Balancing branding and sales - The content strategist dilemma

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Abstract

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This research strives to examine the impact of online brand communication on the content strategy of a premium brand in the context of ETON e-commerce store. The secondary purpose of the study provides the insight as to why brand message affects brand content strategy through various communication modes. The research set forth brand perspective to create an in-depth understanding of the mechanisms behind the content strategy and its importance for delivering the desired brand value to the target audience. The methodology of the study includes an overall approach to research analysis structure is based on the customer journey of ETON visitors. Finally a multimodal analysis of the brand color palette, typography and imagery has enabled an in-depth examination of editorial aspects of the brand content strategy. This study clarifies the strong connection between content strategy practices and effective brand message although complex mechanisms behind effective brand communication require a deeper focus on online branding. Branding, e-commerce platform and editorial content strategy practices have devised the key aspects of the successful performance of an online store. The research results have challenged the existing practices of content strategy approach and pointed to a strong contextual relevance for successful online brand communication tactics. Consequently, the study outcome points at a high risk of failed content delivery and ineffective brand message in the absence of data drive approach and in-depth understanding of consumer needs.

Keyword: Strategic communication, Content Strategy, Branding, E-commerce, Customer experience, Symbolic brand

Thank you!

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We hope that you who read this thesis will find the reading of interest!

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1. Introduction

The introduction represents the relation between e-commerce, branding and content strategy. Thereafter the preamble describes the problematic environment of an e-commerce in the context of traditional branding strategies by emphasizing the study's relevance to strategic communication through content strategy. Subsequently the study's purpose and research questions are presented and followed by our case presentation and study's limitations.

1.1 Preamble

In the 6th century B.C. in ancient Greece, the central shopping area of a city was named agora, here local merchants could set up displays and sell their merchandise to the citizens (Thompson, 1993). Similar scenes are present throughout the western periodical division of history: the medieval, modern and out postmodern period (Spielvogel, 2011). Thus we have been building physical stores for hundreds of years, allowing us to perfect the craft. In our postmodern period the globalization of business and rapid development of technology has shifted the paradigm behind an image of successful retail brand, from a purely physical reality to the online virtual reality. Subsequently a robust e-commerce store has become a new imperative for any company wishing to thrive on the market. With an increase of brands and number of goods it is essential for a brand to actively and strategically differentiate the brand by getting the right message to the right individual at the right time through the right channel (Chaffey, 2009; Rahel & Noz, 2013). Contemporary marketing strategies are driven by rapid technology progress and focus on inevitable brand communication discrepancies between multiple online platforms. Thus transferring traditional marketing theory into online practice is challenging due to the dynamic nature of the online environment. Further McGovern (2001) expresses the difference between online branding and offline branding as offline branding seeks to get attention while online branding seeks to offer attention by providing information that answers the consumers' questions. Thereafter McGovern (2001) highlights the challenge of applying traditional theory of branding to an online environment.

1.2 Scientific problem

An effective, engaging and converting e-commerce store that caters to all the consumers needs is a great challenge for all brands (Bandyopadhyay, 2009). However premium brands face a different type of difficulty due the complexity of forming a unique selling proposition and the loss of the tactile product feedback in the online environment. Chanel's president of global fashion Bruno Pavlovsky (Bloomberg, 2013) conveys fashion as: *"Fashion is about clothing and clothing you need to see, to feel, to understand"*.

Thus, premium brands need to compensate for the absence of offline product interaction and find a solution for retaining customer trust and product value within the online store. Additionally the lack of physical personal service and direct communication with the consumer eradicates the personalized tool of encouraging a high involvement purchase (Porter, 2001). The lack of tactile elements and physical service forces the brand to compensate through online branding to communicate a form of added value online to gain and retain consumers (Fill, 2013). As a result, highly competitive and transparent online environment has forced the brands to compensate for the absence of personal selling service and introduce strategies for online branding, explicit product value and effective content strategies (Fill, 2013). Thereafter premium brand had to readjust their traditional branding strategy to an online reality to preserve the exclusiveness of the brand products and simultaneously push for sales (Seringhaus, 2002). Thus premium brands need to rethink the remnants of the traditional marketing approach. Such approach would allow premium brands to overcome the gap between a high involvement purchase and harsh realities of e-commerce sales.

Reaching the online consumer requires that the brand master the combination of customer's journey concept, user experience and content to convey their brand message. The online consumer experience is somewhat similar to guiding the consumer through a physical store but requires deep knowledge of consumer needs and understanding of customer journey throughout the store. Rahel & Noz (2013) refer to content as the bridge between the user experience and the consumer. The content either supports the consumers purchasing decisions or it supports the relationship between the brand and the consumer. Hence without an appropriate content strategy the brand cannot communicate their online marketing or sales objectives.

We have observed multiple challenges of premium brands in an online environment, henceforth we believe that there is a need for a deeper insight of branding strategies in an online environment. Thereafter we strive to create an insight into premium branding within

a given e-commerce store from a strategic communicators point of view. Identifying the balance between branding and selling through content strategy could provide a dramatically different strategic insight into the e-commerce phenomena.

1.3 Study purpose and research questions

The purpose of this single case study is to explore how online brand communication forms a brand's content strategy. The research aims to examine why a brand's message impacts their content strategy through communication modes, within the context of an online e-commerce store. To attain the purpose of the study we intend to answer the following research questions:

1. How does online brand communication form content strategy through communication modes within a given e-commerce store?
2. Why is e-commerce content strategy practices put in focus for conveying desired brand message?

1.4 Case presentation

ETON is a family oriented shirt company established in Gånghester, Sweden 1928 as a direct reaction to the great depression in the 1920s. With a unique production process the Pettersson family managed to increase the production efficiency and to improve the quality of the shirts. ETON family motto *"No other shirt is sewn with such great care"* reflects a brand choice for high quality materials which is partially a reason why ETON has become a lovemark of male fashion in 60 countries across the world.

The year was 2013 when ETON launched their e-commerce store. Initially it was just a showroom; however ETON soon realized the need for an online store. The international e-commerce developer Vaimo guided ETON through the maze of online presence during the development of the brand e-commerce store. Vaimo managed to increase the store traffic by 85% which led to 70% increase of transactions (Vaimo, 2015). Thus ETON's e-commerce store can be considered a success story as they have managed to increase brand sales. However being a premium, eminent brand with a specific brand image based on their heritage creates curiosity in exploring how ETON can express their online brand through content in their e-commerce store without the tactile elements.

1.5 Case study specifications and limitations

The case study's e-commerce store will be analyzed through an organizational perspective. The International version of the e-commerce store in English will be analyzed due to the fact that this thesis is being written in English. The e-commerce will be analyzed through the desktop version on 13' to 17' inch screen. Such limitation is necessary due to the differences in layout caused by responsive design of the e-commerce store and the need to obtain similar layout of the store pages. We would like to specify that anything below or above 11'-17' inch screen resolution would disrupt the notebook layout analyzed in this case study.

We will also use suggested boundary steps for the development of inclusion and exclusion criteria in the qualitative study sample selection. The sample selection will only cover online branding and content strategy aspects. We are refraining from overall case study sample selection (ETON brand) for the sake of analytical generalizations and integrity of one case study method. The suggested case study boundaries will us help define the breadth and width of the study and act as precision markers throughout the whole research process. The study scope will be bounded to complete an online purchase scenario from a homepage to the checkout page in the context of consumer journey.

2. Theory

Three theoretical areas will be presented in this section. The theoretical section is shaped as a funnel, allowing us to generate precision and depth in the case study. The introductory segment will provide the thesis context in relation to strategic communication. Thereafter online branding and e-commerce will be discussed. Subsequently online branding will be narrowed down to content strategy which will focus on images, voice and tone, text and typography and navigating content.

2.1 Marketing communication and strategic communication

Falkheimer & Heide (2007) defines strategic communications as a multidisciplinary field containing a knowledgeable interest in three main fields of research; public relations, organizational communication and marketing. This study is managed from a marketing communication perspective as we intend to investigate how ETON's online branding affects their online content strategy. Content strategy is strongly linked to strategic communications as all content needs to be strategically composed to communicate the desired message.

Falkheimer & Heide (2007) points out that unlike public relations and organizational communication, marketing has a much more simplified view on communicative perspective. Considerable amounts of marketing literature are rooted in traditional and simplistic models like the Shannon-Weaver model, since the transmission approach is deeply established in this discipline. In recent years there has however been a turnaround in marketing research, which focuses on the importance of relationship marketing. A large part of marketing activities is still more tactical than strategic and rather linked to the sales of specific products than to the organization and the brand as a whole (Falkheimer & Heide, 2007).

Shobeiri, Laroche & Mazaheri (2013) discusses today's importance of an external communication that creates value for the consumers. The competitive online environment requires that companies use their marketing communication in a strategic way to differentiate themselves and create a more personalized relationship with the consumer. All which is clear-

ly connected to branding that Hislop (2001) defines as "the process of creating an association between a symbol/object/emotion/perception and a product or company with goal of driving brand loyalty and differentiating the brand".

2.2 Branding

Branding is a tool to represent the brand online, the concept entails several mechanisms. Through an organizational perspective we will process branding in the context of symbolic brands, brand management, e-commerce, customer journey and bridging branding with content strategy through visual identity.

Brand is one of the most valuable assets of the company for creating consumer experiences, evoking strong feelings and building associations for perceived value (Elliott, Percy & Pervan, 2011). According to Fill (2013) there's a wide range of definitions when it comes to a brand. In our study, we define a brand in line with Schmitt's (1999) definition: "as a rich source of sensory, affective and cognitive associations that result in memorable and rewarding brand experience".

The performance of the brand is measured by consistency in matching brand promise to consumer expectations, and in doing so reinforce the positioning and the credibility of the promise. The three brand P's; brand promise, positioning and performance represent the core elements of the brand and are crucial for a brand to become successful. Communication is central to the interaction of the three P's. It enables interaction of the three brand elements by assisting in brand differentiation, attracting new customers and preserving the loyal ones (Fill, 2013). Strong brands possess unique characteristics thus differentiating themselves from the competitors. Such brands appeal to the mind and to the heart of the consumer, through addressing rational and emotional concerns regarding the product. Rational concerns satisfy utilitarian needs of the customer while emotional concerns satisfy psychological and emotional needs. Henceforth strong brands blend product performance and vivid imagery to create lasting consumer attachment to the brand and build the grounds for brand differentiation (Keller, 2013).

Brand differentiation can be achieved through intrinsic and extrinsic brand attributes. Intrinsic attributes define the shape and the performance of the product while extrinsic attributes represent the brand name, form brand associations and convey brand meaning (Fill, 2013). Rosenbaum-Elliot, Percy & Pervan (2011) define brand as an intangible concept

existing in the minds of the consumers, while Temporal (2010) elaborates on segregation of the brand concept into functional and symbolic brands. Thus managing the brand also requires management of consumer perceptions (Rosenbaum-Elliott, Percy & Pervan, 2011).

Consequently, consumer perceptions of the brand are represented by brand image and require a strategic approach to consumer cognition and evaluation of the brand concepts (Heding, Knudtzen & Bjerre, 2009). To construct the desired brand image we see that brands need to apply appropriate symbols to generate and limit the potential associations and meanings of their brand. Thus we see the importance of understanding the symbolic brand and its mechanisms as key in developing a relevant content strategy in an e-commerce store.

2.2.1 Symbolic brands in the context of premium brand image

Modern society represents a symbol rich environment demanding that people construct meanings from a large number of images and symbols. Brands coexist in this culturally rich space and play a significant role in the way consumers communicate fundamental meanings of age, gender and social hierarchy. Constant interaction between modern society and material culture allows consumers to make choices based on product functions and the creation of *symbolic meanings* of the products (Elliott, Percy & Pervan, 2011). Media possibilities allow brands to become powerful carriers of *symbolic values and meanings.* Constantly increasing number of brands results in an intense market competition. Consequently, brand differentiation through functional attributes becomes problematic. Henceforth *symbolic meanings of the brands* form a new basis for differentiation and positioning on the market (Tan & Ming, 2003).

Park et al. (1986) also elaborates on the idea of *consumer needs* classified as being either functional or symbolic one. Functional needs are related to specific and practical consumption of the products whereas *symbolic needs* are related to self- image, social identification and role position. To tap into these two different types of needs brands need a "brand concept" defined as an overall abstract meaning that identified a brand. A brand concept is either symbolic or functional, thus tapping into consumers' symbolic and functional needs respectively (Bhat & Reddy, 1998).

Consequently symbolic consumer needs and product consumption bring forth the concept of a *symbolic brand* designed to associate an individual with the desired role or self-image and prestige (Kum, Bergkvist, Lee & Leong, 2012; Bhat & Reddy, 1998). The concept of a *symbolic brand* is further developed into two categories, the symbolic social meaning of

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the brand and self-symbolic meaning of the brand. *Social symbolic meanings* of the brand communicates the desired self-image to the outside world while *self-symbolic meaning* of the brand is used for implying desired self-image to ourselves (Rosenbaum-Elliott, Percy & Pervan, 2011). Kapferer (2012) further links the symbolic brand to a notion of symbolic signs, such as material and professional success. Eventually, brands become the *symbolic resources* for construction and maintenance of consumer social- and self-identity and *cultural meanings* (Temporal, 2010). Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. (2011) further elaborate the idea of *symbolic brands* by stating that *symbolic consumption* of the brand products can further communicate cultural aspects such as social status, gender, age, and cultural values such as tradition and authenticity.

The notion of symbolic brand is closely connected with the definition of luxury brands as it implies symbolic, imaginary and added social value for brand differentiation (Temporal, 2010). The luxury brand also meets symbolic needs due to strong image and aesthetic qualities (Geerts, 2013). The definition is supported by Seringhaus (2002), suggesting that luxury brands represent emotion, image and personality, thus symbolically communicating these aspects in brand identity. Okonkwo (2009) supports the idea of a connection between symbolic and premium brand and speculates that premium brand communication primarily focuses on *extrinsic attributes of the brand*, such as specific brand associations and meanings. The scope of this study is focused on premium brand communication. Therefore, the notion of symbolic brand would be further applied to the context of content strategy in e-commerce.

2.2.2 Traditional to online brand management shift

The wide spread of e-commerce practices is turning traditional trading companies into the so-called e-tailers. Consequently, the new B2C models call for tailored e-branding that can engage retain and transact with the consumer (Bandyopadhyay, 2009). Fill (2013) points to the fact that both online and offline brand management activities are focused on sustaining relationships with consumers but online branding activities need to be handled in a virtual context. For instance, traditional brand management tends to focus on the product and consumer attitude, thus marketing strategy is mostly directed towards product appeal and increased brand sensitivity.

However, online branding deprives consumers of tactile product feedback and in-store customer service interaction (Fill, 2013). At the same time online brand building is dependent on a number of traditional marketing success factors, such as brand recognition,

brand differentiation, brand loyalty and in-depth knowledge of brand customers. Brand recognition turns into a critical aspect of a strong online brand. Unique brand name, easily recognizable visual design and brand voice, one of a kind brand story have in turn become the most efficient techniques for brand recognition (Bandyopadhyay, 2009).

In addition to traditional marketing challenges, online branding faces new technology challenges in attracting and retaining the new type of online customers with high demand for online service and very low patience threshold. Anything from complicated store navigation, extra seconds loading time or a limited selection of products lead to consumer irritation and loss of visitors' moments after visiting the online shop (Bandyopadhyay, 2009). Prompt loss of online store visitors is defined as the bounce rate phenomena and became an indicator of the store effectiveness.

As of today, high bounce rate is often caused by a discrepancy between online and traditional branding techniques for explicit brand differentiation. Premium brand stores become especially vulnerable to inadequate online brand differentiation. Inefficient online brand differentiation pushes the brands to compete with competitors in the price segment and undermines the whole idea of premium quality goods with set price margin (Bandyopadhyay, 2009). According to Chaffey (2009), inadequate knowledge of customer e-commerce store expectations, inaccurate store performance metrics (unique/returning customers' data) and underdeveloped online branding strategy are among the most common online brand management problems.

A rapid development of e-commerce platform capabilities provides multiple possibilities for testing and tracking branding efforts and adjusting brand communication strategy (Schneider, 2015). Sales data and negative conversion rate metrics implies that standing out in a crowd of equally unique brands can make a difference between brand survival and brand success within the e-commerce environment. Global trends in declining offline sales push the brands to re-evaluate their online branding strategies and explore ways of differentiating the brand to survive the new online market realities (Hernández, Jiménez & Martín, 2009). In-depth knowledge of target audience and their needs has become a new crucial brand building tactics. Understanding how and why customers have come to the online store proves to be another important aspect of the online brand performance.

Due to this aspect, Morris & Martin (2000) suggest key drivers for brand product success and summarized them as ten attributes:

- Excellence: perceived as best of breed
- Uniqueness: clear one-of-a-kind differentiation
- Aesthetics: perceived aesthetic appeal
- Association: generates positive associations
- Engagement: fosters emotional involvement
- Expressive value: visible sign of user values
- Functional value: addresses functional needs
- Nostalgic value: evokes sentimental linkages
- Personification: has character, personality
- Cost: perceived value for money

Consequently data-driven analysis of the online store performance and customer activity has become a necessary condition for truly addressing brand audience and their needs (Schneider, 2015). Online branding and brand communication strategy are being put in focus in research goals and questions of the study thus stated aspects of online branding would frame the processing and the interpretation of the empirical data of the study.

2.3 E-commerce

To be able to study online brand communication and online content strategy aspects, an introduction of its context follows. E-commerce is the modern reality of classic trading activity where all sales are concluded online from various trading platforms. Electronic commerce includes many activities; most common ones can be categorized as business-to-business (B2B), business-to-customer (B2C), online marketplaces for connecting third-party B2B and B2C sales. However, the online store concept is one of the most frequent forms of e-commerce and offers direct, personalized shopping experience to the willing customers (Bandyopadhyay, 2009).

The e-commerce concept is particularly suitable for the purpose of our research study goal as ETON operates through multiple marketing channels and currently focuses on the development of its online store. Marketing channels can be defined as different pathways to customers in forms of offline and online brand stores and allow reaching more customers at

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less cost (Keller, 2013). Operating through multiple marketing channels is of particular importance for the retail area since customers want physical access to the product in offline brand stores and the freedom to shop online at a dedicated e-commerce store. As a result, Schneider (2015) means that low-cost to medium-cost brands can partly compensate the loss of traditional tactile product feedback and interaction with a brand representative during the purchase process due to the nature of the low-involvement purchase.

However, multiple market channel strategy is still problematic for luxury and premium brands. Purchasing high-involvement products calls for offline product interaction and high-quality customer service. As a result, many premium brands became wary of alienating their upscale physical stores and did not promote their online stores until last few years. Eventually, luxury and premium brands attempted to counteract forced entrance to e-commerce platforms by limiting the range of online offerings to keep the in-person brand experience in physical stores (Schneider, 2015). Although Keller (2013) states that the reality of e-commerce performance has shown that traditional aura of exclusiveness and promises of premium quality goods were not enough to satisfy the modern generation of customers. Consumers face hundreds of shopping destinations and thus rapidly change their shopping decisions.

Meanwhile traditional marketing techniques stumble through multiple advices on what could drive brand sales and help reinforce the brand in online environment (Osterwalder, Pigneur & Clark, 2013). Concepts of brand positioning, brand differentiation and brand mission fail to explain the core aspect of the brand survival in online space even despite differences in high- and low-purchase involvement (Keller, 2013). Eventually e-commerce research put forward a *unique brand selling proposition* concept (USP). The idea suggests in-depth research of brand USP for understanding the value of the brand product on the market. Value proposition is defined as a customer solving problem solution or a way to satisfy consumer needs (Osterwalder, Pigneur & Clark, 2013). The approach is particularly useful for premium and luxury brands as it transforms USP into a powerful storytelling sales tool, let consumers express social differentiation through symbolic consumption of the goods or lay grounds for social integration and behavioral change (Keller, 2013).

The brand behind this case study has entered e-commerce market less than two years ago and henceforth represents a vivid example of the problematic premium brand transition to online e-commerce platform when the brand experience needs to maintain its previous high standards.

2.3.1 Customer journey and customer experience

Javons and Gabbot (2000) suggest that the first-hand experience of the brand is a "much more powerful token of trust than the perception of the brand". Such method changes the approach to online branding. Dayal et al. (2000) support the suggested method by stating that "on the world wide web; the brand is the experience, and the experience is the brand". However online marketing strategy alone cannot offer compelling online brand experience. Content strategy of an e-commerce store such as color schemes, fonts, textual, graphic content and site navigation interact with each other and balance explicit branding, effective online brand communication, and positive customer experience (Norton and Pine, 2013; Rahel & Noz 2013). Once balanced the key components of the e-commerce store lead to the growth of sales, strengthen brand equity and return-on-investment (ROI) (Bandyopadhyay, 2009).

On the other hand, Norton & Pine (2013) mean that delivering positive customer e-commerce experience is highly problematic without in-depth knowledge of consumer behavior in online company store that is collected and analyzed in a form of customer journey map. The map represents five navigation phases within the online store: a home page, a brand products display page, a product presentation page, a cart checkout page and an order completion and payment page. Consequently analysis of customer journey map allows identification of an e-commerce store strengths and weaknesses (Mangiaracina, Brugnoli & Perego, 2009). Henceforth flawless customer journey map leads to a positive customer experience. Norton and Pine (2013) define effective customer experience as a sequence of events for engaging customers in a customized "brand presentation drama" for creating memorable and valuable encounters with the brand. The design of the e-commerce store is the final key component of brand communication strategy.

In line with this argument, Rosen & Purinton (2004) suggest the following factors for estimating the effectiveness of the e-commerce store and hence the brand communication strategy;

- Coherence – simplicity of design, easy to read, use of categories (for browsing products or topics), absence of information overload, adequate font size, uncrowded presentation;
- Complexity – different categories of text;
- Legibility – use of 'mini home page' on every subsequent page, same menu on every page, site map.

Finally the perceived quality of the e-commerce store can be represented by the interaction between the needs of the customers and the quality of store content. Key aspects of the store quality can be seen as the relevance of store content in the context of the consumer's needs, (Norton & Pine, 2013) the degree to that the content and design encourages exploration of the site (Rosen & Purinton, 2004) and that the content is presented in a interesting way (Oxley & Miller, 2000). The customer journey approach and the aspects of customer experience provide structural guidance to the analysis of the study and create a meaningful approach to further presentation of the empirical data. Thus the different customer journeys will be presented further in the method chapter.

2.3.2 The bridge between branding and content strategy

Brands have a long history of using human tendencies to attaching meaning to visual symbols. Upbringing, social interactions and natural human inclination to adopt and recognize symbols provide perfect grounds for human brand associations and recognition of brand identities (Busche, 2015). People tend to base their attitude towards a brand based on the first impressions from visual symbols surrounding the brand core product. Constructing the visual identity of a brand is one of the most efficient ways of differentiating the brand from the competitors and moving towards consistent brand recognition. Visual identity is managed through the use of brand logotype, color palette, typography and image, thus some components of a brand content strategy to convey the appropriate associations (Busche, 2015). Therefore the combination of colors, text and visuals can act as strategic brand tools for influencing consumer perception. Thereafter we see it highly relevant to study online content strategy from the organization's perspective to gain and retain customers, as it is aligned with our research approach. Without relevant online content strategy, neither the brand nor the product(s) will ever reach the customer. Thus, insufficient and/or inferior content will affect the brand and its return of investment negatively due to loss of customer to the vast competition online.

2.4 Content strategy

Online content strategy can be described as a plan for regular creation, delivery and maintenance of distinctive and usable content (Wachter-Boettcher 2012). Online content can be defined in several ways we will define it as all text, images and multimedia that add to the comprehension of an e-commerce store. Content is essential for a) a consumer to understand an

organization's products, service, stories and brand and b) to integrate the organization's visions in order to meet goals and objectives (Frick & Eyler-Werve 2015). Ultimately content strategy is about getting the *right* content to the *right* user at the *right* time (Rahel & Noz 2013). Failing to do so results in a failed consumer experience where the consumer cannot find what they are searching for. However the dynamic online environment can be problematic. Every improved or a new online platform forces the companies to build and rebuild their content and navigation design, without any valid "how-to" guidelines (Wachter-Boettcher 2012). Rahel and Noz (2013) states other challenges where content is missing or just purely unusable for its purpose.

From an organizational standpoint content strategy is a strategy for driving business goals. The return of investments (ROI) of content strategy is enabled through sales to customers (Abel & Rahel 2014). An increase of a company's ROI through content strategy may be seen through brand equity, increased sales, shortened content development cycles and reduced product returns and training, service and translation costs (Rahel & Noz 2013). Ultimately a misuse and lack of relevant content will result in a decrease of online ROI. Thus, content needs to be strategically composed to gain and retain a consumer. Hence researching and outlining the e-commerce users is key (Abel & Rahel 2014). Nonetheless the users needs have to be balanced with both the technical possibilities as well as the online branding.

Online content strategy can be divided into technical and editorial strategies (Rahel & Noz, 2013). The technical strategy defines how the content can be delivered both for users and for easier maintenance. This strategy is largely invisible and consists of content structure, metadata, taxonomy, semantic tagging and content models. Editorial strategy defines the guidelines by which the online content is managed: value, tone, voice, images, language etc. As content strategy is an extensive subject we will *only* analyze the following aspects of the editorial strategy: *images, text and typography, tone and voice*. The method section will explain the approach to the analysis of the stated content strategy aspects. We will motivate the choices of *communication modes* in context of content strategy in relation to online branding and explain the different aspects' mechanisms in an e-commerce store.

2.4.1 Selling and branding through images

The lack of tactile elements and personal interaction in e-commerce stores forces the brands to find new ways to portray their products and to bond with the consumer. Images are one way to encode a brand's communication, whether it is selling or branding (Frick & Eyler-

Werve, 2015). Even if the image's purpose is to push a sale it needs to convey the brands image to differentiate the product from any other online product. Unlike visits to the physical store the consumer can enter multiple online e-commerce stores at once, stressing the importance of capturing yet informative image choices. O'Connor (2014) claims that an image must be analyzed and decoded within four seconds or the consumer may be distracted or lost. Thus the consumer is likely to leave the e-commerce store due to lack of needed content in the image.

The mechanisms of an image impact can be divided into the elements and principles of design (O'Connor, 2014). The elements of visual design are the use of: color, light and dark contrast, line, direction, shape, size and typography as visual grammar. Whilst the principles of visual design are: simplicity/complexity, unity/variety, rhythm/movement, symmetry/asymmetry, contrast, compositional techniques, realism/abstraction and are used to highlight the key components of the message. Thus the principles are used to attract attention to the elements that express the communicative idea. Kress & van Leeuween (2006) stress the importance of the social and cultural context of composing an image. Hence the meaning of color in an image can have more than one meaning/association in different parts of the world. We see that the sociocultural aspects can be problematic for brands as their choice of color palette usually reflects their visual identity. Thus we chose to analyze images from a western sociocultural perspective due to the western origin of our case study.

2.4.2 Text and typography in relation to copy

Initially it is vital to separate copy from text. Copy is the message and text is a semantic resource that conveys the copy (Rahel et al., 2013). Copy can be segmented into persuasive and enabling copy (Ibid, 2013). Persuasive copy is used to convince the consumer to think a certain way. In an e-commerce copy could complete a call-to-action (CTA). Enabling copy helps the consumer to complete a task or process a thought. We can consider the text as a tool to deliver the copy to persuade a direct action or to support online branding through helping the consumer to understand the brand. There are several mechanisms that can be applied to create an efficient online text content. Barr (2010) presents the following three guidelines:

(1) *Keep it short* – short words, sentences and paragraphs
(2) *Front-load content* – titles, headlines, content at the top part of the screen
(3) *Simplicity* – one to two ideas in a paragraph and common wording.

Due to the nature of online environment and the 3-4 second span of consumer attention, gaining and retaining the consumer while attempting to convey a message is a challenging task. Thus the online consumer has developed a scan, skim and read process (Barr, 2010). Consequently the consumer requires shortened content that is emphasized through headlines or bold text to be able to process the text and reach the message.

Typography (fonts) is used to convey the text-based message visually and can be considered as part of the brand's voice (van Leeuwen, 2006). Similar to colors different fonts can be associated with specific meanings and reflect on the text and the copy. Typography features weight, expansion, slope, curvature, connectivity, orientation and regularity (van Leeuwen, 2006). Evidently typography can also be used to enhance prominent wording in the textual content to emphasize parts of the persuasive or enabling copy. In relation to the brand we contemplate that the balance between typography and the brands voice is problematic due to online legibility of fonts. Thus if the typography is not applicable to a brand's target group the brand will fail to target those who cannot decode the copy due to illegibility of the text.

2.4.3 Voice and tone

A brand's online voice and tone should differentiate the brand and be heard in all content: copy, images and multimedia (Barr, 2010). The voice personalizes the brand and the tone conveys the feel of the voice. To create a brand's voice and tone the brand must identify the context of brand identity, the website purpose and the audience expectations. Thus the brand needs to define the characteristics of the brand and choose 4-5 descriptors of the brand voice. Barr (2010) and Kapera (2013) describe three mechanisms how to translate the brand's voice into words: vocabulary, sentence structure and organization of the text. Further Barr (2010) advises not to use jargon and restrictiveness with wordplay as it may confuse the consumer potentially losing the message of the content. Unlike Barr, Kapera (2013) urges the use of wordplay as a creative way to gain and retain the attention of the consumer in the 3-4 second observation span.

In our opinion the use of punctuation, jargon and wordplay should not be eliminated but depend on the brands image combined with the purpose of the context. The product page with business critical content may not be able to support the use of wordplay, as it needs to clearly convey the key aspects of the product. Nevertheless if a brand has a playful brand image they may use wordplay or punctuation to color their business critical content.

As the voice personalizes the brand it creates an emotional bond with the consumer (Barr, 2010). A consistent voice throughout an e-commerce can lead to familiarity, which helps to form trust and eventually brand loyalty. The tone of the voice should be adjusted to the purpose of the specific topic whether the goal is to sell or to brand. Consequently we have selected tone and voice due to its strong connection to branding as it builds trust, differentiates and reinforces the brand image (Abel & Rahel 2014).

2.4.4 Navigating content

Navigating an e-commerce store is crucial for the consumer to reach their destination and content (Frick & Eyler-Werve 2015). We will define navigation as global, local and contextual navigation (see figure 1). Where *global navigation* is the top bar, usually consistent throughout the site and allows access to major sections of the e-commerce. The *local navigation* is usually located along the right hand side and allows users to explore parts of the page they are currently browsing. The *contextual navigation* is represented by page links to particular documents or page. It is positioned above and below the typical text and/or images of the websites body (Morville & Rosenfeld, 2006).
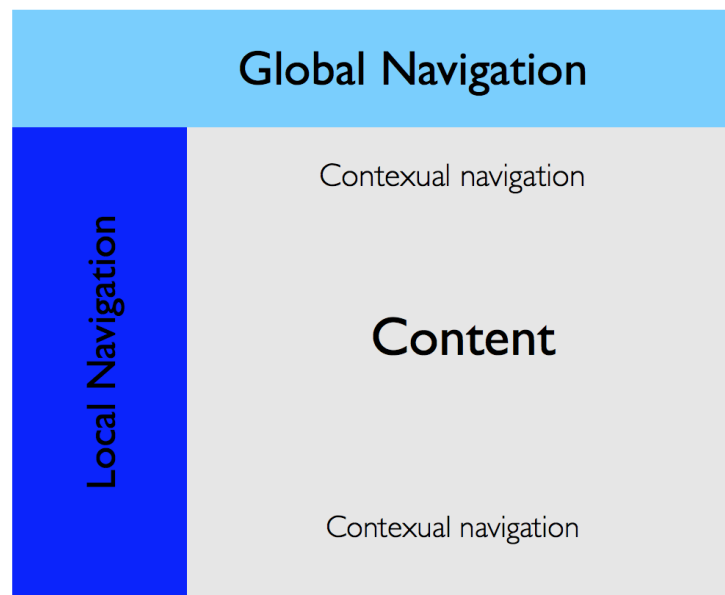

Figure 1 Types of navigation

Initially navigation online was built according to *Figure 1* thus creating a navigational affordance. The navigational affordance online can be interpreted as the consumers' expectation of how to navigate the website. Wachter-Boettcher (2012) describes the development of

platforms as challenging. We consider that altering the traditional placement of global, local and contextual navigation could affect the consumer's navigational affordance. Forcing the consumer to relearn the navigation of a website could affect the individual's capability to take in the actual message of the content. It can be seen that the expected components of navigation allow the consumers to reach the content they crave, as efficiently as possible. Above- and below-the-fold page areas add to the complexity of navigation and finding content. Thus above- the-fold is the area of the webpage that is seen without the need to scroll down the page, while below-the-fold requires the consumer to scroll down to reach its content (Beaird, 2014). Thereafter it is vital for brands to review which content to present on above- or below-the-fold in addition to showing the consumer that there is more content below-the-fold.

Rahel & Noz (2013) suggest three different types of search/action goals a consumer can display on a website or e-commerce: (1) search for information, (2) complete a transaction and (3) engage with the organization. Nevertheless if the content does not meet the consumer's expectations the experience has failed, even if the navigation supports the customer journey to the content (Frick & Eyler-Werve, 2015). Therefore inefficient content might result in some form of ROI decrease, such as loss of order, increase of bounce rate, failing to reinforce the brands values and more. Consequently we construe that content cannot act alone, as without navigation the consumer cannot reach the content they seek. Thereafter we consider it is essential to include the navigational components in relation to accessing and understanding content in our analysis.

3. Research method and data collection

In this section we will present the data collection and analysis methods used to find answers to the study's research questions. The introductory segment will address our theoretical perspective, our philosophical assumptions and our research approach. Once the reader has got an understanding of the theoretical assumptions, we will introduce our empirical data collection and analysis methods. The final part presents our method reflexivity where reflections about alternative method, ethical considerations and credibility can be found.

3.1 Theoretical perspective

Interpretivism will define the systematic view of the whole study. The choice of scientific definitions will allow the interpretation of the observed phenomena (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). This research suggests the interpretivist stance for the study of meaning creation in the context of social interaction. Further, the concept of symbolic brand will act as an interpretational lens for the study of the premium brand content strategy on e-commerce store. An e-commerce store entails several communication modes; to support our interpretation of the store content strategy we will analyze our empirical data through the semiotic inspired multi-modality method.

The philosophical assumption of the research orientation will be defined within *constructivist ontological paradigm*. E-commerce store and shopping behavior are both social constructions of modern reality and are dependent on the participant perspective. Additionally the paradigm recognizes the importance of subjective human creation of the meaning while maintaining a degree of objectivity. Since constructivist paradigm values the collaboration between the researcher and the audience and enables better understanding of participant action, the approach might be particularly suited for study of online brandings affect on content strategy (Lather, 1992; Robottom & Hart, 1993).

The study will be based on single case study method as it will allow us to explore branding and content strategy aspects while using a variety of data sources, such as interviews

and predefined number e-commerce web pages. We are defining the research as an exploratory-instrumental case study. Thus we would be able to explore connections between the presumed and real life mechanisms affecting the research questions (Yin, 2014).

The study will be based on an abductive approach, as we will fluctuate between the empirical data and the theory (Alvehus, 2013). This approach has been selected as the online nature of e-commerce and technology are endlessly changing and interacting. Therefore it is a constantly accessible and dynamic environment where the theoretical framework needs continuous alterations to be applicable online.

3.2 Single case study

A case study is an appropriate method when researchers care to investigate and construct an understanding of contemporary events in a unique situation (Merriam, 2010). Consequently the studied phenomenon is difficult to distinguish from its context (Merriam, 2010; Yin, 2014). As our study sets forth an exploratory purpose and our aim is to explore branding and content strategy elements in the dynamic nature of a e-commerce, a case study approach is possibly the most relevant method. According to Merriam (2010) one of the strengths of a case study method is its ability to deal with multiple empirical data, which is highly relevant in our situation as we use both interviews and the e-commerce pages as empirical data in our study.

Interviews are, according to Yin (2014), the most important sources of case study evidence. Merriam (2010) strengthens this argument and claims that interviews are also a solid collection method for the validity of the study results. In our case, we chose to perform a number of different interviews so that they would complement each other, thus giving the possibility of a continuous assessment and evaluation of the submitted information (Merriam, 2010). In total we have conducted six interviews with experts in various positions and areas of knowledge so that we would get the broadest understanding of the studied phenomenon.

We used a targeted selection of interviewees, due to the purpose to select the candidates that were the most relevant to the research (Bryman, 2012). This type of selection only applied for the selection of candidates but not for the study as a whole. The selected candidates consisted of two people responsible for running and maintaining ETON e-commerce store, a person from Vaimo with a good insight in the development of ETON's site and finally three experts in conversion from the company Conversionista. The interviews were conducted via Skype due to a great geographical distance between ourselves and the interviewees. Ethi-

cal considerations regarding the use of interview data were addressed through verbal consent of interview candidates, hence all data recordings were approved by the participants of the study.

We designed a unique interview guide for each of the participants, in order to address various areas of expertise and to get as much relevant information as possible from the each interview. Our interview guide consisted largely of questions Yin (2014) terms as "Level 2 questions". These types of questions are asked in accordance to the specific case study and not according to the individual interviewees. Yin (2014) recommends that you should concentrate heavily on these types of questions for the case study protocol.

We chose to do shorter case study interviews which took about 45-60 minutes each. Yin (2014) emphasizes the importance of these types of interviews, and states that the main purposes of the protocol questions is not to follow them fully, but to keep the researcher on track and to remind him of the information that needs to be collected. Therefore we chose the nature of the interviews to be well balanced between following the protocol questions, but still to let them be flexible and open-ended. The danger with doing so is that the interviews take on a more conversational manner and that this conversation can lead to a mutual and subtle influence between you and your interviewee where your perspective might unknowingly influence the interviewee responses, and the responses may unknowingly influence your line of inquiry (Yin, 2014; Merriam, 2010). We were aware of this challenge and had it in mind throughout the interviews.

As a complement for the interviews, we chose to use a multimodal analysis to analyze the editorial aspects of content strategy. We find the method relevant since it's especially suited for study of content strategy of a website or e-commerce store due to equal focus on all communication modes that comprise the core of content strategy (Kress, 2011). The e-commerce pages will be focused on studying the aspects from our own point of view; the Western sociocultural perspective.

3.3 Analysis methods

The disposition of the analysis follows two customer journeys in order to complete a purchase in ETON online store. We have therefore analyzed the homepage, the product page, the individual product page, the style guide and the checkout page. All pages except for the homepage were analyzed as a single composition. The homepage was analyzed as 6 different compositions due to its diverse branding goals and various contents. Further, we refrained from

analyzing the multimedia element on the homepage as our study purpose only includes communication modes in editorial aspects of content strategy. We also decided to exclude analysis of hero image "How to wear stripes" on above-the-fold homepage slider due to length limitation of the analysis part. Besides overall layout and composition of the third hero image is extremely similar to hero image "The Essentials" and would not add specific depth or variety to existing analysis.

According to Mangiaracina et al. (2009) a structured analysis of customer journey allows identification of the e-commerce strengths and weaknesses. We have adjusted the proposed theoretical customer journey map to ETON content strategy analysis for a more consistent approach to ETON e-commerce store.

Figure 2: The five key phases of customer journey
(Mangiaracina, Brugnoli & Perego, 2009).

Henceforth we presented the analysis of ETON store by following the suggested two customer journeys:

Customer journey number one is being mapped for a consumer who needs additional help and inspiration for matching items of the male wardrobe before he commits to a purchase. Thus, journey number one guides the reader through the contents of the whole home page and ETON style guide page. We have not include a separate analysis of individual product and checkout page since journey number two would cover all of the purchase aspects.

Customer journey number two is being mapped out for customer with a previous knowledge of ETON products and striving to purchase one of brand bestsellers, the signature ETON product - the blue shirt (A. Krupke, personal communication, April 16, 2015). For this

reason journey number two was presented as the home page, the overall products page, the individual product page and the checkout page analysis.

3.3.1 Multimodal analysis

Multimodality can be described as the theory of how people communicate and interact with one another, not merely through writing but through other modes of design literacy - font, color, etc. The choice of mode plays an essential role in how the individual will experience and create meaning within a particular setting. People alter their meaning through the selection and alignment of modes, thus the significance of the interaction between modes (Kress & Van Leuween, 1996). Lately multimodality has been reviewed in the form of modes of meaning, where images, multimedia and text are studied as a whole for the study of meaning and effect on a human perception (Kress, 2011). We have used this method to be able to bring answers to our research questions since the study of modes of meaning can provide a broader overview of online resources and allow research from different angles.

ETON's e-commerce pages will be analyzed through a multimodal analysis with specifications in color, typography and composition. The strategic communication aims to highlight certain communicative elements such as a specific color or typography to stimulate certain associations in order to create a reliable impression or emotional message (Rasmussen, 2014). What distinguishes the brand from its competitors is above all the graphic design along with the communicative elements. A multimodal analysis can help with understanding of the strategic communication and visual branding.

Color, typography and composition impact potential originates in associations with the physical world. Kress & Van Leuween (1996) argue that the multimodal analysis has its origins in semiotics, which is often referred to as the science of symbols. This type of analysis differs from traditional semiotics in some aspects, for example when it comes to characters. Multimodal analysis has expanded to cover more modes than just language. Halliday (2013) points out that the various forms of communication developed in order to fill important functions. The language fulfills three metafunctions: the ideational, interpersonal and textual. Metafunctions concern not only the features of the individual case, but in all communication. The multimodal analysis can be used to investigate how the three metafunctions seem to relate to each other in different communicative events.

The *ideational metafunction* expresses that the language represents something other than itself thus the actual value of the communication mode. The *interpersonal metafunction*

means that the language has an ability to create a relationship between people or between the brand and the customers, which for example can be a color that is perceived in the same way. The *textual metafunction* ensures that the communication is linked in an understandable way. This can in our case be seen as the systematic use of color that makes the users understand how they should navigate to proceed with the customer journey in the e-commerce store. All three metafunctions can be found in the communication modes such as color, typography and composition (Rasmussen, 2014). These communication modes can be seen as the connection between representational means and what individuals can actually do with them, therefore displaying behavioral patterns through the ways in which individuals apply modes. In our analysis, we have observed how communication modes are practiced and if and how they are incorporated into the store content strategy.

3.3.2 Content as a composition online

Historically text has been considered an independent component and the primary source for delivering information (Kress, 2011). Due to the extensive amounts of information online images have become a useful tool to quickly and effectively communicate brand message to the consumer. However it is questionable if an image can act alone to effectively convey a message. As our modal preferences for information are rooted in text an image may not be able to communicate the content message unaccompanied by means of text. Additionally images can be seen through different lenses depending on contextual, social and cultural influences (O'Connor, 2014). Consequently text becomes essential to clarify the actual purpose of the image. Similarly the text may need an image to reinforce its content. Thereafter we have considered the editorial aspects of content strategy as interdependent components in a composition, where the composition is considered as whole webpage or a part of the webpage in a form of a page scroll.

3.3.3 Coding and thematisation

To produce an overview of our empirical data collected through interviews we have applied Saldana's (2003) approach to coding. We chose to use Atlas Ti. a CASDAQ (Computer assisted qualitative analysis software) software to assist us in organizing, categorizing and sorting our empirical data from the interviews. We stress that Atlas Ti. can merely be used as a tool, it does not code itself (Saldana, 2003). Our first cycle of coding contained descriptive and structural codes while the second cycle was conducted through creating networks be-

tween the key codes. Through a thorough linking the codes our networks illustrated how the different codes were connected allowing us to conceptualize our coding, come up with key four themes of the data and understand causal links between the data. Thus Atlas Ti. acted as an extremely useful tool as it enabled us to easily create and link codes within one interview as well as to the other interviews.

Coding is prone to subjectivity as codes are based on the researcher's interpretation of the collected data. Saldana (2003) suggests that more than one person in the research party codes to produce as reliable codes. Thus our first cycles was coded individually to subsequently code and conceptualize collaboratively in the second cycle. There were several recurring subjects and connections between our three themes: branding in e-commerce, user experience/usability, content strategy and customer journey. Through the coding process we built a overview of connections and segmented usable quotes for our analysis.

3.4 Method reflexivity

3.4.1 Alternative method

A consumer perspective could have acted as an alternative method for answering the research questions of the study. Such approach would entail focus group interviews with respondents' representative of ETON's target audience. Additionally the implementation of this type of approach would lead to an understanding of ETON customer perception and interpretation of online branding communication strategies (Bryman, 2012). This method according to Bryman (2012) enables to create an understanding of why people feel the way they do. By conducting focus group interviews would help us reach a deeper understanding of the meaning behind the brand communication.

Another more common method for exploring an e-commerce would have been to perform a quantitative study by executing A/B testing by tracking and analyzing the customers eye movements to test content efficiency and functionality gaps within ETON store. However such approach would require more time and knowledge and access to relevant software, resulting in a different type of study. As our purpose is to conduct a qualitative case study based on the organizational perspective, we find that individual interviews with experts involved in the development of the e-commerce store and individual experts in e-commerce conversion optimization are highly relevant.

3.4.2 Ethical considerations

Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) emphasize the importance of continually reflecting on consent, confidentiality and the researcher's role in the quality of the study. We have had this in mind throughout our work on thesis. Each interview began with an introduction of us and the study's purpose. After we had gotten an informed consent from all of the interviewees, they were also given the opportunity to accept or decline the recording and transcription of the interview.

The participants' confidentiality has been taken into consideration, nevertheless after an agreement with the participants we have typed out their names and occupation. As the interviewees were questioned for our thesis as experts within their professional fields, there was no personal or sensitive information exposed. The information we have received in our role as researchers has been treated with caution and an awareness of the fact that the knowledge produced is subjective, something that the qualitative method has often been criticized for (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

3.4.3 Credibility

Concepts of validity and reliability are deeply rooted in the quantitative traditions. Since our study is of a qualitative nature, we have chosen to equate validity with credibility. *The internal* credibility can be seen as the designation of the degree to which the subject to be studied has actually been studied. The *external* credibility is the degree to which the study can be generalized to other subjects. Reliability on the other hand is connected to the possibility of reproducing the study (Bryman, 2012). We are aware of the difficulties concerning the reliability within qualitative research since the social contexts are in a continuous change, which makes the study impossible to reproduce in the exact same social situation. We therefore intend to reach an analytical generalization of the study applicable to similar single case studies rather than a statistical generalization (Yin, 2014).

In qualitative research, focus should lie on internal credibility, which according to Merriam (2010) can be achieved through openness and transparency throughout the whole scope of the study. We have adapted a transparent approach through being very detailed and thoughtful when developing our research questions, case study design, sampling strategy and collection and analysis of the empirical data (Russell, Gregory, Ploeg, DiCenso, & Guyatt, 2005). By bringing an understanding of how the concepts of an online brand communication

and a content strategy relate to each other within an e-commerce context, the study can be seen as a relevant contribution in social sciences.

4. Analysis

In this chapter we will combine theory and the empirical data in form of interviews and ETON e-commerce pages. To enable us to answer our research questions we will analyze the e-commerce web pages through multimodal method and the guidelines for creating and presenting online content strategy. The first research question will be answered throughout the whole analysis exploring how online brand communication forms content strategy presented through communication modes. The second question will be answered in the concluding analysis to provide an understanding of why content strategy is required to convey the desired brand message.

4.1 ETON as a symbolic brand

From the small Swedish village Gånghester, ETON shirts and apparel is now available all over the world through ETON's e-commerce store. ETON's online presence is meant to create a sense of closeness with their customers; brand wish is expressed by ETON content manager Olof Enckell:

> *It's always been a bit about "we make the best shirts" - everything we do is the best possible. And for a customer, of course it's relevant, but you cannot really get an emotional bond to the brand from that sort of tone of voice. So what we've done now is that we're trying to implement a new brand platform with a totally new tone of voice. It's more personal and more including, so we're trying to speak more directly to the customer and we really try to help them to understand our products but also to understand how to wear them. So it's about being inspirational and it's about being professional, but not being arrogant or being excluding (O. Enckell, personal communication, 21 April, 2015).*

In order to be perceived as a more personal and including ETON might need to create a more emotional bond with the consumer. People tend to base their attitude towards a brand based on the first impressions from visual symbols surrounding brand core product. Busche (2015) defines brand's visual identity as a *meaning creation gateway* and hence suggests a transformation of a regular brand into a symbolic one. Purchase and possession of various

premium brand products can assign an additional social or symbolic status to the owner of the product; therefore we suggest analyzing ETON as a symbolic brand.

Further, Busche (2015) states that typography can efficiently convey brand message. While the brand color palette is capable of activating the psychological associations that can trigger or hinder a purchase. Therefore prior to the analysis of individual ETON store pages, we will first identify and analyze ETON's use of typography and color as tools to communicate their brand message(s) in their e-commerce store, as typography and colors are present throughout the whole store and are part of an overall ETON content strategy. The need for an in-depth analysis of the data has resulted in a number of new references due to the very specific nature of ETON typographic and color palette. The additional references were unfit for the scope of general theoretical overview of content strategy due to outstanding number of detail that might confuse the reader.

4.1.1 ETON typography

Just as color and composition, the use of typography allows a creation of unique visual brand qualities (Maria, 2014). A font is singularly the most significant component in typography and is necessary for intended output and content purposes (Rasmussen, 2014). The typography strategy for ETON e-commerce store is represented by a minimalistic choice of condensed EB Garamond and Trade Gothic fonts.
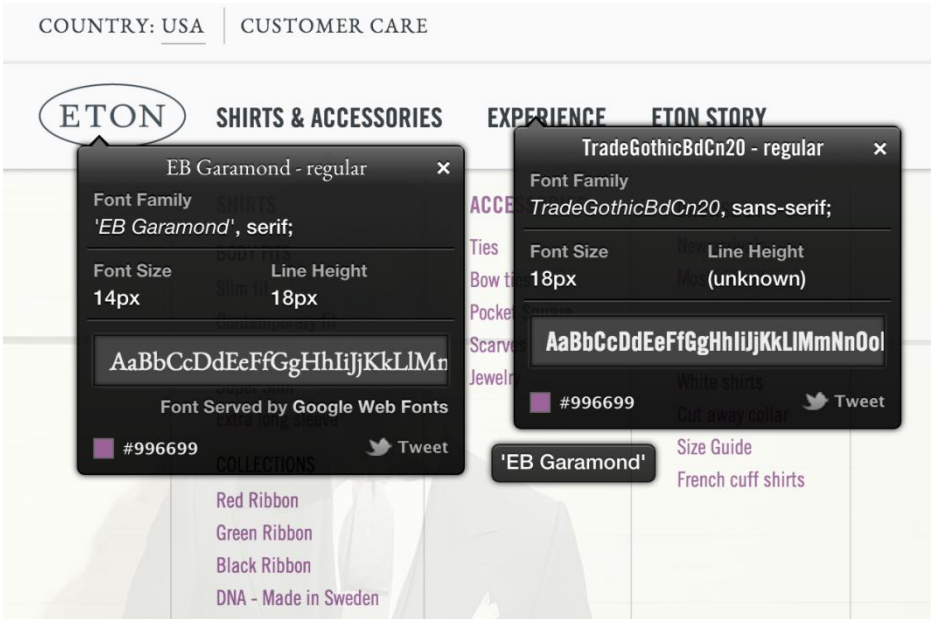
Figure 3: Fonts

Condensed Trade Gothic, as you can see in the picture, is ETON's font of choice for all call-to-action elements and the standard web design elements such as headlines, global navigation bar, footer area, and so forth. The selection of condensed trade gothic typeface conveys strength and solidness (Haley, 2012) and can be valuable in situations with limited space and a need for a good web headline font (Fonts, 2015).

EB Garamond font is used for all ETON content and is recommended as a useful choice for the purposes of content strategy. ETON's choice of font can be explained by similar text rendering on screens with multiple resolutions for desktop and mobile platforms besides the font is not problematic in terms of readability (Maria, 2014). However, the choice of font also has a historical context for a brand. The choice of font can bring forth historical connotations, thus connecting the brand to a particular time and place (Maria, 2014). EB Garamond typeface takes its origins from French Renaissance style where the original Garamond typeface was recognized for its elegance and readability (Monotype GmbH, 2015). Henceforth ETON could be striving to convey its rich historical legacy and historical references to handmade qualities of ETON's product.

For instance, repeated patterns of high EB Garamond typeface orientation in the ETON global navigation drop-down menu could be interpreted as markers of the brand status and superiority. At the same time, a combination of bold and light EB Garamond and condensed Trade Gothic fonts can be interpreted as conveying strength and a sense of "high society" elegance (Rasmussen, 2014). In relation to this argument, Caldwell (2014) states that the typography used in headlines is often dictated by the brand's story, especially if a particular font or stylistic treatment relates to the content. Consequently, we interpret the condensed form of EB Garamond font in ETON global navigation drop-down as an effort to convey narrative coherence and a sense of intimacy (Rasmussen, 2014).

A variety of typefaces can create a cacophony of mixed styles and messages. However, font size and color create a sense of distinction and unity (Maria, 2014). We observe that ETON does manage to create the desired effect for unity, narrative coherence and distinction of brand content throughout the whole store. For instance, ETON uses a minimalistic color strategy by using only lavender and black colors for differentiating parts of their content. Further, ETON's has limited their choice of fonts to two fonts only.

A classic typeface such as Garamond was invented for the purpose of uninterrupted reading on print paper, thus it is supposed to support legibility (Tselentis, 2011). However, ETON uses Garamond typeface as a primary font of choice on their e-commerce platform, according to Coale (2013) it would considerably diminish the usefulness of Garamond

as a screen font. Besides, ETON uses a consistently small sized font for the body of the content throughout the whole store. Such font treatment is a part of the brand policy for presenting textual content (T. Lindblad, personal communication, 27 April, 2015) despite the negative effect on text readability and a possible impact on content accessibility for the consumers in the older age group (Maria, 2014).

We summarize the analysis of ETON typography strategy by representing the meta-functional meaning of the fonts. The ideational function of typography for ETON store is set forth through domination of light EB Garamond typeface with high font orientation. Such typographic choice suggests associating ETON with elitist society, a sense of elegance, lightness, and high status. The interpersonal typographic function of is expressed through font choices for text copy on fashion trends imagery, ETON bestsellers and the signature products. Textual metafunction of typography is represented through unobtrusive variation in the size differences of copy and sub-copy for effective differentiation of the key brand message.

4.1.2   ETON colors

Colors can evoke emotions and affect an overall experience from the interaction with a brand product or an online resource. The choice of brand color may significantly affect the usability of an e-commerce store, thus minimizing communication efforts of the brand management team and hindering the efficient communication of the brand message (Malamed, 2009). We will start by looking at the overall functional approach to ETON's brand color palette in the context of the e-commerce store. A brand's color palette throughout an e-commerce store design should align with the general rules of usability (Beaird, 2007) and promote a positive experience (Malamed, 2015).

ETON uses an unconventional approach to the brand color strategy. The color palette of the store is minimalistic and almost invisible and while the brand color strategy consists of hues throughout the current choice of store imagery. ETON's choice of home page imagery is represented by variations of clean/muted hues (colors) of various shades of grey, blue, navy and white shades and acts as a primary store color palette.

Figure 4: Color palette 1 & 2

ETON's brand color palette hues also represent the cold color spectrum. But ETON store does exhibit a limited number of bright color spots in a form of more fashion oriented pieces of clothing under the fold of the home page.

Figure 5: Color palette 3

However the brightness of the coral, pink and electric blue colors, as you can see above, is constantly counterbalanced by blues, greys and navy colors in ETON's primary color palette. Hence, the ETON e-commerce store does follow rules or web usability in terms of an unobtrusive color palette and the absence of eye-straining colors (Malamed, 2015).

Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) also mean that a consequent use of color leads to systematic communication patterns and make brands easily recognizable. We have observed a consistent use of a single lavender color for defining functional areas of the e-commerce store, such as call-to-action buttons and black-to-lavender color changing headlines in global navigation. Such consistency in the use of color does promote customer comfort during interaction with the store (Beaird, 2007). On the other hand, Rasmussen (2014) points out that the lack of dark-to-light color contrast ratio (weak value contrast) on imagery background dramatically decreases the readability of the copy and call-to-action elements and undermines the content strategy of the store in delivering the brand message. Forthwith, we were unable to trace any systematic color communication patterns that could result in a consistent brand differentiation.

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A brand's color palette throughout the e-commerce store design should also coordinate with the overall content strategy for the target group (Malamed, 2009) and project the appropriate mood or personality (Tucker, 1987). Arthur Krupke, ETON online store manager, had commented on ETON's ambition to deliver an impression of a classic confident brand:

> *We want to be a very confident brand. So we want to tell our customers what we feel but then we also know that we have a client base that is very classical, it is businessmen (A. Krupke, personal communication, 16 April, 2015).*

Krupke's statement aligns with our findings in our analysis of ETON's color strategy, revealing that ETON uses a strategic array of classic male clothing colors. A number of cool greys, blues, navys and white clothing colors imply that ETON is quite careful in company's color choices and strives to represent a stylish and sophisticated brand (Tungate, 2012). Strength, maturity, classicism and intelligence (Rasmussen, 2014; Tucker, 1987) are representations of ETON dominating color palette and add to the image of a timeless premium brand.

However, a careful choice of the brand colors cannot guarantee a positive response from the target group or impact a brand image. According to Stone, Adams & Morioka (2008) in-depth analysis of the target group's demographic and psychographic qualities is the key to creating a brand color palette that will resonate with the consumers. For instance, older people tend to have a set of preferred colors that might associate strong and nostalgic emotions (Tungate, 2012). ETON constantly studies and tests reactions of customers interacting with their e-commerce store (A. Krupke, personal communication, April 16, 2015). In case with ETON, we observe a dominating role of classic male clothing colors, such as shades of blue, white, navy and grey in company's color product palette (Tungate, 2012). The metaphorical meaning of such clean and cold color spectrum palette represents traditional values, confidence, and traditions. (Tucker, 1987) Frequent use of darker accents of chocolate brown colors and charcoal greys in ETON's color palette represent maturity and depth (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Thus ETON's color palette functions as part of the brand content strategy for conveying traditions, maturity and confidence as the key brand values for the older target group.

However, ETON strives to offer premium quality products (A. Krupke, personal communication, April 16, 2015) to a wider audience. The analysis of color strategy on ETON's e-commerce store has revealed systematic targeting of a younger consumer group. Products in various shades of pink, lilac and coral complement an array of classic male cloth-

ing colors and address young people with contemporary tastes in male fashion (Tungate, 2012). In relation to this Stone, Adams & Morioka, (2008) suggest that symbolic meanings of pink and coral colors can be defined as symbols of energy, passion and optimism. ETON's decision to showcase and thus include bright, traditionally feminine colors into the store color palette can be explained by the relative meanings of the colors. According to Stone, Adams & Morioka (2008) color interpretations are affected by the age, gender, personal experiences, mood, tradition, history and ethnic identity. Age is a particularly important factor for color interpretation practices; thus ETON's younger audience would not be affronted by the unconventionally bright hues and a modern approach to the less traditional male colors.

Consequently, we interpret ETON's overall approach to the color palette choices as a balanced color content strategy solution for meeting the expectations of a premium brand target group, such as male audience from early twenties until late sixties. We believe that ETON manages to project business mood and personality of a classic brand through a consistent use of classic male sartorial colors such as greys, blues and navy colors in the dominant color palette of the brand (Malamed, 2015) but still manages to maintain a side of a contemporary fashion brand with a taste for bright colors (Tungate, 2012).

A color is much more than a visual phenomenon, it has emotional and cultural dimensions that can enhance or diminish communication efforts of a brand (Stone, Adams & Morioka, 2008). We will pay additional attention to the social and cultural connotations of color while interpreting the effects of ETON's color palette on store visitors. Each color has a set of symbolic meanings conveying information (Rasmussen, 2014). We will start by analyzing separate ETON brand colors as signifiers of brand ideas, symbolic meaning and associations "coded" by the brand for an implicit brand message through deft use of colors. ETON's predominant brand colors can be defined as blue, white, light lavender, navy, and grey. The symbolic meaning of blue color depicts thoughtfulness, dependability, and honesty (Tucker, 1987). White color is defined by a sense of lightness purity, perfection, and simplicity. Lavender color represents sophistication, inspiration, luxury and elegance. Navy color stands for intelligence and strength. Grey color suggests balance, security, reliability, classicism, maturity, and intelligence (Stone, Adams & Morioka, 2008).

A majority of neutral colors in ETON's store palette, such as greys and whites convey additional overall feeling of elegance and style (Malamed, 2015). All of the dominant colors in ETON's color palette are culturally appropriate as the brand color strategy is focused on an international store and adopted to a Western culture approach. However Asian and Indian versions of ETON stores will need thorough consideration of color choices since some colors

have an opposite meaning in eastern cultures. For instance, Indian culture regards white color as a sign of sorrow and grief (Holtzschue, 2011). Marketing studies in branding and brand communication define color palette as a tool for evoking response, creating the mood, symbolizing an idea or expressing a particular emotion. The color palette can thereafter be regarded as a strategic weapon of an organization; it signals ideas and builds relationships with stakeholders and customers (Rasmussen, 2014). We suggest an overall analysis of ETON's color strategy through the interpretation of color metafunctions.

The ideational function of ETON's primary classic color palette signals maturity and traditional values, while the secondary brighter color palette illustrates energy and positive attitude (Rasmussen, 2014). This observation can be referred to Kress & van Leuween's (1996) thoughts on how color intensity and value can affect the meaning and tone of the communicative message. The color palette of the ETON store represents a mix of darker, intense classic male colors with the frequent splashes of bright, energetic and contemporary colors. The interpersonal metafunction of the ETON's color palette can therefore be defined as an effort to represent a timeless and classic brand with a taste for contemporary fashion trends. The interpersonal metafunction of the ETON's color palette can further be defined by presenting ETON as a brand that can connect with its customers by being a premium quality brand fit for all age categories and all social occasions (Rasmussen, 2014; Tungate, 2012). The textual metafunction of the store's color palette suggests customer attention on the products, elimination of visual clutter and maintenance of a light and elegant store design.

Henceforth we have observed that the current choices of ETON's imagery and photography form the color content strategy of the brand. Such approach allows full control over the overall brand color palette to content strategy manager. This observation can be proved by an example of seasonal change of ETON photography and imagery on the home page. Such changes would lead to a change of brand color palette, as color strategy of ETON store interface elements is minimalistic and barely visible. Therefore, overall mood and tone of the store is planned and executed through the imagery instead of a strict brand color palette style guide. Thereupon we believe that ETON's brand communication strategy is effectively conveyed through the communication mode of color and represents a smart approach to color content strategy.

4.2 Mapping out the customer journey

Smart, engaging and unique content can hardly benefit a brand if the overall user experience from the e-commerce interaction ends up with a confused customer looking for a way around the store (Chaffey, 2009). However satisfying and positive customer experience demands deep insight into the customer needs and a construction of the customer journey with a high-quality content to lead the consumers towards the goal, such as getting to know more about the brand or purchasing a product (Norton & Pine, 2013).

Torbjörn Lindblad, Vaimo customer service and support specialist during the development of ETON's e-commerce store (personal communication, 27 April, 2015) elaborates on the role of content strategy and high-quality content for ETON customer journey:

> *It's super important! Because the sets the entire tone for your online store. If you have someone who is really good at writing content, helping the customer through the journey, I mean that's priceless. Because most of the customers come in a bit random. And then coming in with good content, being able to read, but also matching that in a way to be able to show off their products. So you go into a really inspirational and good written content page but then you're stuck there. You can't move forward. (T. Lindblad, personal communication, 27 April, 2015).*

This quotation tells us that ETON has customers with different needs and expectations. Due to this fact, we have chosen to analyze two different customer journeys that will be presented in the following segment of the thesis.

4.3 Paving a road for the explorers

Customer journey one has been mapped out for the explorers of ETON. This customer is has not made a decision on what product to purchase and requires an inspiration to complete the purchase. We suggest that customer journeys one and two will start on the homepage and continue up until a crossroad where customer one will take an inspirational tour before following the journey of customer two who will go directly to the product page. Customer journey one will follow the homepage down to the bottom of the homepage. ETON's home page content structure will be analyzed by scrolling down the homepage   hence following the customers' journey from the top to the bottom of the page. We will analyze the homepage scrolls as different compositions through the use of multimodal method and the overall guidelines of content strategy in the context of branding.

4.3.1 "Face of the brand" - ETON Home page

Beaird, (2014) points that a homepage is often called the face of an organization since it creates the first impression from the performance and relevant content of the whole store, lays ground for the customer trust and promotes customer interaction with the brand. The homepage also represents the beginning of the customer journey and can be a successful start of a failure for the customer experience. Torbjörn Lindblad, Key Account Manager at Vaimo (personal communication, 27 April, 2015), points out the importance of branding through inspiration in an attempt to make the customers interested in brand offer.

> *Start page was really important for ETON. To be able to make sure that you came into the site in a very easy way and being able to find what you're looking for. You can still kind of see their feeling when you go online, in fact you don't see products that you do on most pages, you see inspiration instead (T. Lindblad, personal communication, 27 April, 2015).*

Thereafter homepage design defines the effectiveness of the brand communication. Henceforth, brand homepage layout, usability, navigation and content strategy can ruin brand perspectives for the effective online differentiation or instantly engage and retain returning and potential customers (Beaird, 2014).

ETON's store navigation is represented by a clean and minimalistic global navigation bar with the strong focus on ETON's key content. The global navigation bar is designed according to a *"sticky"* principle and follows the consumer throughout the whole customer journey and content interaction until the bottom of the pages for all store locations. ETON's tactics go in line with Rahel & Noz (2013) statement that user orientation through navigating a store is a crucial part of an effective content strategy.

ETON has structured its crucial store content into the three key store content categories *"shirts & accessories", "experience"* and *"ETON story"*. A cursor hover over the ETON logo or any of the global navigation bar categories results in the product category menu dropdown. Product categories are grouped into two main subcategories with black and lavender interchanging colors for a better visual hierarchy. Content consumption is further promoted by products being grouped by the most popular browsing choices and possible quick find suggestions. All category headers are clickable and well defined. ETON *"experience"* global navigation section uses a different navigation design approach. Image thumbnails, explicit category copy and sub-copy act as an early preview of the store sections and reduce chances of customer navigation errors.

Thus, the store navigation system allows a continuous customer orientation and facilitates the browsing of the content throughout the customer journey. Henceforth, ETON's approach to logic structure of the brand content and store navigation is based on the principles of an intuitive user orientation and constructs a crucial part for an effective e-commerce content strategy (Rahel & Noz, 2013; Beaird, 2014; Hernández, Jiménez & Martín, 2009).
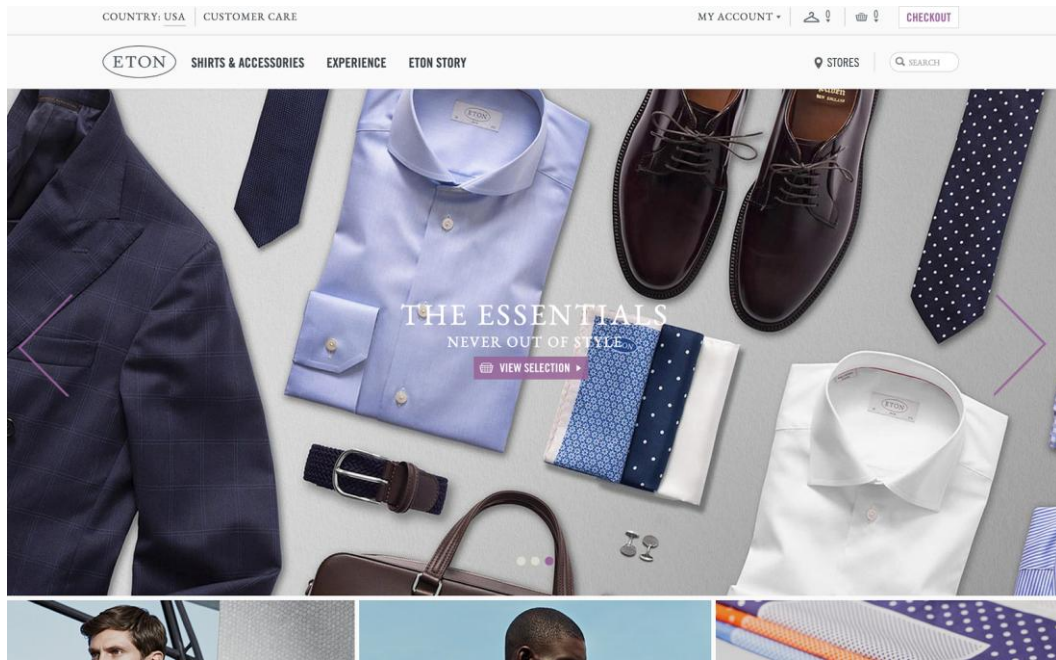
4.3.2 The Essentials

Figure 6: The Essentials

"The Essentials" –"never out of style" hero image is the most versatile ETON home page composition and has been deemed one of the central themes for branding goals of ETON above-the-fold store area. ETON had to face the strategic decision behind key hero image choices since homepage slider currently allows showing only 3 images. The dilemma whether above-the-fold area should focus on the branding goals or product value proposition is still an open question for the marketing department of the brand. For instance Olof Enckell, content manager at ETON explained that ETON does balance between the brand sales goals and branding efforts of the marketing department:

> *It's also a big debate between the marketing team from ETON and our e-commerce team, because the marketing department they want to show more branding images and more storytelling (O. Enckell, personal communication, 21 April, 2015).*

Henceforth we observe that ETON's "The Essentials" composition provides an unobtrusive but smart product value proposition (UVP) that can be defined as *"ETON is the embodiment of style and we have mapped it out for customers who strive for elegance and timeless sartorial looks"* We suggest that the idea behind the "THE ESSENTIALS" hero image slider can be interpreted as ETON's goal for targeting a broad array of customers and offering a choice of bestselling brand products in a form of a non-conventional layout. ETON's signature blue and white shirts and handmade accessories are presented as the key fashion items through a symbolic representation of a modern businessman wardrobe. A modern approach to showcasing brand bestsellers is executed through the product lay-down layout. The image utilizes a textured light grey background and a slightly inverted image orientation for the increased image information value (Rasmussen, 2014) and focus on the brand products. The slightly angled product lay-down composition conveys an additional sense of space thus rendering the image in a more alive and contemporary style (Beaird, 2014).

ETON's bestselling products are placed in the center of an image and are symmetrically counterbalanced with the complementary items on the margins of the composition. Hence, the layout draws attention to the brand products without being too obvious or too artificial. ETON's blue and white signature shirts and silk accessories are presented as the most salient image elements (Rasmussen, 2014; Beaird, 2014). Such product lay down composition creates an explicit visual hierarchy and represents a clean and modern color contrast for easier customer attention. On the other hand the representation of ETON's bestsellers can be described as a rough modular grid of intersecting horizontal and vertical lines. Such technique breaks up the space into the individual modules of meaning and serves as a representation of small units of ETON's bestseller products in a consistent style (Malamed, 2015). The overall symmetry of the hero image layout can be interpreted as ETON's effort in recreating a symbolic sense of solidity and stability. A vivid representation of high-quality male wardrobe items can further be interpreted as symbols of wealth, status and markers of higher social class (Rosenbaum-Elliot, Percy & Pervan, 2011).

According to Malamed (2015) a lack of obvious framing lines in an image creates a feeling of openness and accessibility. We believe that the invisible framing choice of ETON's bestsellers image can even be interpreted as a strategic brand effort to bind above- and below-the -fold content and present it as a continuous home page composition. ETON chooses to retain a certain amount of white space around imagery throughout the store. Such approach to activation of the white space impact is widely used in premium stores e-

commerce designs due to the effect of sophistication, elegance and effective communication of fashion meaning (Malamed, 2015).

The image copy "THE ESSENTIALS" and sub copy "NEVER OUT OF STYLE" follows affirmative and often engaging voice and tone of the store's content strategy. The language choice is consistently expressive without being overpowering or mechanical. The lavender colored call-to-action button is in line with the consistent brand user experience strategy and the brand color palette as described previously in the ETON colors section of the analysis. However, the readability of copy and sub-copy brand messages is quite inferior due to the low contrast between image background color and white color of the text. Thus, the brand message would most likely be missed or unread subsequently undermining content strategy efforts in ETON's brand communication.

The ideational metafunction of the composition can be interpreted as ETON's effort to promote a high status, investment worthy products that are universally accessible. The interpersonal metafunction of the composition can be expressed by a sense of dynamic lifestyle and closeness to a higher-status male wardrobe. The brand message is conveyed through a composition of neatly folded brand bestsellers that are almost *"caught in the movement"* and call for an interaction with the customer.

The textual metafunction of the composition can be described as a gender-related message of timeless male clothing style and status. The absence of a fashion model creates a feeling of the product accessibility and relevance to ETON's brand message. On the other hand, pure focus on the ETON's bestseller products draws attention from ETON's efforts to communicate with the target audience through the role or fashion models and brings the whole customer experience down to pure B2C conversion-to-transaction model. We also observe that systematic use of blue, white and brown colors defines business customer orientation and premium product category without additional brand copy.

We believe that ETON's content strategy choices for the above-the-fold area are divided between reinforcing the brand heritage and a referral to an older consumer group through a form of storytelling and an example of vivid display of the brand's bestsellers for prompt conversion-transaction B2C model.

4.3.3 The Human Touch

Due to the nature of the second hero image explained in the section below it is analyzed separately from hero image 1.
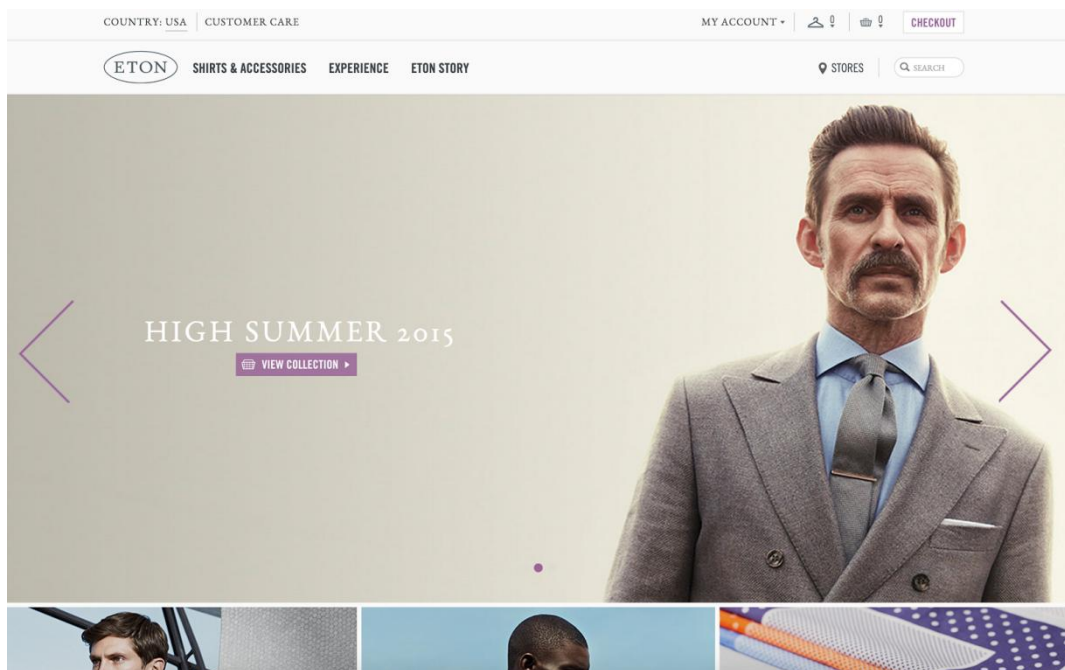
Figure 7: Human Touch

An older male model dominates the second hero image in the slider in the above-the-fold area of ETON's homepage. The simplicity, right hand placement of the model, digital filter and the model's eye contact beyond the consumer eye line drives the focus to the product (the light blue shirt) and ETON as a brand. ETON's desire to remove the previously excluding and conservative brand label (O. Enckell, personal communication, 21 April, 2015) is clearly illustrated in the *ideational* metafunction of the image. The metafunction portrays the depth of the brand message through the use of a digital filter modifying the overall composition colors, brightness of the light and the composition lines, creating a vintage-like-feel. The vintage feel, which is communicated through the digital filter, can be interpreted as a form of abstraction of the image (O'Connor, 2006). Abstraction allows moving away from conservative to a more open approach to the brand message, yet maintains ETON as a reliable and traditional brand by associating vintage with heritage. Additionally the choice of the yellow/beige tones creates a warm and including atmosphere with a sun-like effect (Rasmussen, 2014) and provides a more human touch to the overall ETON image content strategy. The use of yellow/beige tones contradicts ETON's classical color palette described earlier. Hence toning down the product oriented color palette can be regarded as a distinct effort of strategically communicating ETON's brand image towards a more including and warm one.

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The *interpersonal* metafunction of the composition engages the consumer with the product and the brand through direction of model's movement. The movement direction flows from the left to the right, naturally transferring the message and context of HIGH SUMMER 2015 to the actual product on the image (Kress & van Leuween, 2006). The lighting and the text on the right project a movement of the model, hence the model is moving toward summer 2015 with the consumer. However the text and the image are dependent on each other as neither of them can convey the message of HIGH SUMMER 2015 separately. The image-copy dependency can be interpreted as a strategy to create an interdependent relationship between all content in the composition to communicate both the call-to-action (selling) and the brand message (branding).

The *textual* metafunction of the composition is depicted by the digital filter and image luminosity to direct the customer focus on the model. Subsequently the contrast between the light blue shirt and the beige tones of the suit sharpens the attention to the light blue shirt. Clearly the metafunctions of the composition illustrate a struggle between branding and selling in ETON's e-commerce store. ETON's e-commerce manager Arthur Krupke describes the struggle as-the most challenging issue in terms of balancing ETON's online branding goals:

> *I'm trying to make it as easy as possible for the customers to*
> *make a purchase but still being loyal to the brand, have a*
> *feeling on the website that doesn't breathe just sale, but it*
> *breathes something else. So I think that is our most challenging*
> *aspect, as of today at least*
> *(A. Krupke, personal communication, 16 April, 2015).*

We can interpret the following three themes in Arthur's statement: the navigation/placement of content, brand trust and the relationship with the consumer. This brand-building slide has been placed between two slides aimed at direct sales of ETON's products. We interpret it as a strategic way to place the brand between two direct sells to generate a brand-consumer relationship. Thereafter we interpret that the effectiveness of the content strategy of the image composition for portraying ETON's brand message is a successful attempt. The image composition is successful as ETON creates a subtle focus on both the brand and on one of their two key products: the light blue shirt.

4.3.4 There's more to it on our page

This part of the analysis will present below-the-fold homepage content of the ETON store. The content will be divided into five visual content zones and is accessible through five vertical scroll-downs. The content scroll zones are dedicated to promoting product collections, latest fashion trends, store finder, signature brand product and the store footer area.
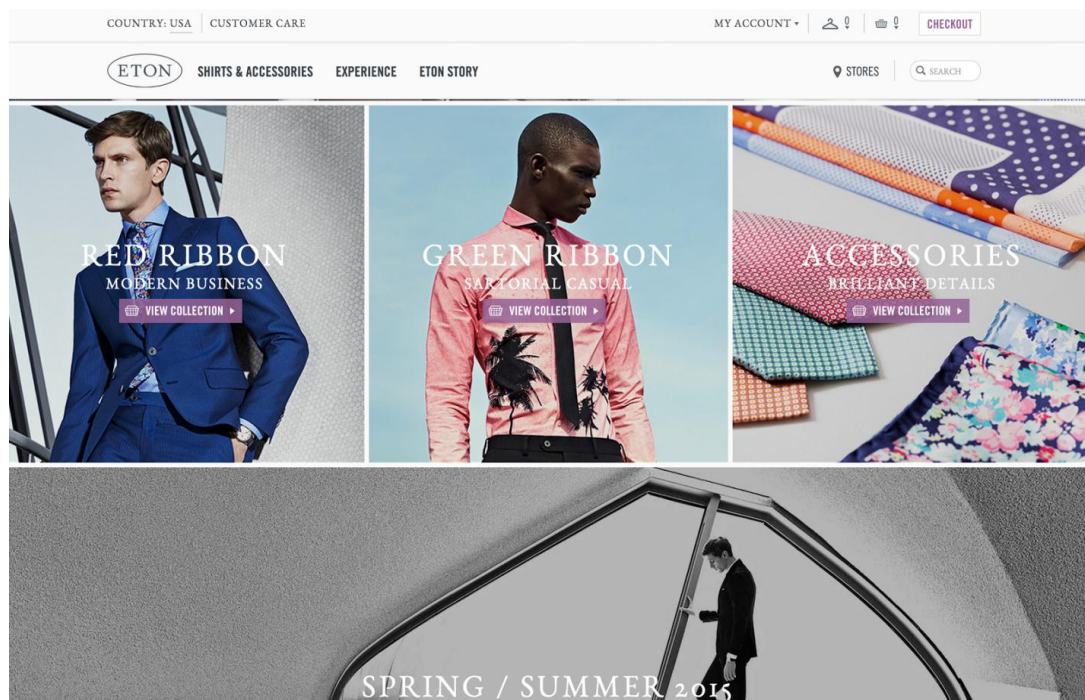
Figure 8: There is more to it

We chose to call this image composition after a particularly interesting quote of ETON e-commerce store manager. *"There is more to it on our page"* represents the first scroll under ETON's strategic above-the–fold area. The composition represents a strategic triptych with a polarized layout (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). The white male model on the left is wearing the classic ETON blue and navy colors. According to Kress & Van Leeuwen, (1996) left positioning of white male model can be interpreted as a "Given" brand reality suggesting a higher social class positioning and a certain society status (Rosenbaum-Elliot, Percy & Pervan, 2011).

The center image of the triptych depicts an Afro-American model wearing bold and contemporary male sartorial colors. According to Kress & Van Leeuwen, (1996) central positioning of the Afro-American model can be explained by the model's role as the brand's "Mediator". Therefore the black male model could represent a transition between the classic ETON style and brand desire to include the younger audience and a modern approach to

ETON's brand message. The image to the right depicts an array of ETON's handmade male accessories and can be explained as a "New" aspect to ETON brand message (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). We believe that the position of the right triptych image could be pointing at ETON versatility and attention to detail even for the less expensive brand products. Hence the concept of exclusivity and premium priced products could be downplayed in the favor of opening up the prospect of owning symbolic brand items to a wide array of social groups (Rosenbaum-Elliot, Percy & Pervan, 2011).

Both the left and the right triptych images of ETON models are symmetrically positioned in the center of the composition and represent a similarly close photographic angle. Subsequently, informational value of the triptych strives for a coherent representation of ETON's examples of style and fashion with the unobtrusive support of background environmental elements of nature and urban life (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). The models' gazes are averted from the viewer, thus attracting all customer attention to the ETON clothing to further push for sales. The most salient aspects of the triptych can be defined as sharp differences in color contrast and sense of diagonal movement of the models. The similar size and proximity of left and center triptych elements create a clear sense of unity and clear visual hierarchy (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). In line with this argument, Malamed (2015) sees that the absence of visible composition framing creates a sense of symmetry and flow without breaking below-the-fold space into parts of scrollable content.

> *For us it was difficult to use the website, or at least we noticed when we looked at statistics that customers tended to leave the pictures that was behind the first one unseen so they didn't scroll on our start page. So that was the reason we re-did the whole design. We wanted to show our customer that there's more to it on our page and not just one picture. The basic thought was to get our customers to use our website a bit more to see that there's more than just one picture on the start page (A. Krupke, personal communication, 16 April, 2015).*

Once again, the struggle of finding the balance between branding and selling makes itself visible. Patterns of copy, sub-copy and call-to-action buttons on all triptych elements represent an overall approach to the content strategy of the composition. We think that ETON is following the overall recommendations on explicit brand-consumer message, such as short copy and bold front-loaded content. However, ETON chooses to use less known names of its clothing collections instead of clear definitions of the main copy, consequently risking confusing new coming visitors with inefficient content description (Barr, 2010).

We define the ideational metafunction of the whole composition as ETON's intention to combine classic and contemporary brand positioning and minimize possible ethnicity and race prejudice towards ETON brand representatives and target audience (Rosenbaum-Elliot, Percy & Pervan, 2011). We also believe that ETON fails to deliver the intended interpersonal metafunction of social interaction. For instance, the overall brand message of coherence and persuasiveness could be improved with the unified direction of the movement for both models (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). ETON could also drastically improve contact/interaction between the brand message and viewer perception if the models gazed at the viewer instead of detached off-screen gaze towards different directions.

4.3.5 How to wear and where to buy
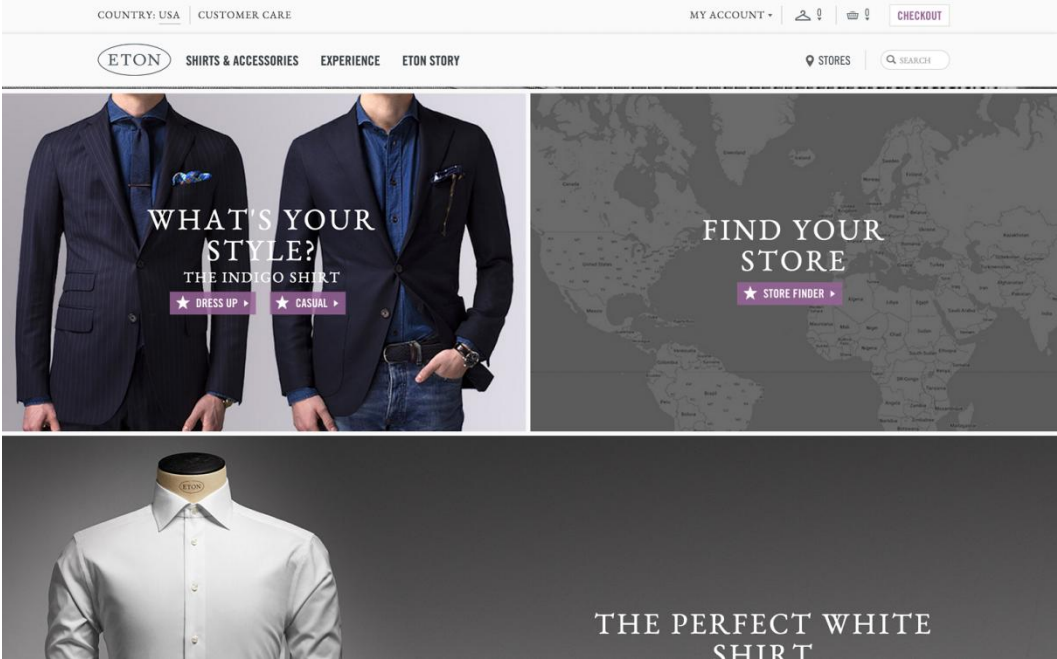
Figure 9: How to wear and where to buy

The composition of *Figure 9* consists of two images with copy and call-to-action buttons that overlay the images. There is an evident use of the generic ETON color palette in both images. The color palette and evenly distributed space indicates equally significant information value (Rasmussen, 2014) as well as coherence and sense of unity (Malamed, 2015). Further, the left section of the image depicts a *"how to wear"* guidelines for ETON clothing whilst the right image displays directions on where to buy ETON products. Olof Enckell, ETON content

manager develops their ambition to break away from a purely classical brand message that is limited to a dress-shirt:

> *We try to really talk to our customer and be a bit more guiding in how to wear our clothes. We intend to say how to wear this kind of shirt instead of just putting a picture of it and saying what it is. We're still very rooted in our classic business shirts so we really need to learn how to communicate and how to show our customer to buy the entire look from us.*
> *(O. Enckell, personal communication, 21 April, 2015).*

In accordance to Olof's statement we suggest that ETON attempts to use the ideational metafunction of the image to strategically communicate added value through casual expression of the products and complete looks. ETON achieves its goal by using the same shirt in two different styles showing a more versatile brand message and therefore potentially expanding ETON's target group. ETON uses the same color palette on both models to overcome the challenges of keeping the attention of the current target group and to simultaneously maintain the classical brand message. However ETON distinctly separates business from casual through socio-cultural aspects of the image such as unbuttoning and the placement of hands in the latter look.

The left dress-up image focuses on the background, while the right image focuses on the text in the foreground due to the larger color contrast of the image. We interpret this as an interpersonal metafunction as it indirectly forces the consumer to refocus between the two sections. Hence ETON is engaging the consumer further into the composition during the move between the two sections. Further the consistent textual use of a personal pronoun *"your"* creates a more informal voice and consumer closeness to the composition and therefore to the brand (Rasmussen 2014). This observation allows us to conclude that ETON is reinforcing brand ambition to create a more personal relationship. The framing technique and the contrast of lines between the two sections generate a clear and organizational environment (Kress et.al, 2006). Hence the framing technique and the line contrast act as a textual metafunction to easier transfer between the two distinctive content messages of the composition. Thereafter the communication modes in form of image and text reflect the strong symbolic branding message through social differentiation.

4.3.6 Signature by ETON
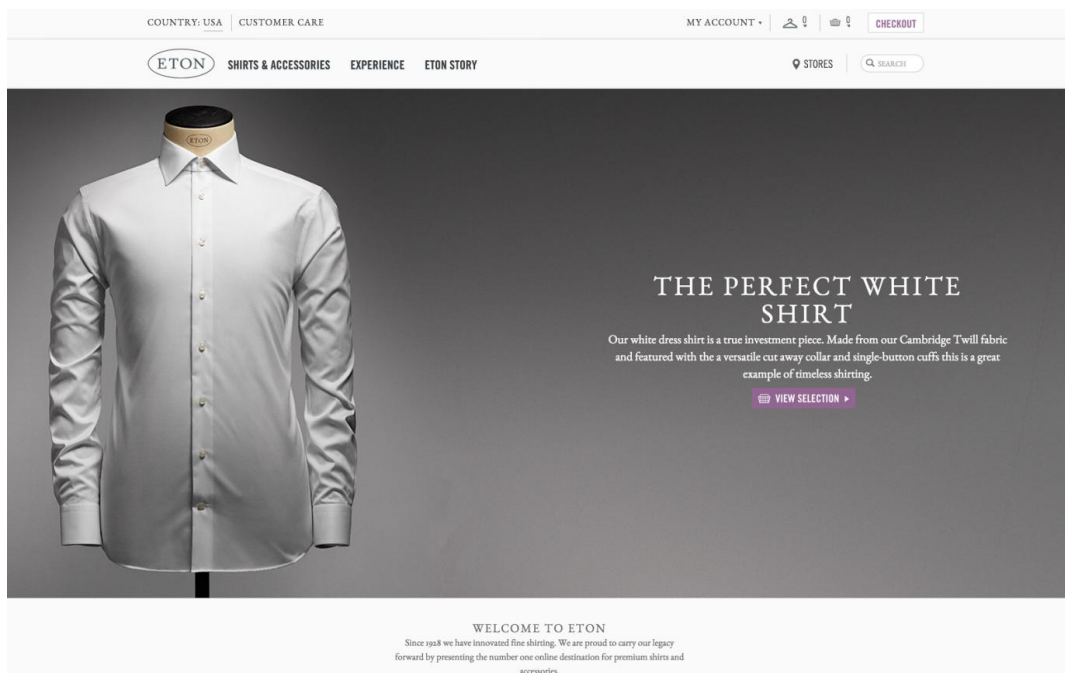
Figure 10: The perfect white shirt

The composition of *Figure 10* consists of a gradient grey background with a brightly lit white shirt on an ETON mannequin on the left and the copy and call-to-action on the right. Unlike the previous composition of *Figure 9* there is no whitespace activation technique. The dark grey and the white color contrast adds to the visual interest and therefore attracts the consumer's attention (O'Connor, 2014). The contrast between the hues can be defined as the interpersonal metafunction of the image. Meanwhile the textual metafunction of a gradient background and similar color contrasts (white on grey) direct a symmetrical focus on both sides of the composition. Thus, ETON's content strategy strives to generate a balance in the composition to not favor any content and points at an interdependent relationship between the image and the copy.

ETON chooses to bring attention to the white shirt by putting it into the spotlight and making it the center of the composition, thus eliminating the outside friction of the content message. Additionally the mannequin is branded with the ETON logotype on the neckline. We interpret this as a way for ETON to differentiate the white shirt from any other white shirt online. The bright spotlights on a crisp white shirt generate a socio-cultural association of love, goodness and luck (Rasmussen, 2014). These types of associations can be considered warm and including which also supports ETON's ambition to avoid being perceived as a conservative and excluding brand (A. Krupke, personal communication, April 16,

2015). Furthermore, such type of light can be interpreted as a spotlight similar to a theatre, hence highlighting the importance and star-like quality of the mannequin in focus. The brightness of the lighting can be linked to the consumers desire to display our social status in the socio-cultural context. In accordance to Rosenbaum-Elliot et al. (2011) historically individuals have a need to display their social statuses. One of the tactics to visually express an individual's social status was through fashion. For instance, naturally excelling up the social ladder was and is done through the consumption of status or symbolic goods. Thus, ETON's use of the spotlight can cause the consumer to associate the shirt with the feeling importance and prosperity. Hence ETON is communicating an actual desire for their product to enhance the consumer's social status.

In the supporting copy we can interpret an embellishing tone of voice in the context of the white shirt, through words such as *perfect, true investment, great* and *timeless*. Ultimately the combination of the brightly lit mannequin and the meaning of the copy reinforce each other to push the communication touch point of ETON's signature product. Thereafter the ideational metafunctions of the image can be seen as perceived product quality and social status. For a consumer, quality can act as a triggering point for the added value and loyalty of the brand (Keller 2013). Meanwhile the socio-cultural aspects assist ETON in distinguishing their ambition to be perceived as a premium brand. Thus, ETON uses content strategy to convey their intrinsic (quality) and extrinsic attributes (social status) to differentiate and reinforce their brand promise through a quality dress shirt.

4.3.7 Homepage content tactics

The content strategy of ETON's above-the-fold homepage space is represented by a slider containing three hero images, serving specific brand communication goals. The hero image slider delivers instant content propositions to the potential and the existing brand customers. Two of the hero images, The Essentials and Human Touch represent ETON's style-inspired and bestselling *product value propositions* (PVP) and are aimed at existing brand customers. The content strategy goals of the two PVP for ETON's hero images represent a less engaging content approach and are aimed at providing a fast-track journey to brand content. Conversion specialist P. Matell (personal communication, 20 April, 2015) from Conversionista, means that the above-the-fold homepage area is the most valuable property of an e-commerce store since it supports consumer motivation, communicates relevance and product value.

A web page is a piece of real estate with different values. Above-the-fold of the landing page is your most valuable property and if you spend all of that on just a hero image then you're placing all your bets in one place not giving them that many ways out. That image backed up with value propositions and proper call to action and other things that make it relevant can work for sure (P. Matell, personal communication, 20 April, 2015).

Lavender colored call-to-action button with explicit copy suggests prompt conversion goals but would yield a lower response rate due to the low readability of the call-to-action element on the multicolored background of the image. We chose to direct attention to ETON's second hero image due to the company's strategic effort in putting forth brand heritage and symbolic values through storytelling technique. The strategy behind the "Human Touch" composition was clearly aimed at an older ETON target group; the content strategy goal can be defined as an effort to engage a potential brand customer. The same neutral colored call-to-action button might lead to higher chances of conversion due to a better copy readability on a unified image background.

Henceforth, the overall ETON above-the-fold content strategy approach represents a stronger sales to branding ratio and favors product content above branding content and marketing goals. Beaird (2014) suggests that the above-the-fold store area should answer the most important visitor questions about the brand and contain the vital brand value propositions. We believe that ETON does provide critical information about the brand; however it is mostly done through the minimalistic global navigation bar with little use of above-the-fold slider. At the same time the above-the-fold area with the current slider solution represents a doubtful balance between the branding and sales goals. We observe that the lack of brand-specific content on the hero images results in a less explicit brand message. Subsequently the uneven background of the hero images affects the readability of copy and hinders customer engagement. Thereafter the above-the-fold content strategy does not fulfill customers' needs for a persuasive and engaging copy. Additionally, we observe a number of drawbacks of the editorial aspects of ETON home page content strategy. The above-the-fold page area offers copy as a clear task path, thus fulfilling the customer journey goal in theory, but it does not deliver the brand message content to support the hero image visuals. Conversion path links from call-to-action elements are broken and lead to error page 404, thus drastically increasing store bounce rate and cancelling content strategy efforts.

ETON uses high-resolution imagery with dedicated call-to-action buttons as entrances to various content zones. An interactive fashion movie continues the previous visual storytelling strategy, presenting ETON as a symbolic fashion brand. Hence, ETON's content strategy

on their homepage strives to map out high-value brand content for visitors following explorative customer journey throughout the home page.

The homepage content zones lack visible borders and are divided by margins and symmetrically balanced. The minimal amount of white space between the content zones helps to avoid a sense of information overload and convey an impression of lightness, openness, and narrative coherence. Such an approach to the homepage layout allows placing visual weight on the most salient content elements and creates a visual hierarchy of the content. We suggest that such approach to the structure of the homepage layout provides a possible solution for balancing the brand building content for the optimal customer engagement.

The overall amount of below-the-fold content serves the key content strategy goals, such as providing an early-on brand product information and engaging the customer for desired shopping behavioral change and consequent conversion. The last scroll of homepage follows general levels of customer affordance and introduces visitors to ETON's footer area. Lynch and Horton (2009) suggest that a well-designed footer should offer links to the business critical content, such as links to the products, legal and purchase information along with the detailed brand contact information. We suggest that ETON does succeed in providing very detailed brand content through separate clustering of the critical product and brand information. The structure of the footer follows the outlined typographic and color choices of the whole e-commerce store, hence adding to the overall sense of coherence.

The overall length of the ETON's homepage can be explained by the brand desire to provide a maximum amount of the brand building content for helping the customers make a more informed purchase decision. The absence of the small homepage elements allows quick scanning of content and increases page usability. We also think that ETON is unsure about their customers' motivations for scrolling down the homepage. Henceforth ETON provides a mix of content for creating product awareness, specific brand awareness and ETON style awareness. Finally, we suggest that ETON sacrifices its brand message for the sake of fitting every possible type of the brand content throughout the homepage. Hence, ETON's homepage content consumption possibilities are diminished to a list of engaging imagery with an occasional hard to read short call-to-action copy.

4.3.8 Living ETON - The Style guide
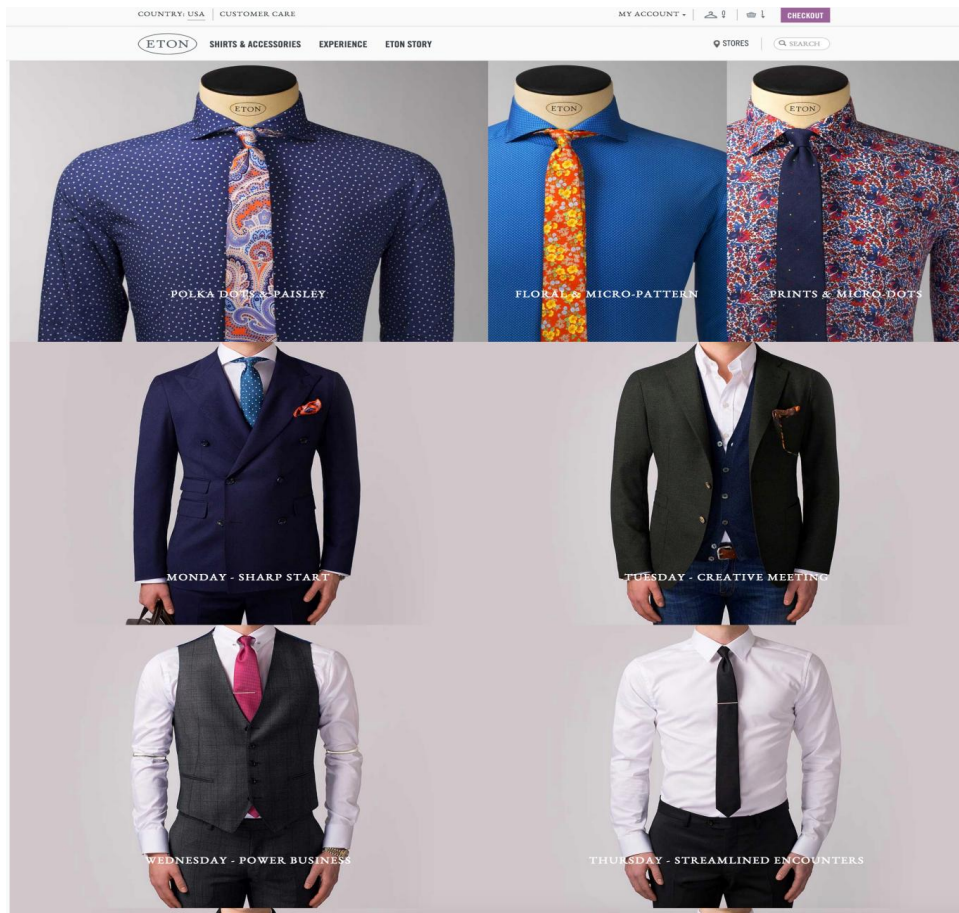
Figure 11: The Style Guide

As discussed previously customer number two requires a more inspirational journey to com-plete the purchase. An option for the consumer to acquire the needed inspiration is achieved through ETON's style guide found under the heading *Experience* in the global navigation. The style guide represents a clear layout, through a chart-like presentation with symmetrical frames/boxes on left and right sides if the page layout. We can distinguish three different methods to express a specific style with the different types of close-ups. The three methods entails a headless human, the product lay downs and the ETON mannequin.

The textual metafunctions of the layout create a consistently organized layout with the vertical lines along the middle or horizontal lines. The lines are created by the framing of the styles with different tones of beige and gray in the image background. Further, the lack of bold lines produces a more coherent composition appearance simultaneously providing the consumer with a sense of symmetry (Kress & van Leuween, 2006). The absence of white space can mean that ETON wants the customer to experience the style guide as a whole com-position. However the absence of white space can also make it more difficult for an individual

consumer to process the information (Beaird 2015). We suggest that the absence of white space is an advantage in presenting the weekly looks as it creates a coherent flow similar to a week. On the other hand it may create friction for the customer to process the page due to the different types of product presentations.

We interpret that the three methods for expressing ETON clothing styles are a strategic approach to visualizing different types of content message. The headless human is used to express a specific style while the product lay downs illustrate a complete look with accessories. ETON also uses product lay downs to represent symbolic products such as New Balance and Crockett & Jones shoes to create an emotional bond through the product association in a form of the modern look and the classical look (O'Connor, 2014). Again emphasizing ETON's brand message as both modern and classical allows a wider target group to associate themselves with the product lay downs. The more graphically and stylistically complicated colors and print matching techniques are communicated through close-up photography on ETON mannequins. The use of mannequins is perceived as a more neutral way for strategically presenting more complex combinations and for allowing the consumer to focus on the matching of the outfits and not other symbolic features such as socio-cultural associations. We interpret the use of mannequins in the context of complex combinations as pushing for sales and understanding the product rather than branding goals.

ETON's content strategist Olof Enckell elaborates on the importance of content strategy to demonstrate the diversity of an ETON dress-shirt in the consumer's' social and everyday life:

> *Then I think it's important for us to really have diverse content.*
> *We need to show our products in a different ways like our range*
> *of shirts include everything from a linen shirt that you can have*
> *on the beach to a black tie shirt that you have on a formal event,*
> *so we really need to show the customer a diverse sort of pictures*
> *and content (O. Enckell, personal communication, 21 April, 2015).*

Olof's statement can be interpreted by consumers need to understand the value of ETON's product. Understanding the product value aligns with Frick & Eyler-Werves (2015) outlook on one of the purposes of content strategy. ETON's style guide is an example of attempting to support the consumer in understanding how to wear and match. The style guide creates a significant product value by specifying weekdays and segmenting the dress codes (work/leisure, business/casual) for the target group as it results in a more precise vision for the consumer.

The ETON style guide observably tries to communicate the consumer's need for their products and the product's versatility in a consumer's life.

However, the style guide's compositional balance between the copy and the image is slightly problematic. O'Connor (2014) and Barr (2010) stress the need for visual elements to be decoded within seconds. By supporting an image with a label or copy the style guide can assist the consumer to decode the content message (Kress & van Leuween, 2006). ETON uses labels to enable the consumer to understand the ideational functions as a sense of living the brand. The style guide acts as a form of service that can be interpreted as adding value to the consumer's brand experience (Keller, 2013). Nevertheless, labels such as: *date-night, family dinner* etcetera require that the consumer makes associations to western social events. The labels use short however vivid wording such as *Sharp start* enhancing ETON's modern and classical brand image. Invoking the consumer's need for an ETON dress shirt to vindicate their social status in social all events.

We suggest ETON's weekly concept is a way to generate brand loyalty through the consistent social differentiating strategy and the need of the product. However we observe difficulties with the readability due to lack of contrast between the label and image do not support the labels purpose. Therefore, the content message of the style guide such as consumers needs to understand the product can be lost in translation for parts of ETON's target groups. The loss of understanding results in a lack of or decrease of brand value. Consequently ETON fails to communicate brand message throughout the style guide due to the poor enunciation of the composition of communication modes.

4.4   Letting them have it their way

This part of the customer journey is an analysis of customer number two who knows what ETON product he is after. Henceforth customer journey number two will proceed directly from the homepage to the overall product page, to the individual product page, to check out. Mind that customer one will also reach this process subsequently after gaining needed inspiration to make a purchase decision.

4.4.1 Showing the goods
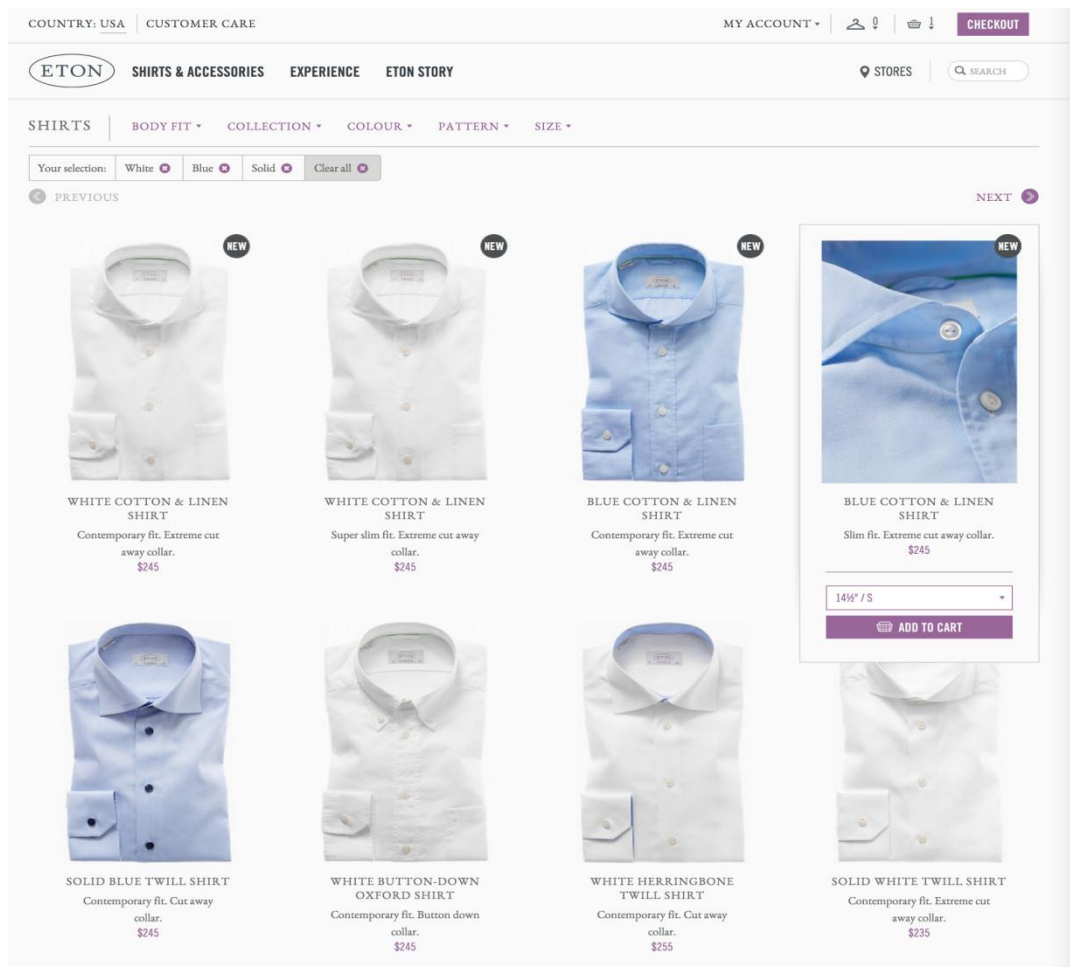
Figure 12: Showing the goods

The overall product page consists of a light grey background with a four-by-four grid of dress shirts. The shirts are presented as folded, on an ETON mannequin or through a close-up image. The equal sizes of the product images generate a rivalry between them. The lack of solid lines separating the content/elements of the layout indicates at openness and gentleness (Rasmussen 2014). Instead the shirts act as their own framing tool on the light grey space. Malamed (2015) means that the use of white/grey space and the color contrast assists the individual in processing content. Thus ETON's uses generous margins to create a sense of framing through light grey space, which creates an organized and balanced composition allowing the consumer to process all the present content.

The local navigation does not follow the traditionally left-placed navigation that is presented by Morville et al. (2006). Alternatively the local navigation is placed below the global navigation. Additionally the local navigation has a small font size and disappears once

the customer moves the cursor away from the navigation bar. This forces the customer to re-petitively click, causing a massive friction. We contemplate that this can negatively affect parts of ETON's target group due to their navigational affordance, henceforth constructing a form of friction in the customer's process to reach required content to complete a purchase.

Our interview with Andreas Nordin (personal communication, 2015, April 22) a user experience designer at Conversionista clearly expresses how "less is more" in terms of online content, especially in the context of premium brands such as ETON:

> *Adding stuff is easy, but just keeping it to the bare minimum and don't add dis-tractions and just keep with the things that actually matter is the hardest part. So for premium brands specifically the test that they do should be on remove stuff rather than adding stuff. And of course in these cases the images, that you can actually feel the quality that they provide is the most important (A. Nordin, personal communication, 2015, April 22).*

Andreas highlights the unique selling point (USP) as vital aspect for premium brands. We define ETON's USP as discussed the quality of the shirt, thus an intrinsic attribute. Okonkwo (2009) partially contradicts Andreas's statement signifying that a premium brand mainly fo-cuses on the extrinsic attributes, thus ETON's centers around the social symbolic meaning of the shirt. We suggest that ETON applies a mixed method, where the symbolic meaning of the shirt enhances the other. For instance the intrinsic attributes are expressed through the de-scriptive material copy such as *Light blue shirt – Herringbone Cambridge Twill.* The extrinsic attributes point at the connection to the physical reality of an ETON store through product composition. Similarly to ETON's physical stores most of the images depict folded dress shirts, building a connection between their physical store and the online e-commerce. We construe this as a tactic to unite and reinforce ETON's brand trust through bridging the con-sumer's expectation of a physical reality into a virtual reality. Nevertheless the association is merely applicable on consumers that have visited a physical ETON store, obliging ETON to cater to the unfamiliar target group simultaneously as the familiar target group.

Further, the order of products and content is vital for ETON. Barr (2010) sug-gests that user behavior research indicates that the consumer tends to drift to the top left area of a website. ETON's choice of placing their two signature products, such as the white and light blue shirt in accordance to Barr's findings is evidently an attempt to affect the consumer. We interpret that the placement of the products can reinforce the brand through the familiarity of the signature products. ETON's use of the white space throughout the page layout is vital to for the brand message to reach the consumer through the content on the product page.

Thereafter the customer selects a product continuing their journey to an individual product page.

4.4.2 "Show me THE shirt"

The individual product page can act as an ultimate test for efficiency of the store's content strategy (Bailie & Urbina, 2013). Henceforth, we are going to analyze the content strategy behind ETON's product images, move to the analysis of the business critical content of the product and finish by an overall analysis and estimation of the content strategy behind the product page layout.
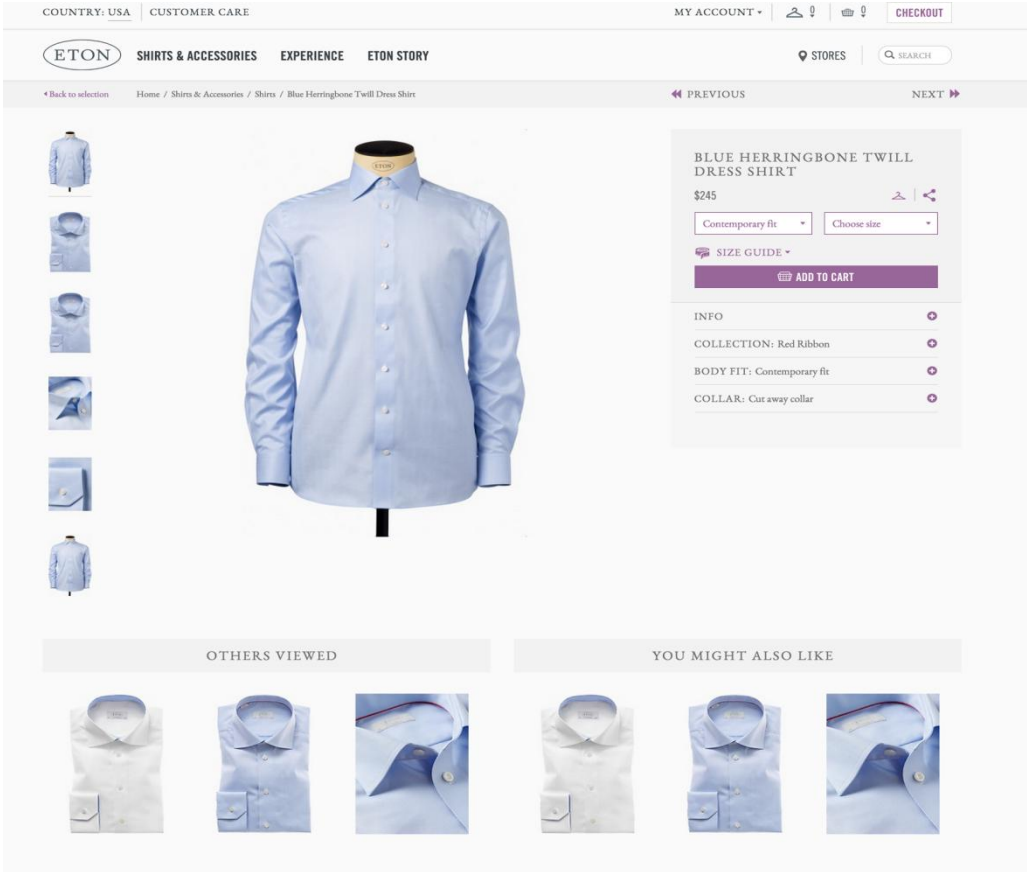
Figure 13: THE shirt

The blue shirt is the central element of the ETON store page. The product is displayed on an ETON branded mannequin and represents a realistic sales item with minimal digital retouching of the photo. As the mouse cursor hovers over the shirt photo it zooms the product picture and allows close inspection of the shirt details, fabric quality and fit. Additional product thumbnail pictures to the left provide various details of the product and suggests multiple

product angles for in-depth analysis of the shirt. Finally, all product photos on the page allow close inspection of the shirt quality through build-in zoom feature. However, ETON decided to provide maximum product value through the use of high-resolution product photos throughout the whole shopping process. Such an approach to graphic product content provides ETON's customers with an extremely detailed overview of the overall product quality, fabric feel and texture, execution of the smallest details and even inspection of the quality of individual stitches.

The business critical content for the individual product page is represented by a text box and contains detailed information about the product. A lavender colored "ADD TO CART" button and large product title are the most attention drawing elements of the product description area. Shirt details and general description of the product are hidden from the customer and can only be accessed by clicking a very small plus symbol across the content description. Visitors are expected to have a higher level of affordances to understand how to access the product content and are likely to miss the meaning behind the small symbol opening to open up the product's content. Nevertheless, the content behind the complicated product description interface reflects the guidelines for highly relevant and accessible business critical content (Bailie & Urbina, 2013). The product description is presented as an easily scan able text with clear paragraphs and descriptive product care icons. The key areas are highlighted through ETON's signature lavender color, thus used for differentiation interface elements. Tone and voice of the product description does not follow the previous examples of ETON's content. We suggest that the quality of ETON's tone and voice provides a very neutral brand attitude with slight personalization of the text through the scarce use of possessive pronoun "our shirt". The font size throughout the business critical content is consistently small and complicates reading and comprehension of the product description despite the solid quality of the text.

The individual product page renders a clean minimalistic layout and is dominated by a large amount of white space. An overall page composition consists of relatively symmetrical product page layout with additional product thumbnail photos to the left, full-size product image in center and business critical product content to the right. Such an approach to page space creates a sense of clear visual hierarchy and provides effortless focus on the blue shirt as the most salient element of the page.

We have also analyzed the informational value of the product page to see whether it could be interpreted as a coherent composition with embedded symbolical meanings. ETON's shirt and product information are the largest content element on the page and are positioned in

the relative center of the page while thumbnails for additional product images occupy margin space of the page. Henceforth ETON manages to highlight information value of the most salient elements on the product page. The "ADD TO CART" button is the second most salient element on the page. Element saliency is achieved through the contrast of lavender button color against the clean white background of the page. Such a technique allows ETON to draw the customer's attention to the shirt and the "add to cart" button while maintaining the sense of strict visual hierarchy and element prominence. The absence of obvious page framing lines connects all elements on the page and conveys a sense of unity and coherence. The generous use of white space along with lack of obvious framing creates an additional sense of lightness and openness of the page layout. However the product page still needs to guide customer attention to the most important content elements. Such a task becomes problematic in the absence of content framing lines. Therefore, ETON implemented blocks of light grey background for product and contextual navigation content as a technique for drawing attention to the business critical content of the page.

We have also noticed that unlike the homepage and the overall product page ETON's individual product page shows the beginnings of navigational flow for prepping the customer for a checkout page transition. According to (Beaird, 2014) the flow is defined by the ease of customer transition between the different store pages. The flow between the content on ETON's individual product page and checkout page is created by the lack of visual clutter and strict focus on the two most important elements of the product page, the shirt and the "add to cart" button.

The unique product value proposition is a way for solving the customer's problem and satisfying consumer needs, it must be communicated consistently and delivered through the right product at the right time (Keller, 2013; Chaffey, 2009). We propose that ETON has an excellent product value proposition on product page and satisfies the customers' needs for product examination. We also suggest that ETON's approach to in-depth high-quality product photos solves potential customer problem with tactile product feedback in the offline ETON stores and simplifies decision-making process before purchasing a premium and expensive product. However we suggest that ETON lacks showing brand products in a real life context, for instance in a form of lifestyle shots to allow the visitors to relate to the brand product through storytelling and strengthen brand message by making shopping process more lifelike and less abstract. ETON could also add an embedded product video with a real person wearing the shirt for a better shopping experience. Adding the video to the lifestyle context could take product page value to a whole new level of content relevance and customer experience.

Product videos would also drastically improve emotional and behavioral aspects of online shopping at ETON store. We also suggest the implementation of customer feedback opinion, for increasing brand trust and adding value to the product page. Reading customer feedback would help the visitors relate to ETON's products, read real people opinions on the product fit and quality and help promote aspects of social differentiation through association with ETON's target group.

The current ETON approach to the customer's shopping experience is guided by a sense of an abstract shopping window with strong focus on a single product and its features. However high-quality representational content of the product page lacks contextual relevance to real life environment and therefore mutes potential effect of social differentiation through symbolic consumption of the brand bestselling product. Henceforth the customer experience on the individual product page renders a sense of isolation and might result in customer anxiety instead of focus on the brand shopping experience. Finally we would like to stress the importance of the critical friction appearing when the customer makes an error while adding the product in the cart. Error notifications are rendered by the means of very small text just above the product image and are unnoticeable at best. We suggest that the customer will be abandoning the shopping cart due to irritation and lack of clarity behind the shopping process error. Consequently, this content friction is a critical case of potential sales drop and higher store bounce rate.

4.4.3 Minimizing the obstacles
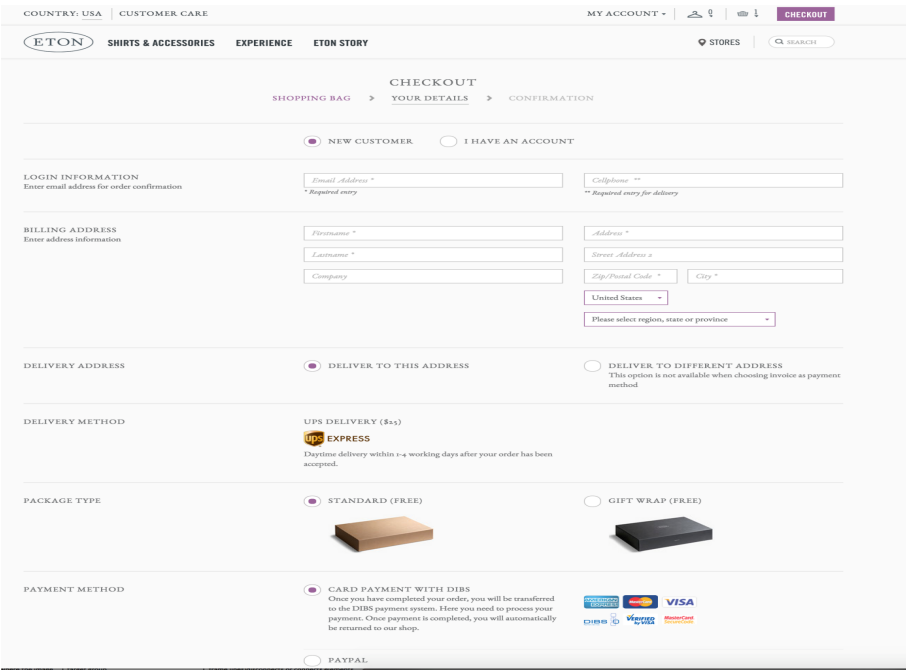
ETON's checkout page is the last store page of customer journey one and two. Our section has been named after a quote of ETON's content strategist Olof Enckell.

The content strategy behind the page layout, navigation, as well as tone and voice of the brand, will allow for a successful end of the brand product or in customer departure. ETON's checkout page represents a reversed "white space" concept for maximal attention to the key checkout page areas. Henceforth, ETON replaced the standard generous white background of the page and designed a light grey page with white text fields. We suggest that this technique is very efficient in reducing customer anxiety before the multi-step payment process. The concept of reversed white space also reduces the effect of visual cluttering with large amounts of text fields and small interface icons hence drawing attention to the most important areas of the page. The voice and tone of the checkout information fields are presented in neutral way, but ETON follows up possibly confusing information fields and carefully explains terms and conditions of the purchase and delivery. We suggest that such an approach increases customer trust to the brand and enhances the overall checkout experience. Henceforth we conclude that ETON has reworked the complexity of web forms, checkout process steps and designed a one-page checkout through an easy and well structured content strategy approach. Both the content fields and page layout on the checkout page are intuitive, hence supporting customer interaction with the store content and enabling maximum positive user experience.

5. Discussion and conclusions

In this chapter we will present the findings in our case study, the chapter will be divided into three parts. Part one will process our findings and apply them to the e-commerce phenomena in a general sense. In the second part of the chapter we will explicitly answer our research questions and present how our findings can contribute to the area of strategic communication and digital media. Finally, in part three we will set forth suggestions for future research that can deepen and complete our findings.

5.1 Results

The purpose of the study aimed to explore the ways in which online brand communication formed ETON content strategy through various communication modes within the context of the given e-commerce store. The results of our study have revealed that ETON's e-commerce content strategy is driven by the brand image and brand differentiation tactics and expressed through an established brand communication strategy. The content strategy of the brand is largely defined by ETON's overall goal for conveying an image of a classic brand while avoiding associations with being a conservative and outdated male clothing brand. In addition to the main branding goals, ETON makes further efforts to position the brand as a contemporary and forward-looking company that is attractive to both older and younger audiences.

Furthermore, in-depth analysis of ETON's brand message through content strategy communication modes has revealed that ETON strives to convey an image of an including and open brand while avoiding a typical stereotype image of a premium and inaccessible brand. As a result, ETON's brand positioning goals affect a significant amount of the brand content, such as the mood of the imagery, as the brand color palette, as the typographic choices as well as the tone and as the voice of the brand message.

The diversity of ETON's branding goals can be both a limiting and a positively challenging factor for the brand's content strategy and its effect on the e-commerce store performance. For instance, one of the main content strategy challenges for ETON originates from balancing between the need to express various branding goals and to maintain positive num-

bers in brand sales statistics. As a result, ETON's content strategy reflects somewhat contradictory branding tactics throughout critical store locations. For instance content strategy for ETON's above-the-fold area on the homepage represents a minimal amount of brand message but effectively promotes sales through unique brand value propositions. Meanwhile below-the-fold homepage area has been being sacrificed for the purposes of fitting every possible type of the brand content in a hope of reaching both existing and potential customers.

At the same time, study results have shown that ETON consistently works on as the tone and voice of the brand message and at times does manage to create a sense of closeness between the brand and the consumers. Nevertheless, brand content consumption constantly suffers from low readability of the text due to the small size of the font throughout the store. Similarly concise and well-written copy on ETON imagery is often rendered unreadable due to the poor contrast between the image background and call to action buttons. Henceforth large amount of brand content fails to convert or engage the customers. At the same time ETON does manage to convey product value through high-resolution imagery and well written business critical content although the positive effect of the product value of often missed due to content path frictions or unintuitive access to the content. Naturally the discrepancy between multiple branding goals and content strategy challenges cannot be regarded as a singularly negative aspect.

Mastering communication of content strategy techniques for branding premium e-commerce stores is a sought after knowledge for enabling high-involvement purchases. Deep analysis of customer journey, user experience throughout customer interaction with the store as well as content efficiency need to form a basis for effective and engaging premium brand store. From that point forward tracking and elimination of the main content friction points provides the framework for analyzing content efficiency and brand message priorities.

5.2 Discussion & Conclusion

We want to stress that content strategy is a complex tactics that can be neither discussed nor analyzed in terms of specific communication modes that are torn out of the context in a given e-commerce store. For instance, colors are not merely colors, they represent an interdependent relationship with other communication modes within a given e-commerce store to generate the desired brand message. Therefore, existing content strategy theory cannot fully reflect our analysis, as it is context specific and depends on as the customer journey of the store and as

the consumer needs. Content strategy is also highly dependent on as the branding goals and as the brand message. Thus, content strategy is defined by how the brand positions itself and communicates with the target audience. Every tool in the content strategy toolbox serves a purpose of driving the brand message further, increasing sales, and attracting attention to specific brand product features. Branding aspects include pushing product value and differentiating the brand through the product.

Ultimately content strategy varies from an e-commerce to an e-commerce and is dependent on as the brand goals. Therefore, content strategy should always be approached in the context of the given e-commerce and the customer needs. In a cultural context the brands must tailor content strategy by considering the communicative interdependence between the sociocultural and cognitive aspects to create appropriate brand associations for the product. Essentially only a data driven approach to as the content strategy will result in as the effective brand communication through differentiation and addressing actual customer needs by actually knowing what the target group wants and expects from the brand.

There are a few vital aspects of as the content strategy enabling the successful functioning of an e-commerce store. For instance, content enables understanding of brand message in terms of product value and timely delivery of information to the customer. However content strategy practices have a much broader potential. The use of color, typography, imagery and specific tone and voice can make a difference between supporting high-involvement purchases through the explicit brand message and losing customers during the first minutes of the store visit.

A deft use of content strategy practices grasps customer attention seconds after visiting the brand store and engages the user through the powerful imagery backed by the captivating copy for a unique product value proposition. Combinations of content strategy tools, such as an inviting tone and the voice of the brand message can promote a repeated purchase from the permanent brand customers. A simple and intuitive content navigation and an in-depth knowledge of the customer needs would deliver an optimal brand message for converting new store visitors. A skillful use of color palette and text can immediately draw attention to the specific areas of the brand content and ensure the retention of the key brand message aspects for a further brand differentiation. A deeper insight into the content strategy practices opens possibilities for a life-long consumer-brand relationship. Storytelling techniques through engaging visuals and a captivating context specific text enable overcoming challenges of the high involvement purchase and to diminish the importance of a tactile feedback.

A brand message can be turned into an inspiring lifestyle position, a social differentiation tool or even transform the brand into a symbolic company offering high status products. Ultimately content strategy practices are a driving mechanism of the online branding for delivering the brand message to the targeted consumer groups. Hence, the combination of the content strategy tools with the data driven approach provides a full control over customer perception of the brand and controls customer behavior within the e-commerce store.

5.3 Suggestions for the strategic communication field

We are aware that our findings are specific for our case study; however they may be applied to the similar contexts as a result of the analytical generalization. During past decade an online presence has become a clearly established imperative for most of the successful brands, especially in the premium segments of the market. Henceforth, the majority of the brands have realized the need to clearly communicate the brand message or risk losing consumer attention and face high bounce rates statistics within the first minutes of consumer visits to the online brand store. The brand message can be formed by a digital content strategist. We consider a digital content strategist as a profession requiring the knowledge in the strategic communication field as they must strategically design and plan creative content that will meet the customer's needs and expectations. Therefore a digital content strategist may take advantage of the study results when planning and developing specific brand content for the e-commerce purposes. However we would like to stress that the online brand communication and the brand content strategy varies from an e-commerce store to an e-commerce store. Thus the insights of the study may be useful for premium brands in an effort to reach the brand and sales objectives. We suggest employing the study knowledge as a recommendation for the strategic development of the brand message through the data-driven approach to the use of communication modes in an e-commerce store.

5.4 Future research

Due to the continuous development of the technology and the effects of globalization on the field of marketing communications and e-commerce activities we suggest a further study of symbolic brands concept in the context of an online environment and a research of sociocultural associations created by the brand. An e-commerce needs to accommodate all individuals to allow a brand to push sales and reinforce their brand online. Likely this requires a more

consumer oriented perspective rather than the organizational perspective used in this study. We suggest explorations of the symbolic associations and norms that might have evolved with the rapid development of online e-commerce platforms. Thus a study of how and if it is possible to apply some type of universal communication modes would cater to the needs of all consumers in an e-commerce environment.

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7. Appendix

7.1 Interview guide – Eton

Date: 2015-04-21, 09.00-09.50

Duration: 45 min

Number of questions: 10

Communication channel: Skype

Theme: Eton Brand

Purpose of interview: Bachelor's Thesis in Strategic communications and digital media, Lund University.

Purpose of study: Explore the performance and develop understanding of how interaction design and content strategy may have impacted Eton brand communication strategy within the context of an online e-commerce store.

Interview persons: Olof Enckell, Content Manager & Mathias Mattson, Graphic designer

Interviewers: Madina Amerhanova, Johanna Lundström Kabus, Elida Palmgren

Eton

1. *Olof and Mathias please tell us about your work as content strategy expert and in-house graphic designer at Eton. What are your job responsibilities? Do you work as a team? What are the most challenging aspects of your work so far?*

Content Strategy

Ranking content

Content is all text, graphics and multimedia on a company's online website. Depending on the companies' objectives graphic content may be more independent than textual content or vise versa. A powerful image can take the lead or vice versa.

2. Please, describe the content ranking and independent/dependent relations between content on ETON's online store?

Online Brand Differentiation

The online market is growing everyday with new suppliers and new products. Customers have more options and the importance of brand differentiation becomes more central in order to wheel in the customers purchase decisions.

3. How does ETON differentiate themselves through content? Compared to competition?

Content strategy in different contexts

Depending on the desired action of the customer content needs to be adjusted to not lose the customer on the way to conversion.

4. How does ETON's online content strategy differ between the landing page, product page and checkout page? In relation to CTA's (call to action)?

Branding

Value through content

Value can be seen as the customer's perception of the products price (the cost to own and use) and performance (quality). This can be difficult online where the luxury brand such as ETON cannot offer the same tactile and emotional offline interaction with the products.

5. How do you communicate value to the customer through content online? How can the value in a physical store be transferred online?

Creating an emotional bond

A consistent and engaging tone and voice is especially important on product page and marketing emails (newsletters etc.). They can create a type of emotional bond with the customer. It also reinforces the brands positioning and brand image.

6. What are ETON's tone and voice guidelines? How does ETON vary tone and voice depending on purpose? Does it create an emotional bond? How?

Conversion Rates

Visual Guidelines

In order to create any type of conversion the customer needs to make an action, such as a click a button, fill in a form etc. Text and visuals are essential for the customer to (a) understand what to do and (b) locate where to click.

7. What are the visual guidelines for the conversion elements on ETON's online store?

Visuals vs. text

Historically text have been the biggest information tool. However imagery has become more and more significant as the digital environment has developed. Today's statistics show that conversion rates increase through video and image content.

8. Describe the relation between different types of content and conversion rates? How does the choice of content type affect the conversion rate?

Effective UX vs. Brand Communication

Brands' desire for maximum customer engagement and emotional response (micro-conversions) often clashes with experts' ideas re. UX of the website.

When it comes to communications strategy brands want it all. The storytelling and powerful imagery (large hero images), the engaging text, buttons, banners and it can easily stretch the limits of web store design strategy.

But modern minimalistic design trends are all about simplicity. There is a large hero image and few buttons that require advanced UX and content strategy skills to maintain customer engagement.

9. What is your vision in overcoming the gap between brand communication strategies vs. effective UX in an online store?

User interfaces in e-commerce

Successful user interfaces are those in which users immediately notice the important stuff. Unimportant stuff, on the other hand, doesn't get noticed because sometimes it's not there at all. One of the biggest challenges of designing interfaces for complex systems is figuring out which aspects the users don't need to deal with and reducing their visibility (or leaving them out altogether).

10. What is your idea of successful UI for premium ecommerce store?

7.2 Interview guide – Vaimo

Date: 2015-04-27, 10.00-10.45

Duration: 45 min

Number of questions: 12

Communication channel: Skype

Research Theme: Eton Brand

Purpose of interview: Bachelor's Thesis in Strategic communications and digital media, Lund University.

Purpose of study: Explore the performance and develop understanding of how user experience and content strategy may have impacted Eton brand communication strategy within the context of an online e-commerce store.

Interview person: Torbjörn Lindblad, Key Account Manager at Vaimo Sweden

Interviewers: Madina Amerhanova, Johanna Lundström Kabus, Elida Palmgren

Vaimo for Eton

Torbjörn, we know that you specialize in ecommerce optimization and have experience with customer insight. Please tell us about your work on Eton of Sweden project

1. What were your responsibilities for Eton project?

2. Please tell us about the pitch from Eton, what were they after?

3. What aspects were the most challenging?

4. What did Vaimo final product look like? Content, visuals, layout, UX?

Brand Management in E-commerce

Roughly put typical e-commerce store serves as a platform for brand management that results in brand sales.

Brand Identity

Brand identity is one of the essential tools of brand management. It specifies brands' uniqueness and value

5. What is your vision of conveying brand uniqueness and value on landing and product pages? (premium brand)

6. Is there a specific product page for some brand that you find particularly inspiring, why?

Brand Positioning

Brand positioning based on brand identity. Differentiates the brand in a specific market at a specific time for its products. Most premium e-commerce brands look strangely similar with their flat minimalistic design.

7. Why do most premium e-commerce brand stores look the same? Why is it mostly large hero image, one call to action and similar product page layouts?

8. How important is content and brand's tone and voice for the success of e-commerce store?

9. Product page contains the so called business-critical content (visuals and information about the product). Why creating powerful product page is so compelling to many brands?

UX vs. Marketing Dream

Modern e-commerce industry faces a well known dilemma between delivering engaging UX while maintaining brand value, strength and image. Online stores design and usability principles are not particularly suited for multiple branding goals. That is especially noticeable when less tech proficient customers try to make a purchase on beautiful e-commerce sites with low usability.

10. Are data driven methods (A/B testing, Multivariate testing, eye tracking etc) the most efficient ways to create unique e-commerce UX for a brand?

11. What were your UX guidelines (goals) for Eton store?

12. What are the usual UX design pitfalls for e-commerce store?

7.3 Interview guide - Conversionista

Date: 2015-04-20, 15.00-15.45

Duration: 45 min

Number of questions: 9

Communication channel: Skype

Theme: E-commerce store usability and optimization

Purpose of interview: Bachelor's Thesis in Strategic communications and digital media, Lund University.

Purpose of study: Explore the performance and develop understanding of how *interaction design* and *content strategy* may have impacted Eton brand communication strategy within the context of an online ecommerce store.

Interview person: Patrik Matell, conversion specialist at Conversionista

Interviewers: Madina Amerhanova, Johanna Lundström Kabus, Elida Palmgren

Conversionista

Tell us about your work at Conversionista please! *What are your responsibilities?*
1. Most important tasks? What are the most challenging tasks in e-commerce optimization?

User research

Naturally any conversion optimization is impossible without proper user research. So there are no universal rules and every conversion optimization starts with the needs of the users.
2. *What is your strategy for user research?*

Online Store Usability

High quality website does not always mean high usability.
Tailored content, beautiful imagery, fast loading times and high ranking Google search are just not enough to make users stick around. Websites have chance to impress users and see if users can make sense of its structure and location of necessary content. However user patience rarely exceeds 3 minutes time for the

most sought after information. After that they give up and rarely come back.

3. What is your idea of highly usable e-commerce store? How can you describe highly usable landing page, product page and checkout page?

Content -Usability Rules

Content is all text, graphics, audio files, video files and other info on the company's online store. Content is often called the public face of the organization. Websites have distinct looks, expressive images and convey tone and mood through brand voice. However not all content supports usability. Tests often lack visual hierarchies, pages are often overloaded with graphics.

4. What are your guidelines for getting the content right for ecommerce optimization processes? We are mostly interested in text and visuals.

Effective UX vs. Brand Communication

Brands' desire for maximum customer engagement and emotional response (micro-conversions) often clashes with experts' ideas regarding UX of the website. When it comes to communications strategy brands want it all. The storytelling and powerful imagery (large hero images),the engaging text, buttons, banners and it can easily stretch the limits of web store design strategy.

But modern minimalistic design trends are all about simplicity. There is a large hero image and few buttons that require advanced UX and content strategy skills to maintain customer engagement.

5. What is your vision in overcoming the gap between brand communication strategy vs. effective UX in an online store?

User centered design

User centered design is said to focus on creating engaging and efficient user experiences.

6. What is your idea of high quality user centered design with prominent brand message in e-commerce? Can you focus on landing page and product page please?

User interfaces in e-commerce

Successful user interfaces are those in which users immediately notice the

important stuff. Unimportant stuff, on the other hand, doesn't get noticed because sometimes it's not there at all. One of the biggest challenges of designing interfaces for complex systems is figuring out which aspects the users don't need to deal with and reducing their visibility (or leaving them out altogether).

7. What is your idea of successful UI for luxury ecommerce store?

Visual hierarchies

8. What is your understanding of efficient visual hierarchy in terms of grid layout, text, visuals and UI elements on landing page? Are there any specific visual hierarchy aspects for luxury e-commerce stores?

E-commerce conversion optimization

9. What are the most common conversion pitfalls on e-commerce product pages? What usually goes wrong and why? We are mostly interested in content presentation and user interface design (layout).
What are the most common conversion pitfalls on landing pages? What makes users stay and what makes them leave?

7.4 Picture

Figure 1:
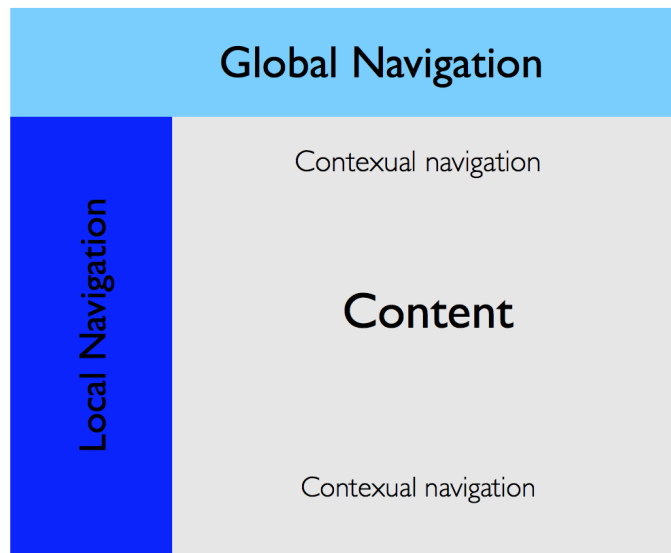
Figure 2:

Figure 3:
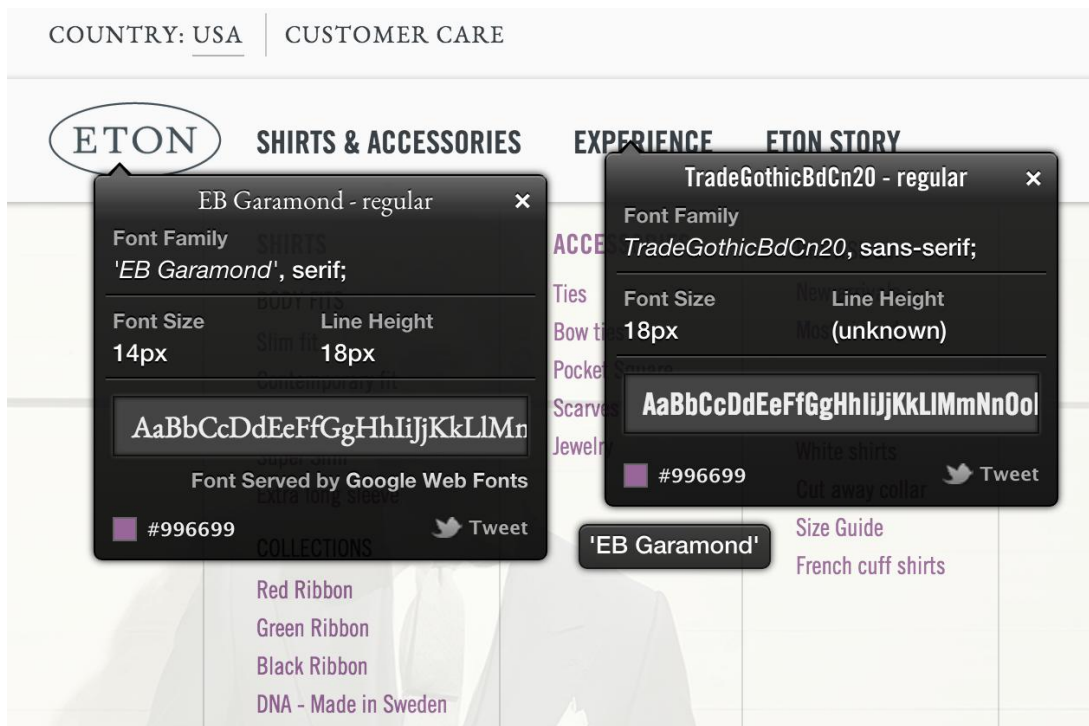
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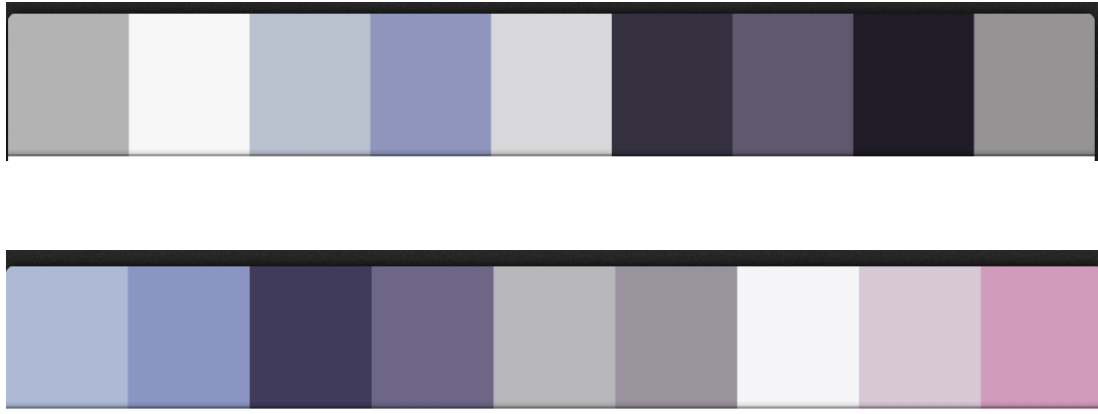
Figure 5:

Figure 6:
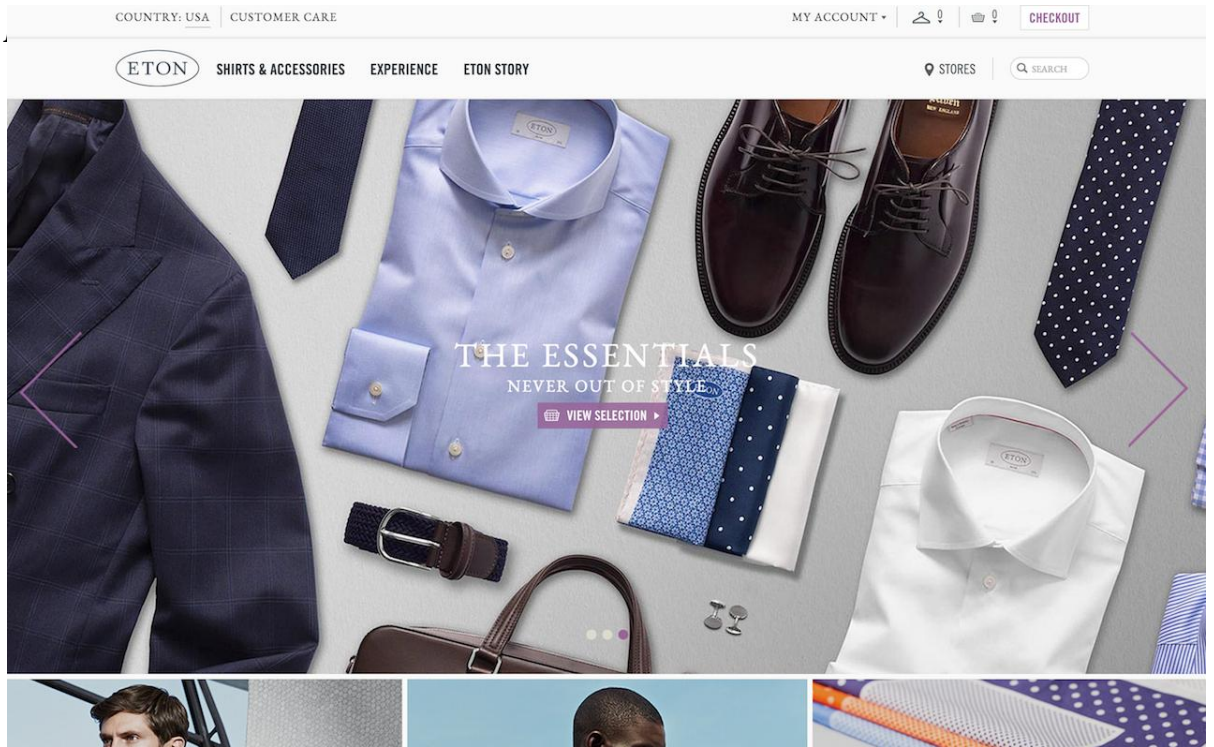
Figure 7:
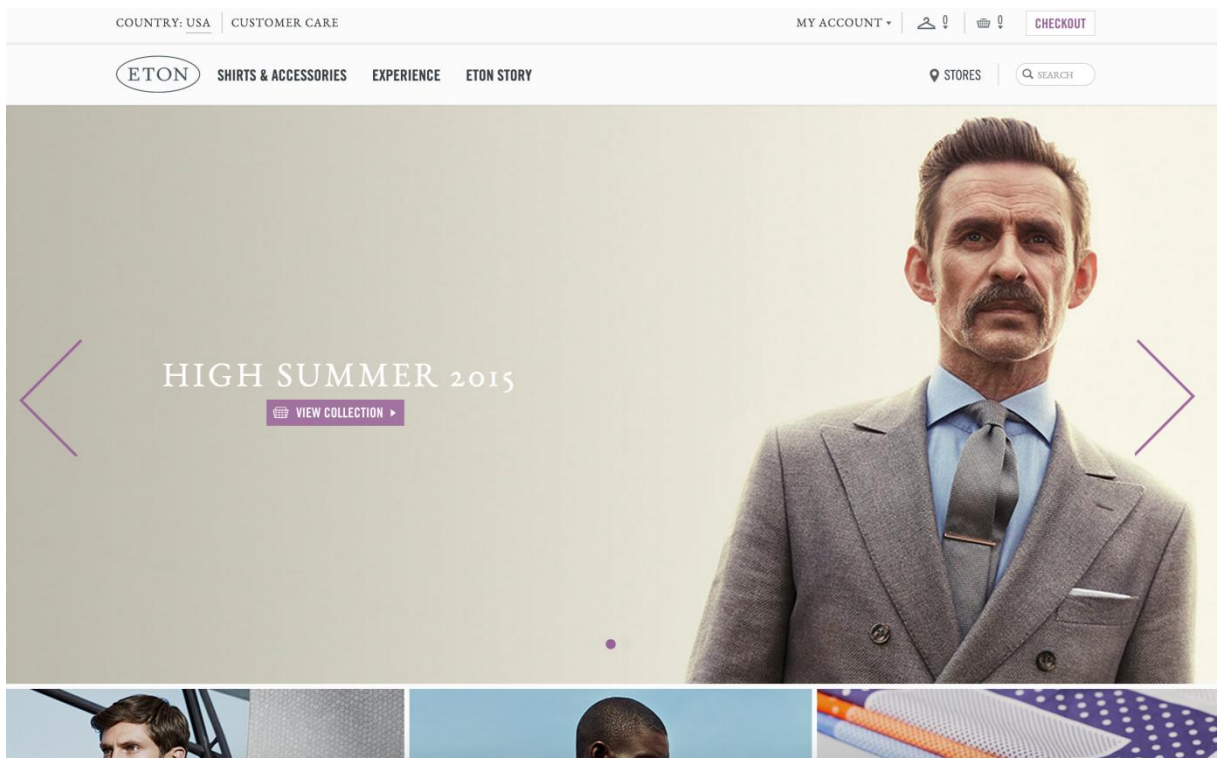
Figure 8:
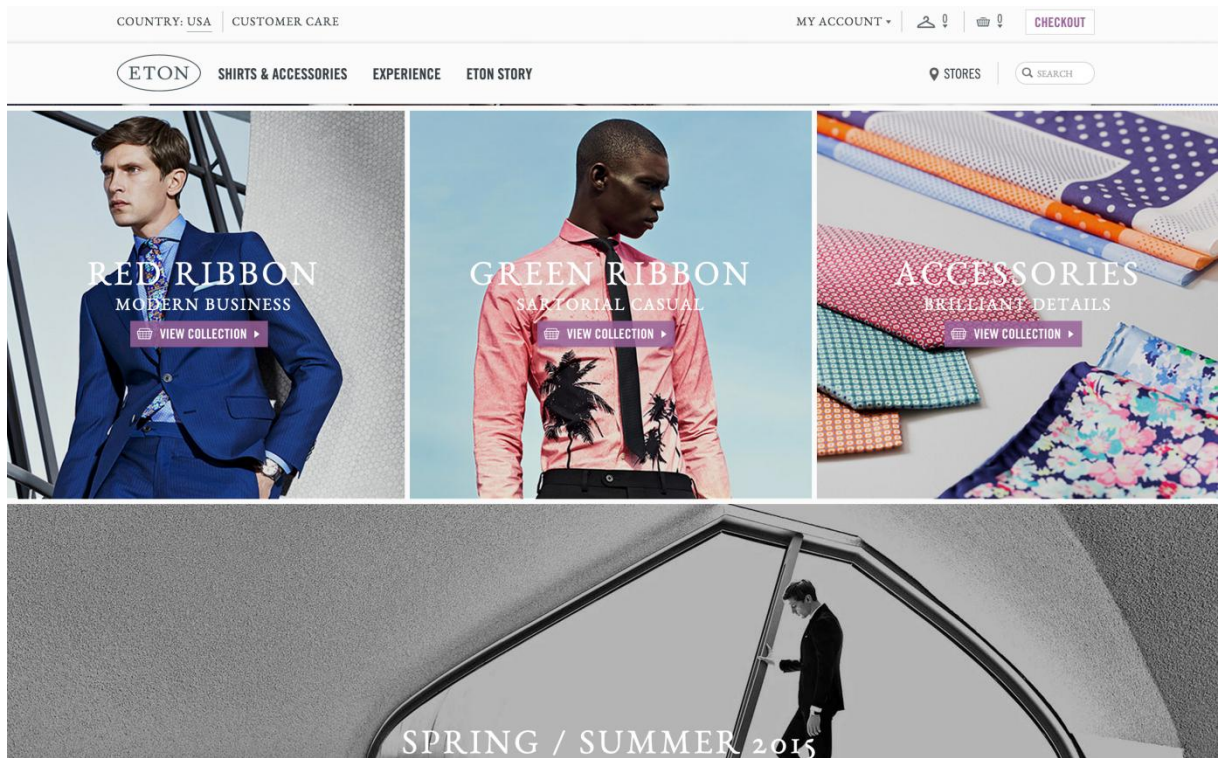
Figure 9:

Figure 10:

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Figure 14: