want to get everything when I go in there. It feels like they have better quality than for instance H&M, and we got H&M in Sweden too. You want to get something that no one else has, you know? So the feeling was really good when I came in [the store]."

(...)

Interviewer: "What is so special about Urban Outfitters?"

Julie: "The appearance of the shop, the decorations. They have the staircase in the middle, and they mix clothes with jewellery, like those cameras and small stuff. It feels a bit more designer-like, if I could say so. Not like those mass-retailers such as Kappahl, Lindex, H&M to some extent, and Primark. Urban Outfitters feels a bit smarter, the other stuff feels so mass produced."

Julie describes how she is inspired by the environment in the store and how it speaks to her aspiring self-identity (Elliott, 1998). Julie's argumentation about different clothing brands throughout the interview indicate that she possess a large knowledge about codes of clothing

(McCracken & Roth, 1989). The consumer's life situation is an important factor in understanding how she relates to brands. As described in the presentation of Julie in 4.1.2 she is currently transcending into a new life project, as she is about to graduate from upper secondary school. This type of role-changing event brings as argued by Fournier (1998) significant meaning to Julie's relationship to consumption and plays an important role in her transition into the future. Since Julie recently has been given the ability to make her own choices in life she is hypersensitive to fashion as a way to declare her belonging to a certain social group (McCracken & Roth, 1989). For Julie, Urban Outfitters presents a constructed identity of being trendy and artistic that Julie can identify herself with. In the light of Belk's (1988) ideas about the extended self we can assume that Julie by purchasing the clothes from Urban Outfitters become more of the ideal self than she perceived herself to be prior to the purchase. This notion is implicit in the citation below when Julie tries to describe the value she links to the Urban Outfitters brand.

Julie: "If the clothes had been in another store [than Urban Outfitters], I don't know, I like them better now when they are from Urban Outfitters I think. Because the whole thing that they are from that store is in the clothes"

Thompson & Haytko (1997) argue that self-identity is a dynamic process that involve putting oneself in contrast to others, in this case we can see how Julie create her self-identity by taking the character of Urban Outfitters and by that putting herself in contrast to other types of retailers, such as H&M and Kappahl. Julie expresses how she feels special and individual when she is buying at Urban Outfitters in contrast to other retailers, which resembles what Thompson & Haytko discuss as the fear of being static. Julie's brand choices transcend a meaning into other aspects of her life as it evokes associations to her future life. As being static in the study of Thompson & Haytko (1997) gives the respondent negative associations such as not being able to control one's destiny or leave a noticeable mark on the world, buying all clothes from the retailers that Julie perceives to be for the masses would leave her with the same feelings of negativity. Since Julie has grown up and are currently living in a small town, with a limited selection of shops she experience a need to express her individuality by engage in

brands that are different to the ones people in her surrounding possess. Still, Julie also express a need for belonging to a social group, she does not strive to have a completely individual look, rather she want to put on the look presented by the Urban Outfitters store. Julie express a trust in the identity presented by the Urban Outfitters store, which results in her feeling comfortable enough in the environment to allow herself to be impulsive in her buying activity. The brand reassures her that whatever she ends up buying she will reach closer to her ideal self. We mean that the degree of impulsiveness that Julie is expressing towards the Urban Outfitters store would not transcend onto other retail outlets since she does not share the same level of trust in their brands.

4.4. Limiting the alternatives

In the first two themes of the analysis we have given notion of the consumer as in possession of a great independence and ability to take action. In the first theme we put forward the awareness and control the consumer possess over her own impulse buying behaviour and in the second theme we expressed how the consumer use impulse shopping as a way to be creative and express suppressed aspects of the self. In this final theme we will try to neutralize the view of the consumer, by illustrating how the consumer is influenced by the outer world. Throughout the whole analysis we have tried to put the consumer behaviour in a mental and socio-cultural context to understand the identified behaviour. Here in the final theme we will instead focus on the influence of brand preferences on the consumers' impulse buying, and give further evidence that suggests that the choices of products and brands are far from purely impulsive.

The section will include a presentation of how the need for comfort and recognition influence the brand choices, but we will start of the section by describing how the consumer's life history tend to influence the consumer's shopping preferences. The empirics show that the choice of product brands and retail brands are heavily influenced by the childhood home and the inherited preferences from the parents, as described by Kate:

Kate: “When I go grocery shopping I buy the things that I have grown up with. This morning I saw that my boyfriend has bought Lätta instead of Milda, and I panicked. I am thinking about buying another can, and I don’t really understand why. But butter is one of those things that I am really picky about, I have to have Milda. I believe that I was more selective to begin with [when I moved away from home], that I only wanted to have products that I have grown up with, because you know what you get. Later on I have bought cheaper brands in order to save money, but I would never buy meat or fish from a generic brand like Euroshopper. I don’t know why, but I don’t trust in what they offer. Macaroni or canned goods are ok, but not any type of fresh food. I for instance still only buy bacon from Tulip, as that’s the only brand of bacon my parents bought. (...) I remember that when I went shopping with my parents and took the wrong brand, they told me to get the one we usually had, that it was better. I guess it’s hard, because my boyfriend has grown up with other brands, and they have Lätta at his parents’ house. My parents even had two separate types of butter until they got children, because they could not compromise. But my boyfriend has had to give in, I have bought the brand I want.”

As described in Kate’s citation above, her experience of different brands and products are heavily influenced by her parents’ brand preferences and choices, to the point that they still are a determinant for her behaviour years later. Kate cannot explain her preferences for several different brands with anything other than that it is the brands that she has always used. This type of nostalgic behaviour supports Belk’s (1988) notions of the influences of a person’s past on the self-identity. The use of different products and brands and their repeated usage in the past makes Kate see them as sacred possessions that have followed her through life and helped her form her identity (Belk, 1988; 1989). As seen in Kate’s reaction when her boyfriend has bought a different brand of butter, the feelings evoked are not just those of dissatisfaction but plain panic, as they disrupt her normal pattern and in a sense also question her identity.

Kate’s preference for certain brands can also be understood in her reference to shopping with her parents, where they did not allow her to buy any other brand than the ones they normally got. This has not only made Kate loyal to those brands, but has also affected her to be reluctant to even consider other alternatives, as seen in for instance her preference towards the Tulip brand. Kate has thus formed an evoked set (Howard & Sheth, 1969) based on her parents’

preferences and her memories from the childhood home, which more or less subconsciously affects her shopping behaviour (Belk, 1988). This notion is further strengthened in Kate's following reasoning:

Kate: "We have always had soured milk at home, and because of that I have trouble with eating yoghurt and find it strange. And we have only had A-fil, I would never buy anything else. (...) If I say 'buy soured milk' then that means 'buy A-fil', not any flavoured or low-fat soured milk"

As described in the citation above, Kate's preference for a specific brand of soured milk makes her see the whole product category as only consisting of that particular brand. Her evoked set is thus limited down to only one brand, A-fil, which indicates strong loyalty towards the brand. Kate's preferences also transcend into her impulse behaviour, where she limits her own impulsiveness by only allowing herself to consider products from her evoked set as possible alternatives. As she does not step outside of her evoked set, her impulsiveness is limited to the decision on whether or not she should buy the product now or later. The impulsiveness that Kate performs in the store cannot be considered to be purely impulsive (Stern, 1962) as she does not consider all the brands in the selection, as she has from the beginning eliminated some of the alternatives.

The choice to buy the same brands as the parents indicates a strive for comfort among the consumers. The strive for comfort is also evident in other ways, the experience of a brand or the perceived image of a brand also influence the spontaneous aspects of the impulse purchase to be viewed as more rational and structured than previously argued. Susie's grocery shopping illustrates her strive to purchase brands that she has trust in. Although she generally perceives convenience to be the main mediator when choosing grocery store, she still raises objections to visit some retailers.

Interviewer: "Can you describe yourself as a consumer?"

Susie: "I do not plan my purchases very carefully in advance, and I do not put a lot of efforts into considering what to choose when I am in the store. Often you know, for

example when you enter Ica you have a fairly good notion of what you need. You just have to remember it. I do not have a shopping list, but I know more or less what I need and then I often end up buying some more. 'Oh, I need that!' I am not the kind of person who is indecisive between brands, which brand is best, or that I have to have the cheapest one. I am absolutely not the kind of person that goes to the cheapest store, I chose the one closest to my home. It is more that I like it to be quickly accomplished."

(...)

Interviewer: "Can you describe how you choose a store?"

Susie: "I guess that I'm not super picky, but I do want to recognize the brand. Maybe I single out Lidl a bit, but I usually avoid it, even though I live right next door I rather walk a bit further. I believe it's because they do not have any brands that I know of. If I didn't know [what brand it was] and tasted it I probably wouldn't be able to tell the difference, it's just that it feels better to stick to what I know."

Interviewer: "What brands do you like, if we talk about groceries?"

Susie: "I think I normally chose Ica because it is close to where I live, if it had been a Konsum or Hemköp store, I would go there. But as I said, I do not visit Lidl. But I like Netto, there you recognize the brands."

The citation above illustrates Susie's perception of the available retail alternatives. The retailers that she mentions are only a fraction of the retailers available in Malmö, and she has also limited the number of retailers that she consider by excluding Lidl based on her perception of the store. The argumentation illustrates Susie's frame of an evoked set of stores that she will consider visiting (Howard & Sheth, 1969). The evaluation of alternatives is thus narrowed down before the consumer is even exposed to the available range of brands.

In an impulsive setting Susie will not consider visiting a store that is not included in her evoked set. She explains how she does not even bother to walk into the nearest supermarket, as she does not believe that they have any products or brands that she likes. When visiting a store that she feels comfortable in, Susie can allow herself to be spontaneous and impulsive. In the retail setting, the trust of the retailer influences her to trust in the brands presented as well. The

behaviour can be understood in the light of Fournier's (1998) interpretation of the influence of the life situation and life history. Through Susie's description of herself and her past we can identify a pattern of trust seeking. In addition to the shopping behaviour, a similar pattern is also present in other aspects of Susie's life. An illustrative example can be found in the explanation of her choice of occupation:

Susie: "Before I started university I was working at a kindergarten. I was not sure what I wanted to study. I was thinking about teaching, I was actually a bit into it, but then... I did not have any subject [in school] that felt like 'Wow!'. So in the end I chose business, it felt good, it is a broad education. And I am happy with my choice (...) My parents are also economics you could say. But dad has actually studied law so I guess he is more into legal stuff, and mum on the other hand has only studied business in upper secondary school, and then she started work right away."

From the citation above we can identify the incitements that convinced Susie to choose business as her main subject at the university. The arguments involve a degree of risk reduction, firstly she refers to the broadness of the education implicitly arguing that it make it possible for her to apply for a large array of jobs after finalizing her degree and therefore decrease the risk of becoming unemployed. Secondly she refers to her parents who made more or less the same choice of occupation. As she has seen her parents succeed in their choice of occupation, Susie perceive it to be an adequate choice to follow in their footsteps. This pattern of risk reduction and trust seeking is coherent with Susie's handling of impulse buying. Even though she argue that convenience and the possibility to finish the purchase quickly is the most prominent variables for her when choosing a store, she simultaneously prefer a longer walk to the shop to avoid being faced with a retail environment that makes her feel uncomfortable. In accordance with Fournier's (1998) way of linking personal traits and brand preference together we can identify that Susie's risk averse personality influence how she perform impulsive buying. She allows herself to express her impulsiveness only in environments where she feels comfortable and safe. The store that presents her with a familiar context increases her willingness to respond to in-store stimuli. As seen in Susie's description about herself as a consumer, she wants her purchase activity to proceed in a fast and efficient

manner. As a result we can assume that she does not want to spend time evaluating different alternatives, which she may feel forced to do if she enters an unfamiliar retail context or is faced with unfamiliar products.

4.5. Discussion

When applying a wider perspective to the impulse purchase we have found aspects that indicate that the impulse purchase is not exclusively a response to a sudden urge. Our study shows that purchases previously defined as impulsive do in fact consist of several rational aspects. When focusing on the narrow sphere of a specific purchase our investigation find the same patterns as previous studies (e.g. Rook, 1987; Zajonc & Markus, 1982), describing how the consumer in a specific context finds it difficult to resist a certain urge. But as we widen the sphere of the impulse buying event we find variables that indicate that the consumer has certain expectations on the impulse shopping activity that are constructed in advance and outside the narrow sphere of the specific purchase. The shopping activity has attained a sacred status (Belk, 1989) for the performer, which has led the consumer to construct extensive expectations regarding the outcome and the performance of the shopping activity. When these expectations are not met the consumer experience negative feelings. The feelings of frustration that arise when the environment fails to present appealing shopping stimuli can put the consumer in a situation where the joy of shopping becomes outplayed by the frustration and desperation of not performing as good as expected. The intentions that the consumer constructed prior to engaging in the shopping activity are so strong that the consumer feels forced to buy something to try to appease the mental expectations.

The consumer also expects the shopping activity to be completed according to certain rituals. The consumer is well aware of her role in the ritual and when the surrounding environment, such as store atmosphere and interaction with staff and co-shoppers to proceed in a certain manner. If the consumer's expectations are met the consumer will feel comfortable in the situation and her likeliness to buy more will increase. On the other hand, if the ritual is disrupted or not completed in the expected manner the consumer gets anxious and worried.

She will try to assign meaning to the event, by evaluating her own part in the failure and try to understand in what aspects she did not live up to the notion of the good shopper. The disappointment regarding her own performance will transcend into the experience of the entire shopping activity and the consumer is less likely to appreciate the impulsive purchases made.

We argue that impulse buying as defined by Stern (1962) and adopted by a large array of researchers (e.g. Hausman, 2000; Beatty & Ferrell, 1998; Wood, 1998) needs to be viewed from an alternate angle. While Stern's classification was developed with the product in focus, we believe that the concept also has to be understood in relation to the individual. Stern (1962) focuses on how the consumer is affected by the product offering in the retail setting, while we believe that we need to add the dimension of the individual and her larger context in order to fully grasp the phenomenon of impulse purchasing. To understand what happens in the specific occasion of an impulsive purchase it is not enough to understand the phenomenon. We believe that the planned aspects also needs to include the wider context and how the consumer relates to and controls her impulsiveness, as well as how she makes decisions on when to involve herself in impulsive buying and when to avoid it. We thus argue that impulse buying in fact is the result of considerations that is rational in relation to the individual.

Our angle of the planned impulse buying as being effected by expectations from the consumer has also led us to discover tendencies that reveal a behaviour that is not covered by Stern's (1962) classifications, a type of 'forced impulse buying'. This aspect of the impulse purchase implies that the consumer enters the retail environment with an expectation of engaging in impulse buying. When these expectations are not met spontaneously the consumer forces herself to buy anything just to live up to her own expectations of the visit to the shopping environment. If studied as an isolated event from a third person perspective, this would resemble a 'pure impulsive purchase' but described from a first person perspective we can distinguish that it deals with negative emotions and frustration rather than the positive emotions which characterize the pure impulse category.

4.5.1. Reflections of the personality

We identify the impulsive act of shopping as one sequence of a larger pattern of how the consumer relates to herself and how she is perceived by others. The act of impulse buying can be seen as a leisure time activity that follows the same pattern as other types of leisure time activities. The impulse buying possesses a symbolic meaning for the consumer as it functions as a way to understand, relate to and complete the notion of the self. The strive that is implicit in the way shopping is performed reflects the consumer's strive in everyday life, whether the collector is trying to complete herself or the connoisseur are trying to stress important aspects of the self-identity (Belk, 1989; Holt, 1998). In the construction of the self as the consumer enters into new life projects (Fournier, 1998) she may form important relationships to brands that contribute to a sense of security and completeness. A brand can represent such a strong mediator of the aspired self that the consumer can allow herself to release her inhibitions and be truly impulsive as long as she purchases the specific brand.

We believe that the rationality of the impulse buying also is evident through this perspective since the impulse purchase seems to follow a certain consumption ritual. By understanding the consumer, her strives and values, one will also understand the underlying motivations that guide her way of performing the impulse buying activity, similar to Fournier's (1998) way of linking the personality to brand possessions. We believe that the impulsive buying behaviour cannot be seen as an act performed randomly but rather as something that is connected to an understanding of the self. We argue that if we can understand the consumer, we can also understand the motivations that construct her behaviour in the impulsive context. This notion further stresses the idea that the impulse purchase in fact is not as impulsive as previously argued, and indicates that the explanation can be found in the individual's context.

4.5.2. Restriction of the impulsiveness

The initial parts of the analysis focused on the amount of control the consumer possess over the impulse buying activity and how it contrasts what previously been argued in the theoretical field of impulse buying. In accordance with socio-cultural researchers within other fields of

consumer theory we argue that the consumer is free to form the image of herself through her buying behaviour, although the freedom is unconsciously governed by the social sphere wherein the construction takes place (Elliott, 1998). We argue that the influence of brand preferences restrict the consumer's ability to control the outcome of the impulse purchase. We have found indicators that suggest that the consumer's life history and personality greatly influence her brand preferences, resulting in the consumer only evaluating a limited set of alternatives. As showed, the consumer's childhood and the parents' brand preferences heavily influence the evoked set (Howard & Sheth, 1969) years after leaving the childhood home. The products that the consumer used during the upbringing are seen as nostalgic possessions assuring the consumer of her self-identity and are prominent for the construction and reconstruction of the future self (Belk, 1988). We can see that the nostalgic behaviour makes the consumer only consider a limited number of brands. The pattern of limiting the number of alternatives can also be linked to the consumer's personality, where risk aversion affects the consumers' behaviour to prefer a known set of retailers and brands (Fournier, 1998).

The findings presented in the final section of the discussion may seem to lack novelty for those familiar with theories on brand preferences in general and evoked set in particular. However, as we are transferring the notions onto the phenomenon of impulse buying we are contributing to the exploration of the theories into a different setting, which impose new ways to view and understand the meaning and emergence of the phenomenon. We believe that the field of impulse buying needs to show more attention towards the area of brand preference, as it reduces the consumers' scope for impulsiveness. The identified influence of brand preferences on impulse buying also stresses the main point we are trying to communicate as we conclude this analysis, which is that the impulse buying event involve an array of rational aspects, the influence of brand preferences being one of them.

5. Conclusions & future research

We started this study by arguing that the positivistic view that has dominated the impulse buying has led researchers to disregard the influence of the individual's socio-cultural context on the impulse purchase. Researchers have assumed that the impulse purchase can be studied as an isolated event, without taking any interest in the context of the event. To contribute with a deeper and richer understanding of impulse buying we set out to investigate how the consumer's self-identity and life situation influence her perception and handling of the impulse purchase activity, as well as how the socio-cultural dimensions influence the consumer's decision making in an impulse buying context.

Our study identified three dominant themes in the empirical data that were subject for analysis. We found evidence that suggests that the impulse buying activity involves dimensions of control and pre-planning. The consumer tends to be aware of when she exposes herself to environments that triggers her impulsiveness and also develops expectations regarding the shopping outcome. When these expectations are not met in the shopping environment the consumer experience frustration and feel forced to buy something in order to live up to the initial expectations. We believe that aspect of impulse buying can be added as a fifth categorisation to Stern's (1962) impulse mix, as it reflects phenomena not previously observed. Furthermore, we found aspects in the empirics that indicate that the act of impulse buying gives meaning to the consumer as a way to create and recreate the notion of the self. Through understanding the consumer's life situation we can find a pattern for their impulsive behaviour, furthermore indicating that the impulse buying activity leans against structures that are rational for the individual consumer. The rational aspects of the impulse purchase are also visible in the final identified theme, namely the influence of brand preferences. We have observed that the consumer's brand preferences and evoked set influence the impulsive behaviour as it limits the selection of alternatives that the consumer perceives as well as unconsciously directs the consumer's behaviour. To conclude, we argue that impulse buying involves far more rational

aspects than suggested by previous research. By putting the impulse purchase in a wider context and viewing it as one sequence in a larger pattern of sequences we have found evidence that suggest that the impulsiveness is dependent on the consumer's life situation and perception of the self.

The managerial implications of our study is to stress the need for companies to understand their target group, their values and life situation, since it influence the consumers' motivations in the impulsive context. Companies need to be aware of the difficulties of convincing the consumer to buy an unfamiliar brand or product when faced with it in the store. We argue that companies need to prepare and familiarize the consumer with the offerings before she engages in the purchase activity.

5.1. Future research

As our study has had an explorative approach the tendencies that we have identified needs to be studied further. To better understand the planned and controlled aspects related to the impulse buying activity research may concentrate on understanding how the consumer's expectations are created, and how the retail environment can be developed to support the consumer in attaining positive feelings. The phenomenon of forced impulse buying also needs further investigation in order to understand its full impact on impulse buying.

The study has concluded that impulse buying involves several rational aspects that can be identified when the wider context is taken into consideration. This notion implies that there is a rationality linked to impulsiveness. We believe that our findings in the field of consumer buying behaviour can act as basis for further studies of impulsiveness in other fields of research and be a foundation for researchers questioning to what extent irrationality directs impulsiveness.

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Appendix 1: Diary manual

DIARY: SHOPPING SITUATIONS

Name:

Instructions

The purpose with the study is to understand people's shopping behaviour. A shopping event can include one individual purchase or cover a full shopping spree.

We wish the diary to include three aspects of the purchase: pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase. We wish that all purchases made during a seven-days period is described in the diary. The diary notes should include rich descriptions, focusing on the psychological aspects, such as feelings, moods and other thoughts. The diary will be used as basis for the interview that will be carried out in week 16 or 17.

The diary includes seven pages, one for each day of the diary completion period. If the amount of space is too limited, you are allowed to do additional notes on separate sheets. Do not let the amount of space given in the diary affect your notes! We are striving for rich descriptions, it is important that you as participant put away time to complete the diary.

The final page is for you to make comments, and fill in thoughts or questions about the study.

If there is any questions, do not hesitate to contact Fredrik (073-532 19 63) or Cajsja (073-706 81 08). Thanks for your participation!

Think about this when you complete the diary

Below we have articulated some key words for each aspect of the purchase. The key words can be used as guidelines for the diary. Note that even other feelings and thoughts that are not noted below should be included in the diary completion.

Pre-purchase

Purpose with the shopping event

The purchase: Planned or unplanned? Thoughts? (Brand, product, etc.)

Momentary considerations

Mood, feelings

Did you go alone or together with someone? Reasons?

Purchase

What do you buy? Product, brand, store

Why? How do you motivate your purchase in the situation? For yourself and others?

What influence you to buy?

Mood, feelings, considerations

What role does any potential co-consumer has?

Post-purchase

What do you feel after the purchase? (Instantly and later on)

What does the purchase mean to you?

Appendix 2: Interview guide

The interview will touch upon five themes in order to attain knowledge about the respondents' everyday life, relation to shopping, experiences of impulse buying and planned buying, and finally their perception of brands more generally. The interview guide will only be used as a guide and the interviews will be adjusted to fit each respondent and the information received from the personal diary.

1. General questions

Purpose: To get an understanding of the respondent's everyday life.

- Who are you? Tell us about yourself and your life?
- Demographics: age, gender, occupation, marital status, lifestyle, interests

2. Relation to shopping

Purpose: To understand how the respondent relates to and talks about shopping, if it generates positive or negative emotions.

- Describe yourself as a consumer? Who are you?
- Can you describe your relation to shopping? Reasons for shopping, general opinions about shopping?

3. Experiences of impulse buying

Purpose: Based on the information received from the diaries the aim is to get a deeper understanding of the different variables related to impulse buying.

- Can you describe your last shopping spree? (experiences from the diary)
- Your shopping the last week, is it a fair description of your general shopping habits?
- Questions regarding impulsiveness
- When you think about your impulse purchase- what feelings emerge?
- Can you describe how you choose that brand?
- Can you describe what encouraged you to buy that brand?

- Can you describe how you felt about yourself after completing the purchase?
- Would you have purchased a different brand if the purchase had been intentional?
- Can you describe the most important variables when you chose that product? Does it vary between planned and unplanned purchases?
- Did you buy what you intended to buy? What made you purchase different from intended?

4. Experiences of planned buying

Purpose: To attain understanding of the differences between planned and unplanned purchases, and how the respondent's feelings and attitudes vary.

- Can you describe an occasion when you did a planned purchase?
- In what ways was it planned: product, brand, and price level
- How did the process differ between this purchase and the purchase we just discussed, the impulse purchase?

5. Relation to brands

Purpose: To understand how the respondent relates to brands and what role they play in the respondent's life.

- Can you describe what brands mean to you?
- Can you describe which brands do you like? Can you describe what you like about them?
- What do you think that your brand choices say about you?
- Can you describe the importance for you to possess certain brands? If any.
- Can you describe why it is important for you to possess these brands?