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Understanding the world through advertising; Identities and civic engagement

Lili Sapi

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Supervisor: Professor Helena Sandberg

Examiner: Joanna Doona



Abstract

This thesis explores the audience's reactions in regards to the phenomenon of norm-breaking ads in Sweden, focusing on the representation of immigrant minorities in advertisements. The aim is to understand if, how, and why, these ads engage audiences online and offline, at a time where public interest in institutionalized politics is on the decrease. The interviews and photo elicitation are a way to understand political engagement in Sweden today. The data shows how the interviewees overall lack an interest in institutionalized politics, while showing how discussing images from a critical, post-racist perspective can further civic engagement through discussions and talks, both online and offline. The thesis presents an explanation of online behavior in regards to ways the audience manages political discussions, and how this is exercised due to the level of educational capital, as well as online identity management. The empirical material consists of semi-structured, qualitative material with 13 people living in Sweden, between the ages of 22-30. The interviewees were selected on the premise of including both those having university degrees and those without, those who were born in Scandinavia to parents from countries outside of Europe, those with Scandinavian parents, and a mix of gender. Drawing on theories on identity and audience research, the empirical findings show how those with an immigrant background react to the ads more passionately and with a greater interest than interviewees of Scandinavian heritage. Drawing on concepts of advertising and consumption, the ads serve as a way for the audience to understand the political reality in Sweden today, while the interviewees express both cynicism and an appreciation of the images displayed in the ads.

Key words: Advertisement, Sweden, Multiculturalism, Immigration, Representation, Political, Engagement, Digital, Online, Facebook, Class, Qualitative research.

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Introduction: The Swedish Lucia tradition

All cultures come with mystical traditions one learns as a child without having much rational understanding of why it is done. Most Swedes can remember December mornings in primary school, wearing a white robe, singing songs for parents and teachers while holding a candle. This is called Lucia, a Swedish winter tradition. Along with advent, it marks the beginning of Christmas celebrations in Sweden. It is originally an Italian tradition, commemorating St. Lucia, who died as a martyr in 304 A.D. The Lucia ceremony is a strong national symbol in Sweden. Schools usually select one lucky girl to be Lucia. She is the one leading the choir, walk in the front with candles in her hair, similar to the halo of a saint. There is even a national pageant each year, where a (usually young and attractive) female is crowned 'Lucia of the Year'. But not everyone in the choir is Lucia. There are different roles for the children to dress up as, named after characters of Christmas songs. Boys can be gingerbread cookies or star boys. The girls who are not chosen to be the Lucia are called Lucia-maids. In Sweden, the idea of the Lucia as a woman, is as established as James Bond being a man.

As an adult, you no longer participate in the Lucia choir. If you have children, your responsibility is to provide them with the right attire so they can participate in the tradition - a white robe and electrical candle to hold (as it's hazardous to give children real ones), or if they are the Lucia, the parents need to buy a crown with electrical candles. In 2016, Swedish department store Åhléns unveiled their new campaign for Lucia. Instead of portraying a girl as Lucia, it featured a photo of a dark-skinned young boy dressed as Lucia, whose gender was not obvious to all. The ad reads: "We have all the costumes, cones and lights for the awaiting Lucia train. Shop now." (See under elicitation material section)

Shortly after the campaign was released, racist and sexist comments began to flood Åhléns' Facebook page, questioning why Lucia was represented by a black boy whose gender wasn't clear. The negative comments, however, were soon met with a strong response from people defending Åhléns' choice of Lucia, prompting the involvement of Facebook groups and hashtags such as #Iamlucia and #Iamhere. The campaign received about 200 negative comments on Facebook, verses more than 20,000 likes or "love" reactions. The aggressive comments against the black boy being Lucia led to people posting photos of themselves in Lucia outfits on social media under the hashtag #jagär Lucia and #jagärhär (#Iamlucia and #Iamhere) to show support for the boy but also to highlight how Swedishness does not mean

sticking with traditional old images. The perception of Lucia has been contested in the past, when a dark-skinned girl won “Sweden's Lucia” and received racist hate comments (Haimi, 2016).

Advertising is known for using and reflecting the value orientations of the culture which it exists in (Zhang, 2014:275). This thesis argues that the use of this specific image in the Lucia ad was twofold. It is an image which plays on Swedish tradition and cultural symbols, while reflecting current debates taking place in Sweden (and the world) surrounding immigration and nationalistic political forces. As the Swedish population is becoming increasingly eclectic due to more immigration over the past twenty years, these ads bring to light issues of Swedishness, tradition, and changing representations.

“Sex doesn’t sell anymore, activism does”

In 2015, two years before the words above were expressed in *The Guardian* (Holder, 2017) a normative advertising trend became apparent in Sweden. Several advertising agencies in Sweden claimed that advertising should represent all groups in Swedish society; Advertising should actively move away from the typical white, blonde, heterosexual representations we often see (Haimi, Horne, Sundell, 2015). This take on representation, a norm breaking stance, is becoming increasingly popular by the big brands in Sweden, and globally. In some recent examples of corporations taking a political stance occurred during Donald Trump's immigration ban in 2017. When this happened, the CEO of Starbucks wrote an open letter to staff, committing to hire 10.000 refugees. Airbnb tweeted that they were providing free accommodation to anyone who was not allowed in the US, and Uber created a \$3 million fund to help drivers who were affected by the “wrong and unjust” ban (Holder, 2017).

Another campaign from Åhléns in 2016, named *Nordic tones*, displayed female models from different ethnicities (white, black, Asian) and a woman with a hijab. The ad gained a lot of attention and praise by Swedish Muslim women who felt their representation in advertisements was long overdue (Almerud & Friberg, 2015). The ad was also protested by Swedish immigrant feminists, who claimed the representation of hijab in a fashion campaign normalized a symbol of oppression for Muslim women in Swedish suburbs, while increasing the company's sales (Avci, 2015). There was a small protest outside of Åhléns. Micheletti et al. (2004) reminds us of the meaning of the words *buycotting* and *boycotting*, which are used

to highlight the acts, or lack of, consumption as a way to demonstrate the need for political responsibility from corporations.

As Dahlgren argues, many citizens feel distant from, and often cynical about, the political process and governments (2013:10). Being political can today be seen as a sort of add-on to one's life and identity, something done at one's convenience. Dahlgren claims this is much due to the presence of neoliberal ideology in our societies (2013:12). Interestingly, Swedish citizens seem to be keener to support a company, often via social media, displaying diversity in their ads, rather than engaging in a political organization. This has been explored by other scholars under the concepts of commodity activism (Banet-Weiser & Mukherjee 2012) or political consumerism (Lekakis, 2003:8). These concepts explain the way consumers engage shows their stance on the company, supporting or boycotting them by highlighting the ethical or moral responsibility they have taken. This is increasingly made possible by social media, as we can see in the Facebook group #Iamhere which was previously mentioned. The aim of this particular group is to lobby against online-hate, instead writing positive and 'love' comments, as seen in the racist reactions for Åhléns Lucia ad.

Aim

The aim of this thesis is to explore how ads of this nature can serve as a window to understanding the ongoing debates about diversity, racism, belonging and Swedishness. In this thesis, advertising is seen as a part of culture and a way for people to understand the society they live in. To acquire a deeper understanding, we must give voice to the audience of ads, and what meaning they make of these images. This thesis is an attempt at understanding civic engagement through norm breaking ads, while at the same time highlighting the use of social media as a space for political debate.

Research questions

How can the audience's reactions and actions to these ads help us understand civic engagement in Swedish contemporary society?

How does the audience react to these ads?

Can it be a starting point for political engagement?

How far does this engagement go?

These questions will be answered by conducting semi-structured, in-depth qualitative interviews with people living in Sweden today. The structure of this thesis entails an overview of the existing literature relevant to the aim of the thesis, and a reflection of my contribution to the field. Further ahead, the methodology and methods are explained. Through thematic coding, the analysis chapter will discuss and answer the research questions, concluding with a critical reflection of the findings.

Research review and theoretical framework

This chapter starts by explaining the contribution of knowledge that I will make to audience research within media and communications centered on advertising. Following is an overview of the intellectual framework this thesis is working from. The theoretical concepts guiding this thesis stems from existing research on identity, especially in regards to minority media research and post-racism. These serve as important theoretical frames to guide audience research, which focuses on advertisements displaying multiculturalism; these are used not only in the analysis but in shaping the interview guide. This thesis begins with images, which we are exposed to. These visual advertisements needs to be broken down and understood through many layers, which is why a mix of theories are used. To understand ads and their position in society, I offer two sides of the way we can view ads — a critical standpoint from a capitalist critical perspective by Bauman (2007) but also ads as a cultural form in its own right. Seeing ads as a cultural form can be a handy tool for gaining insights and understanding the norms and ideals of our society. Since this project aims to analyze the possibilities for civic empowerment connected to these ads, Dahlgren's notion of civic circuit is explained, as well as other related concepts such as cultural citizenship and subactivism. The goal of this chapter is to map and contextualize the bridge between institutionalized politics and culture in regards to online (and offline) identity.

Situating the research: Making advertising personal

The overarching ambition of this thesis is to take a step away from textual analysis which dominates advertising research (Zhang, 2014:273) and position this research within the less explored combination of advertising and qualitative audience research. The intention of this section is not to map all advertising research ever conducted, but to highlight studies relevant to the aim of the study. Research made from a perspective of content and text analysis offer helpful theoretical concepts, as presented in Goldman's lengthy analysis of magazines in the United States (1996). These have contributed to useful concepts such as legitimacy ads and commodity feminism, which will be explained further. Goldman highlights gender representations in ads through both a constructive and critical lens, however there is less focus on race, ethnicity, immigrants and a thorough problematizing of their representation in advertising. This tendency is apparent in other comprehensive works on advertising (Fawles, 1996) (Jarlbrog, 2006) (Cronin, 2000) (Törrönen, 2014). However, in Goldman & Papsons

Nike Culture the authors show how Nike made race a non-issue in some of their ads, while at the same time mentioning racism explicitly with their spokesperson Tiger Woods (1998:114). However, these analyses of race and the deconstruction of campaigns, does not further explain how people make sense of these ads on a pragmatic, personal level. In the introduction, the authors claim they “lack an ethnography of audiences” (Goldman, Papson, 1998). This quote highlights a crucial gap in critical advertising research which must be filled: What's useful about having critical knowledge on ads, if this knowledge is not shared with the consumers?

There is a good amount of research on how advertising sees us, but less so in how we view ads. Although this is understandable, since it is not an easy task to fully grasp the social effects of advertising. In regards to gender representation, one study showed (Spitzer, Henderson and Zivian, 1990) that while models in American ads were getting thinner, the female population was becoming heavier. This discrepancy between the weight of the population and the weight of the women in the ads were to blame for an increasing dissatisfaction felt by girls and the way they view their bodies, and was enhanced by using surveys as a method, as a way to understand how women view their bodies.

Audiences and advertising

In regards to audience research, Lunt & Livingstone (1992) provide a lengthy overview of peoples' consumption habits in regards to personal experiences and social identity, conducted through interviews, discussions and statistical analyses. This is assessed through the field of marketing, where people are called consumers as opposed to audiences, as they are in this thesis, although research from other fields are still important to keep in mind. Such as Hirschman & Thompson (1997) study on the active audience, and their meaning making of ads in mass media in terms of inspiring and aspiring, deconstruction, and identifying it to their own personality. When it comes to Swedish ads, I have not been able to find audience research regarding immigrant representation in Swedish advertising, which is becoming increasingly popular, as well as the representation of HBTQ-persons or femvertising, when commodities are sold via a feminist representation (Jalakas, 2016).

This changing Swedish identity seen in ads, is influenced by the large number of immigrants living in Scandinavia today - such ads are becoming increasingly present in a globalized cosmopolitan world. Therefore, my contribution here has two purposes. First, it responds to

the lack of qualitative audience research in advertising. This thesis also focuses on the commodification of a cosmopolitan Swedish identity, and how it can be understood in regards to online civic engagement.

Advertising as culture and power

Every day we are swarmed by messages that seek for our attention. This need for marketers to stand out from the constant buzz has been under debate in academia since the 1960s (Konsumentverket 2012). Marketers are drawn to what people are drawn to. If urbanization is making people spend more time on highways and supermarkets, marketers would be experimenting with billboards. If people are using social media, marketers would be getting on social media (ibid). According to the Swedish Consumer Ombudsman (Konsumentverket, 2012), discussing advertising is as common amongst Swedes as it is to discuss politics (Grusell, 2008 in ibid:42). However, this might not mean much, as political engagement is on the decrease (Dahlgren, 2009) and political issues are the bottom of the list of what most people like to do in their spare time (Bauman 2007)

Fantasies sell commodities and commodities sell fantasies (Goldman, 1992:25).

The goal of advertising is to create an image of a dream world, highlighting the good while hiding the bad aspects of our culture (Bauman 2007, Jarlbro, 2006). And what better dream is it to see the world as a place where all colors of people, all sexualities and religious beliefs co-exist with each other, in the same country? To understand the desires of people, and how they are manifested as goods which can be purchased, we must study these images. Therefore, researching advertising is equivalent to researching culture. Within media and communication studies, studying advertising is often conducted via text or content analysis (Björkvall, 2003, Goldman, 1992).

Goldman stresses this importance of analyzing ads, as it can serve as a platform for cultural hegemony and ideology (1992). Using Marxist critical theory, he explains that modern advertising teaches us to consume not the product, but its signs (1992:19). Fowles (1996) agrees that it is useful to see ads as a cultural form in its one right, not too different from popular culture. What separates popular culture and ads is their ultimate goal. The goal of advertising is to gain something for the brand or company, while the TV series aims for

pleasurable gratification for the audience (Fowles, 1996:xiii). However the two fields intertwine, since they both “borrow themes, sounds, and personalities from one another; and frequently appear in the presence of each other”(ibid). McLuhan, noted for his critique on consumption and, yet states (1964:227):

The historians and archaeologists will one day discover that the ads of our times are the richest and most faithful daily reflections that any society ever made of its entire range of activities.

This way of viewing advertising as a cultural force and useful window to seeing power structures, is often overlooked. Leiss et al (1990:17) claims:

It is difficult to think of another contemporary institution that has come under such sustained attack from so many different directions(...) advertising is commonly dismissed as an institution that manipulates consumers and instills false values, it extols a materialistic and consumerist ethic, it deals in emotions and irrationality, that it leads people to buy unnecessary or overvalued items (in Fowles, 1996:65).

Fowles is critical to the way ads are discharged, and emphasized the elitism behind this stance:

Behind both critiques (non-marxist and marxist) there is an assumption of the offender and the offender. The offended is the misled public, the pliant, supplicating and malleable. The offender is the big businesses or capitalism, the one that can force anyone do anything (Fowles 1996:65).

Fowles equivalates this perspective with the disdain for popular culture, as a way for the intellectual class in society to uphold their power:

Marxists are supposed to be viewing history from the bottom up, so to speak, with the interests of the underclass in mind, yet when the public is represented as being stupefied minions of the capitalist class, as they are in the writings of the Frankfurt school, it is hard to believe that this characterization represents a sophisticated understanding of working-class culture is not elitism in a poor disguise (1996:67).

Advertising and the underclass

It is important to keep in mind, however, when Fawles brings forward the term “underclass”, one cannot help to think of the same definition, but explained differently by Bauman. The underclass is here as wholly cut off from the class system, a no-class, which threatens to undermine the class based order of society (Bauman 2007:138). From this perspective, the critique towards popular culture and advertisement which Fawles highlights can unlikely be seen as elitism towards the underclass, since the underclass is not taken into account entirely in the equation. According to Bauman, we live in a consumer society, a society which classifies everything and everyone from their market value:

They (homeless, beggars, alcoholics, single mothers etc) can not consume, and therefore they are not legitimate members of our society, they are a pain which we could all benefit without. (Bauman 2007:140).

Researching advertising can indeed say something about the people it is targeted towards, the people it excludes, and makes conclusions about underlying power structures within a society. Noteworthy here is the research on advertising from a feminist perspective (Goldman, 1992. Hirdman, 2002. Grabe, Hyde & Ward, 2008). While it is important to keep gender and empowerment in mind in all research, this thesis lays its focus on examining ethnic minorities and the commodification of a cosmopolitan society.

Audience instead of consumers

This thesis views the interviewees as audiences instead of consumers, since not all participants can be linked to the ads via their consumption of the specific brand. They are simply chosen as audiences to visual messages sent out to the public. The ads are understood as visual messages in hopes of gaining the attention of people in the public and online sphere. When categorizing the specific ads which will be discussed, the term “legitimation ads” by Goldman is deemed useful:

Corporations also seek popular legitimacy by joining cherished values and social relations to their corporate images (1992:85).

The term could be applicable when ads use photographic imagery of happy and wholesome familial relations as commodity signs (1992:87). The concept of legitimacy ads is useful when understanding the particular ads which this thesis focuses on. These ads have been chosen as representing legitimacy ads, the commodity signs are displaying a diverse but unified Scandinavia “without the messiness of political struggle” (Goldman, 1992:87). However legitimacy ads do not necessarily have to portray positive images, as seen in the Nike Culture ads, where famous basketball players in the US visited impoverished areas, displaying awareness of social exclusion and poverty, while not offering a solution or concrete action plan (Goldman, Papson, 1998). The ad positioned Nike as “taking a high moral ground, seemingly placing community interests above their narrow market interests” (1998:110).

Identity: Post racism

All the ads examined which are used as stimuli in the interviews display diversity are in all cases associated to the notion of ethnicity. Here the concept of post-racism, or “modern racism” becomes useful. Speaking from (a) US-context, one example of what the authors call modern racism is successful “black” tv series such *The Cosby Show*, which illustrates a successful black family in the US (Jhally and Lewis in Cottle, 2000:12). This representation, however, tells us nothing about the underlying structures of the success or the failure of the black people (ibid). Therefore, it causes white citizens who are watching to assume that the black people who can not measure up to their TV actor counterparts “have only themselves to blame” (Jhally and Lewis in Cottle, 2000:12).

Post racism animates contradictions and tensions that offer fertile ground for humor, and humor, in turn, directs attention back to often over-looked discrepancies and social failings (Rossing 2012:45).

This quote is used when discussing the TV series *Orange is the New Black* from a post racist perspective (Rossing 2012:45). The way the concept can be further understood is through previously mentioned legitimacy ad; Nike culture. Goldman & Papsons discuss the fact that star basketball players (sponsored by Nike) return to impoverished black areas in the US, as a way to show awareness, using sport as a way for young people to engage in something meaningful in contrast to the despair they feel due to the preconditions they are given. Goldman & Papson state that:

While these scenes capture a sense of the despair that permeates contemporary urban America, they also gloss over the crucial absence of structuring institutions that shape the lives of poor youth. (1998:110).

When analyzing ethnic minorities and the media, Hooks (1992:1) claims:

There has been little change in the area of representation. Opening a magazine or a book, turning on the television set, watching a film, or looking at photograph in public spaces, we are most likely to see images of black people that reinforce and reinscribe white supremacy.

When a minority is represented, they are given an assimilated representation (Cottle 2000:12).

Cottle asks:

Should representation portray the ‘negative’ realities of ‘raced lives’ and thereby seemingly endorse wider cultural typification or a more ‘positive’ imagery but then be accused of distorting reality? (2000:13).

Noteworthy here is that post-racism is a concept stemming from US-scholars, and this thesis is investigating audiences based in Sweden. However, the concept is still a useful tool when analyzing minority representations outside of the US, such as non-European immigrants in Europe, or in regards to the Sami culture in Sweden. This is highlighted in *Media of Post-Racial society* where Shin & Hutzler (2016) discuss how post racism can be useful within research on digital participatory media (Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton, & Robison, 2009; Duncum, 2011). Shin & Hutzler (2016) argue how digital media and networked connections can enable minority groups to produce and share non-conforming cultural messages amongst each other, highlighting the empowering effect of participatory online culture.

Minorities and the media

However, in regards to getting minority media produced in forms of production companies, Metykova (2016) notes how competing media markets might hinder the diversity of players in the market. Dahlgren (2013) agrees that market dynamics undermines civic participation as a whole. Regarding a supply of minority-interest programs; if the minority is not sizeable enough to be sold to an advertiser, it is unlikely get produced (Metykova, 2016). She

highlights how this can lead to polarization, for example non-westerners watching from their home countries instead of following the tv programmes in their new countries(ibid).

In a Scandinavian context, Tufte's research on young immigrant people in Denmark show that their own self-image often did not equate to the news media's representation; as seen when reporting on clashes between police and youngsters in their own neighborhood (2003). This shows how Edward Said's categorisation of "the west" and "the orient" is still present in the neighborhood of Norrebro in Copenhagen (Tufte 2003:85). The interviewees felt the media draws a line between Danes and the ones from ethnic minority backgrounds. The representation they saw of their area in the news, is not suitable to the interviewees own lived reality(ibid). This made them aware of things they did not think of before, thinking: "Is it really that bad?"(Tufte, 2003:187). Tufte concludes that having an immigrant or refugee background, compared to most Danish youth, brings a more complex process of identity work (2003). A need to navigate between more layers and worlds of meaning, producing many, not just one, senses of belonging (Tufte 2003:194). Agnes Heller states:

Modernity asserts and reasserts itself through negation. Only if several things are constantly changed, and at least certain things are continuously replaced by others, can modernity maintain its identity . . . Moderns do not acknowledge limit, they transcend it. They challenge the legitimacy of institutions, they criticize, and reject hem: they question everything' (in Robins: 1996:62)

This "modernity's dynamic" is always in this juxtaposition to the other, often the pre-modern. The pre-modern can be understood in the way the orient is contrasted against Scandinavia. The west and "the rest" – the rest are often understood and portrayed as not being as far ahead as the west, for example regarding gender equality or technology. This positioning remains as the essential condition of self-understanding, albeit never the essential condition of self-understanding, according to Robins, (1996:62). The essential condition of self-understanding is discussed by Hall, who understands identity as always being in a cultural context (1996). This means that there is no true objective self that exists within people. Instead, the way we understand ourselves, and others, depends on whatever we are experiencing at the time, due to factors around us (Hall, 1996). This can more easily be understood as the idea in which we all exist with different labels; some more strong components of our persona, some are less dominant in the way we interpret and perceive events and images. But what we can understand

about identity and the contingency of the self, causes us to always experience a never proper fit (ibid). This means that identification is, a process of articulation;

(..) There is always 'too much', or 'too little of' an over-determination or a lack (Hall 1996:3).

This means that while we might identify as something, there is always something there that is not completely us, something we wish were different; a compromise of one self. This becomes apparent in audience research, when a person might engage in a tv programme due to the way it gives them pleasure. But since the sender is another person, with their own mix of identities co-existing with them - it can never be a complete fit between the messages from sender and receiver. There might always some parts of the tv-programme which does not appeal, or even gets across, to the viewers.

Audiences and self-branding

In regards to audience research, recent work has focused on the relationship between people and the internet. The reactions and the way people make sense of media, is often analyzed in the way they use their own platform, for example their own Facebook page as a way to engage with others, or interact with, the media they experience. Napoli calls this the evolutionized audience, as before, we only sat in front of the radio or the tv, and were not able to talk back to the media displayed (2003). We are now able to comment and write to companies Facebook pages, even though they might not always answer. It is this type of reactions and interaction with others, in light of the ads, which are interesting, and important, to study and analyze, from the perspective of civic engagement, which will be expanded on further ahead.

Identity work within a neoliberal society, is labelled as self-branding according to Hearn (2012). In *Commodity Activism - Cultural resistance in neoliberal times* (Banet-Weiser & Mukherjee 2012), we understand the interesting paradox of taking moral or ethical stance, for or against a company. The authors explain how the most common way people participate in social activism, is by buying something, while claiming the political does not have to be in opposite position to consumerism. This branded culture we live in, results in citizens viewing themselves as brands as well. This could be understood as people representing their company, and living by the norms and values of their company (Hearn, 2012) . Further, and especially in this thesis, the self as a brand that must not be flawed. This can be understood in regards to

one's social media identity, as a means for expressing one's political opinions, or as a part of one's own platform which shouldn't be smudged for the whole internet to see. To continue this brandification of the self, the chapter now continues with Bauman's theories about our (consumption) society.

The consumption society

The consumer society build their goal on the goal of satisfying human needs (Bauman 2007:56).

However the market makes sure these needs are never fully satisfied, which leads to a constant search for satisfaction (ibid). The main attraction in the life of shopping is the ability to start over again, to renew oneself, this constant renewing is phony and devious, as the consumer gets used to visions of "new dawns" (Bauman, 2007:59). This consumption society makes us connect to others for only a short time as this sense of community is offered by the market, for example when we are wearing the same clothes or brands. However, it is not a real sense of belonging as it is completely subjective - it is only the moment, and not cemented (Bauman, 2007:126). Identity here is associated with products, since products today often come with an identity (ibid). Instead of getting to know the real selves, we are given new options every day to be someone new - someone better, with the help of products the market offers us (Bauman, 2007:128). Since we live in a society where recent news are most important and the old news gets forgotten quickly; the same goes for politics, and we vote for what is offered to us today. This leads to dissatisfaction as we are used to getting what we want instantly if we pay for it - while institutionalized politics does not give instant gratification, as the promises might change during the years and have a slower process to reach its goals (ibid 2007:165). Bauman means that there is a desire for one's own identity to be uplifted, to show everyone who we are, a desire which comes before the needs of the community (ibid). This is notable in the elections and the way young people think about politics (ibid). According to Bauman, in a consumption society, institutionalized politics is something that has little value, no effect, and mostly in the way of self-fulfillment (2007:165). We are consumers first, citizens second (if we are even citizens) (ibid, 2007:166).

Cultural citizenship and participation

Who decides what knowledge is important, and relevant, and how such decisions are made? (Doona, 2016:37).

Other scholars are able to offer us a more optimistic view than Bauman, about the way we consume, especially in regards to TV-programmes or music in our everyday life. This awareness can be understood by concepts as cultural or media citizenship, which is important for citizens to feel a part of something, especially citizens who do not belong to the middle class, or the academic elite. Here Hermes (2005:41) sees popular culture, as a way for people to identify themselves in different ways, for people to live out their hopes, fantasies and utopias. Popular culture falls the category of soft power, while engaging with traditional news media has more status, and prestige. Cultural citizenship points to how especially (broadly) shared popular culture offers us a sense of who we are, as well as a feeling of belonging, and what the scope of our rights and responsibilities are (Hermes, 2005:1). Hartley continues this discussion on cultural citizenship, which he titles “media citizenship” (1996) (1999). Media citizenship, for Hartley is grounded in his intent to undo the intellectual-made divide between “the knowledge class” and ordinary people (ibid). This is an important point to bring up, as culture should not go unproblematized in regards to power.

Understanding online behavior through class distinctions

What type of media we like, and how we dress, can be understood from a Bourdieuan class lens, where cultural capital is understood through taken for granted likes and interests. Essentially this is a questions of power, the more capital you have, the more power you have to express yourself. Therefore Hartley's argument on media citizenship, can be understood in Danielsson's work on how the distinctions of high and low classes, also understood as high and low cultures, is articulated in digital behavior (2014).

Danielsson shows how social class matters in young men's everyday relationship to digital media, despite Sweden often being mentioned as the forefront of equality and class is not always mentioned as a differentiating social, economic, and cultural factor (2014). In his work Danielsson interviewed 34 young men in Sweden, ages 16-19. These men were then divided into groups of the ‘capital rich’, the ‘upwardly mobile’ and ‘cultural capital poor’(ibid). One

of the interesting findings Danielsson highlights is that for the capital rich, the natural way of engaging in online discussions regarding societal issues (ibid) was taken for granted.

The other classes were often referred this as something which is not in their interest, and which is not for them, but that others are more equipped for (Danielsson, 2014). What is important to keep in mind in regards to previously mentioned 'doing citizenship', is to keep in mind how power, due to economic and cultural capital, are present factors. Factors which have a part in how audiences understand, and more importantly, react and interact with media.

Engagement

As we know, the media sphere can serve as a location where citizens can voice their opinions and experiences as well as interact with other voices (Dahlgren, 2011:67). Furthermore, Dahlgren claims that neoliberal society and the markets hinder this type of participation (ibid). An interesting paradox in regards to this seen on social media was the platform where an advertisement by Åhléns resulted in the civic engagement of a large number of people. Drawing on Carpentiers model of minimalist and maximalist participation (2011), this type of participation opens up to discussions about online participatory practices and how they are manifested through different types of ads. Carpentiers minimalist and maximalist scale of participation is a way of measuring the level of civic commitment through media, where the maximalist participation entails all citizens having equal part in decision making processes. The minimalist participation can be understood through concepts of clicktivism or slacktivism, for example where one signs up for a political cause via with their email (ibid). Carpentier argues that today, citizen are far removed from political decision making even though internet and social media is often talked about as a democratic tool, which he is critical of (2011).

Another way of grasping the way cultural interest might lead to civic involvement is through Dahlgren's circuit of civic engagement, which a way of mapping the different levels of political participation (2009). But to have political participation, we must first have civic engagement (Dahlgren, 2009). Civic engagement is linked to identity, which is one node in the circuit. The others are knowledge, values, trust, spaces, practices and identities (ibid). These factors are a way to empirically and analytically study and how it impact citizen's

engagement and participation in democracy. For democracy to happen, according to Dahlgren (2009), citizens must be able to encounter and talk to each other. They need access to each other to develop their collective political efforts, and contexts in which they can act together (ibid). Citizens must also be able to contact those who represent them, and to enter into the communicative spaces where policy and decision-making are discussed (Dahlgren, 2009:114). Mapping the pre-political, and its path towards the more institutionalized ways of doing politics, delivers a holistic view of the way people are engaging with media (ibid). Since this thesis aims to focus on the non-elites, and keeping in mind that interest for institutionalized politics are decreasing, this thesis will focus on the bottom levels of the civic circuit, while keeping in mind all parts which are entwined within political engagement.

As seen in this chapter, advertising as a cultural form is discussed from its various critiques. Advertising is a part of our culture, and this culture is a result of a consumption society we live in (Bauman, 2007). So when advertising tries to do good; as seen in the Nike ad, (Goldman & Papsion 1998) there are factors which should be critically assessed. The ads are dependent on the audience, and this section has explained audiences in regards to identity and its complexities, especially when the way an ad appears is not considered the norm of the country one lives in. The audience's reactions and online engagement in response to these ads, is understood by concepts of cultural citizenship and civic engagement.

METHOD

Now the overarching theoretical themes guiding this research have been presented, the thesis will explain the methodology and methods which have been used when gathering the data.

Methodology

The best way to find out what the people think of something is to ask them (Bower in Jensen, 2012:240).

Media audience research is about trying to understand how people might react to the message (Staiger, 2005). To understand a human phenomenon, we cannot only look at the action exclusively from the human and environment. We should assume less and investigate more (Corner, 2011:8). We must, for example, include identity and context for a deeper understanding of behavior. Social research is a conversation, which from a pragmatist

perspective, means that theory is not enough if we want to gain deeper knowledge (Baerts, 2005). Knowledge cannot be viewed from the outside as it is constantly evolving and created in context, in situations, according to Rorty (2005). The aim of this thesis is to move away from what Dewey would call a spectator view of knowledge (2005), which follows Flyvbjerg's suggestion that research should have a purpose towards social change (2011). Hence, the goal of the study is to give a clear contribution to society's practical rationality and explaining where we are, where we want to go, and what is desirable according to diverse sets of interests and values (Flyvbjerg, 2001:167). The rationale behind this thesis is not to merely point out a problem, but to gain a deeper understanding how people make sense of advertising messages and the overall cultural and political message these ads display.

There are different type of research available in this field. This thesis positions itself within the aim to increase and deepen our knowledge about events, processes or text (Vetenskapsrådet, 2011:29). People need to make sense of the world to be able to explain and understand (Ibid, 2011:30). Furthermore, universities and colleges need to cooperate with society. This means informing the public about their research, but also work for that these results come to beneficial use (Ibid, 2011:30). Therefore, this study has a higher purpose: to put issues of consumption and political engagement to the agenda. Thus, the goal of this thesis is to examine the way people make sense of these messages, but also to continue the discussion as an expression of civic engagement. After the first few interviews it became clear that all participants expressed their appreciation and that they enjoyed talking about these issues - an important aspect within the selected methodological framework.

Method

Listening to the world is a skill that needs to be trained (Seale 2012:207).

The best way to answer the research questions, and following the overall methodology of this thesis, is to ask people what they think. The most suitable way is qualitative methods with the possibility to deepen into the answers given. In this chapter, the rationale for choosing this method is explained, such as what tactics are used to avoid bias, and the reliability and validity of the study.

Qualitative interviews are used as an approach with a sensibility to open up dialogue and produce fuller accounts (Seale 2012:210). Semi structured interview guides allow the interviewer to go back and forth with the questions, making it conversational and informal. The interviews are seen as a conversation with a purpose (Seale, 2012:208), which means that the interviews are guided by themes which correspond to theoretical framework and research questions. It was informed to everyone that they would remain anonymous, and that their name would be pseudonymous, and that they could leave whenever they wanted during the interview.

Who am I? Bias in qualitative research

Our personalities show in the research (Bird, 2003:70). The research here stems from my own personal interests and reactions to ads leaning towards being political, and my own ambiguity towards the phenomenon. When conducting qualitative research, I as a researcher cannot completely leave my own emotions and perceptions and investigate a matter objectively. I am creating the facts as I go, much depending on my own ideas of the world and how things work (Burr, 2015). This type of subjectivity is a well-known argument against case studies and qualitative research (Flyvbjerg, 2001:67). As a solution to this potential problem, Burr (2015:172) as well as Flyvbjerg (ibid), emphasize on the researcher's role in acknowledging their own intrinsic involvement in the research process, constantly reflecting on their own role in the findings.

When conducting a qualitative research in this way, it is important to develop strategies to work against bias and towards verification. An example is what Darwin called “the golden rule” (Flyvbjerg, 2001:82). The golden rule states that when we find something that stands against our initial belief during research, these findings should to be written down straight away, or else these opinions are easier to fall out of one's memory(ibid). Strategies following the golden rule include taking notes during interviews, complementing them during the transcription, and again asking the participants to re-read and clarify their statements.

Due to the interpersonal interaction, the researcher is the co-producer of the accounts given (Seale, 2012: 210). The interpretation is a subjective one, which is why the pilot interviews and the interview guide have been discussed and read through with my supervisor prior to conducting the interviews.

Respecting the interviewees

Interviewing a person about their perceived reality, and the way they see themselves is not always an easy process as memories and self-conception might differ to how you see yourself, and how others see them (Gillham, 2005:24). One tactic of gaining a closely painted picture of reality was to ask the interviewees how they reflect of certain matters and their actions, but also asking them about their behavior. For example, the interviews revealed that even though most participants said they didn't really like sharing things online, they all have done it in different ways. In a natural and open way, this was important to notice and highlight in the conversation, that what we say or state about preferences and actions is not always the same as how we actually behave. Another way of increasing the studies reliability is by pointing out from the beginning that I am contacting the interviewees as a part of a research process, and that I am not a journalist and everything they say during the interview matters. This was repeated throughout the process of contacting and departing. This is to make the interviewee feel comfortable, but also to keep a distance between the interviewee and myself as a researcher, as my role is to be as neutral as possible while keeping a friendly and interested tone, enabling the participant to speak freely (Gillham, 2005:22-24).

One key aspect as a researcher is to listen and respect the people being interviewed, and allowing them space to express themselves in the interview setting. If this was successful one can never fully know, but one way of making sure the interviewees felt they had been listened to was to talk to them after the interview, where all interviewees expressed that they had enjoyed the conversation.

Finding the people

Inspired by grounded theory perspective, the collection of the data started by browsing online, reading articles surrounding the ads, to get an overarching idea of how they were presented (Charmaz, 2006:7). One must ask what is happening here? In grounded theory there is not a set frame on how the data should be collected. It is a continuous process of gathering, reading, reflecting and in that way developing a deep theory (Charmaz, 2006:7). This inspiration, a deductive approach, helped gather the various pieces of a puzzle and resulted in a basis for who to recruit. Conducting research through Facebook, I searched for the name of the ads

used in the interviews, and found people on Facebook, acquaintances and friends of friends, who had shared and commented on these ads publicly.

The dynamics of a group can be valuable in the beginning of the research (Gillham, 2005:91). Even though this thesis does not use group or focus groups as a method, group dynamics is still a present topic, which became apparent in the first stages of research, as well as being discussed during the interviews. These previous group discussions on Facebook were often mentioned in the interviews. One way I addressed the possibility of interviewees feeling watched or uncomfortable with the fact that I contacted them simply because of their public Facebook discussions, was by initially reassuring them from the first e-mail to them, of their anonymity in the study and presenting myself as a researcher, not as a private person or a journalist. It was important to limit the group somewhat. Therefore, it was suitable to interview candidates within the ages 18-35, as they are the group in Sweden who get the majority of their information from the internet (Davidson & Findahl, 2015).

Strategically choosing the people

As explained, I investigated Facebook to find people who seemed to be more active in sharing political or pop culture news. These people were sent a message with an explanation of the study, then asking if they would be interested in meeting me for maximum an hour. A snowball method in a sense, as I had mutual Facebook friends with most interviewees, and asked some of the interviewees to suggest someone who might be interested. However, there was a clear aim of the sampling which were dependent on the requirements. These guided the strategic selection which was made. Two pilot interviews were conducted which will be included in the data to some extent, and another 11 people. The interviews showed shared patterns early on, but theoretical saturation was reached when all 13 people had been interviewed. The focus of this thesis centers on civic engagement and advertising, although there was a conscious decision minding a gender diversity, sex or age will not be deeply analyzed in regards to the data. However, this would be an interesting and important part to further explore in another study. The participants were all currently living in Malmö or Lund. Half had studied at university and the other half worked in other professions without a university degree. Half had a Scandinavian background and half had an immigrant background. 'Background' simply means if the parents were both born and raised in

Scandinavia, if not, the interviewees fall into the 'immigrant background' category. All use social media.

To be clear, these were the requirements structuring the strategic choice of interviewees:

- 18-35 years
- Use social media
- Have showed an interest in sharing or commenting on these ads, or other societal issues online
- Half had an immigrant background, half were women, half were men, half holding university degrees and half without having completed a university degree

The semi structured interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes - to an hour each, with the possibility to continue the interview if they wanted to. All interviews have been transcribed and sent to the participants to clarify and approve their statements. The interviews took place in a calm café or in the person's home, and generated approx. 80 transcribed pages all together.

Testing the questions: Piloting

Two pilot interviews was conducted before starting the real interviews. Piloting is a way of ensuring self-awareness and quality, and also an important step in the research design process (Hill, 2012). The two pilot interview served as a way of understanding if the questions were well-formulated, and gave the possibility to revise and refine the questions further. The pilot interviews were discussed with academic peers and my supervisor, and highlighted an important issue: Whose voices should we let be heard within this research? The first pilot was with a 25 year old woman working within the advertising industry. This pilot was a way for me to gain a first step into the data collection and how it should be managed, as this research was first intended to only interview advertising professionals. Some difficulties quickly became evident. As Martinez (2016) notes in her research on online marketing towards children, elite interview respondents view the interview situation as a site where they have to justify their work (Barry 2002:680). This became noticeable during the interview. It became clear I was talking to a person representing the industry, a professional producer-perspective, even though the interview offered critical stances also from an audience perspective, which will be used in the data. The interview led me to try and conduct interviews with people

outside the world of advertising, to explore what will benefit the research questions better. The second pilot interview was conducted with an active user of social media for political purposes, a 25 year old journalist. One very important and obvious aspect became apparent in the second pilot interview. That we must not only have highly-educated persons, journalist or known debaters as interviewees, as this thesis wants to move away from elitist, knowledge-class voices. As mentioned before, there need to be tactics to be aware of the unconscious bias, and this was one of them. To increase the validity and reliability of the study, I should not recruit my on-group, highly educated, social scientists.

Elicitation material: talking about photos

Photo elicitation is based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview (Harper, 2002:13). It was being used in the interviews as it has proven to:

(..) elicitate longer and more comprehensive interviews but at the same time help subjects overcome the fatigue and repetition of conventional interviews (Collier, 1957:858).

As mentioned, this thesis will take active steps against subjectivity and confirmation bias, here photo elicitation can, according to Harper “be regarded as a postmodern dialogue based on the authority of the subject rather than the researcher” (2002:15). The photos were showed in the following order:

Image 1: Åhléns Lucia photo advertisement

The ad shows a young, circa 5 year old boy (However, the gender is not made explicit) wearing a white robe and electric candles in their hair, looking into the camera, smiling with a closed mouth. This ad was chosen as it caused much public debate, and social media reactions. It was recognized by all interviewees.



Translation: We have all the costumes, cones and lights for the awaiting lucia train. Shop now: bit.ly/2gn8pv1

Image 2. Åhléns Nordic tones photo advertisement

The photo shows five photos of five different female models standing against a grey, mountain wall. All women are wearing autumn clothes in the colors grey, black and white. One Asian woman with pink hair, one Caucasian woman with black hair, one dark skinned woman with a faux fur hat, one Caucasian woman with a head scarf, and one blonde Caucasian woman. This ad was chosen due to the previously mentioned controversies and public debate that followed.

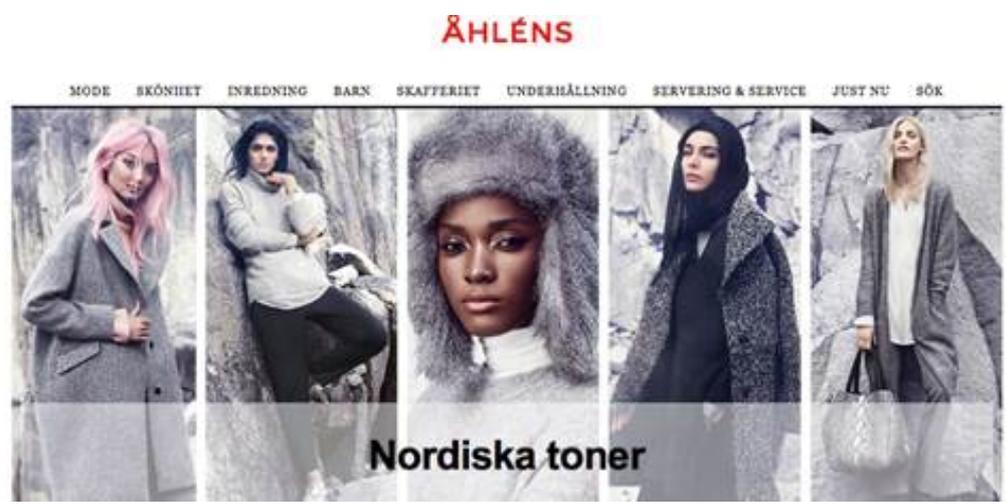


Image 3. Skånetrafiken photo advertisement

Skånetrafiken has overall responsibility for city buses, regional buses, local trains, Öresund and service trips in Scania. It is a part of Region Skåne which means that Skånetrafiken have a political leadership, as well as being a private stakeholder who has cooperations with companies driving the vehicles. The ad was partly chosen due to the mix of public and private sender. Skånetrafikens campaign displayed different people in billboards at the bus stops, showing how they have a different background to the busdriver. The most debated ad was the one chosen below. A man called Layth is standing in front of the camera, with a big smile. The ad reads “One of our bus drivers is an architect. Maybe it is Layth who is driving today? Welcome on board!” The ad was chosen due to the large negative backlash claiming how the original desire to “display diversity” (Efendić, 2016) instead, for some people, resulted in a display of structural racism (McKinley, 2016).



Video 1: TV2 *Alt det vi delar* video advertisement

Unlike the other ads, this was a two minute long video film. The sender is the Danish public service. This ad was chosen due to an overwhelming positive reception, but also by having a

public sender in the mix is a way for the interviewees to reflect on the overall consumption dilemma, to see if they reflect on if the sender is state owned versus corporations.

In the video, different groups of Danes get onto a stage. They then step into designated areas on the floor that define them by their classification: "The high earners" vs. "Those just getting by;" native Danes and immigrants; "Those who trust" vs. "Those we try to avoid." A narrator asks the people in the boxes questions; who's been bullied, or bullied others, who has had sex in the past week, or who loves to dance. This shows how the boxes get more mixed and how they encounter people they are similar to - but wouldn't initially think so. "It's easy to put people in boxes. There's us and there's them," says the voice of the narrator. He goes on to say "There's more that brings us together than we think."



Why qualitative interviews? - Validity and reliability

There are several reasons why I chose to only focus on semi structured qualitative one-one one interviews. Firstly, since political belonging and engagement is a sensitive topic, a group or focus group cannot ensure anonymity amongst the participants which is a valuable trait when talking to people about political values. The idea of face to face interviews is that people might feel more inclined to open up, and say things they usually wouldn't say in writing (Gillham, 2005:22).

Methods should also be chosen according to what best suits your personality (Seal, 2012:07), since the choice of method for a research task is decisive for the value and character of the results. Qualitative research "is often difficult and requires a good deal of experience, often even boldness" (Vetenskapsrådet, 2011:41). This quote highlights my own experience as a

researcher and my own documented experience of semi structured in-depth interviews. This is another reason for the choice of methods. The quality of the interviewees were high, as all research questions could be answered and analyzed after each meeting, as could the perspective of each individual. I met the interviewees in the spring of 2017, March and April. This thesis argues that within the same setting and by strategically choosing the same type of interviewees, similar results would be found by all researchers.

Open codes

When all interviews had been conducted, one transcript was managed by open coding, as a way to “immerse yourself in the first few bits of data and get a feel for what they say” (Rivas in Seale, 2012:370). All interviews were transcribed by me and then sent to each interviewee to read through and verify the statements had been understood and transcribed correctly. By using thematic analysis (Rivas in Seal, 2012:367), the codes were then divided into the following categories: Social media, media literacy, political, advertising and consumption, identity. Codes here simply means quotes from the interviewees that were divided into different categories. The quotes were manually, by scissors, cut out from the printed and transcribed interviews to be managed within the different categories. Further thematic analysis placed the categories within two overarching themes: identity and engagement. These themes will now be discussed and critically reflected in the analysis.

Analysis

The reason for this study is to understand young people living in Sweden thoughts and actions regarding advertising, identity construction, and online political engagement. The aim of this part of the thesis is to give voice to the people, and move away from the image of audiences and consumers as passive recipients of advertising messages. While discussing ads the interviewees made sense of their online reactions as well as their position in Swedish society. During the interviews, some recurring themes became strong, but also showed individual differences. It became evident that those who were more keen to have lengthy personal discussions about racism and belonging in regards to these ads, were those with a non-European immigrant background, while the conversations who focused more on critique towards capitalism and consumption, were with the interviewees who considered themselves more politically engaged. The interviewee’s digital behavior is analyzed from the perspective of class and belonging. Throughout the analysis I argue that citizenship should be extended

beyond the formal idea of doing politics, as the analysis shows how the mix of culture, politics and the popular should not be considered separate units, but as a mix which is becoming more present in a cosmopolitan world (Hartley, 1996:66). This analysis is therefore divided in two overarching parts, which often float into each other; civic engagement and identity.

List of interviewees

| Name | Age | Description |
|------------|-----|--|
| Petronella | 30 | Works in administration. Scandinavian parents, raised in Borås, enjoys music and opera. |
| Jonas | 22 | Studies his second semester of history at Lund university, Swedish parents. Politically active mother, interested in taking photographs. |
| Edward | 26 | Doing supplementary subject probably wants to study biochemistry after. Greek/Australian mother and Greek father. |
| Lisa | 26 | Working within police administration. Parents from Latin-American. Interested in people, travelling. |
| Adrian | 26 | Works in retail. Asian mother and German/Swedish father. Likes to cook on his spare time. |
| Elina | 26 | Elina, 26. Interested in advertising. Has worked 6 months in b2b advertising. Parents from Philippines. |
| Henrik | 24 | Has studied philosophy and has his own business. Swedish parents. Politically active father. Interested in people. |
| Leila | 26 | Studied to be a teacher but now will study HR. Loves travelling. Family from Palestine. |

| | | |
|---------|-----|---|
| Olof | 24 | On his last term of bachelor studies. From the Swedish speaking part of Finland, has lived in Sweden 2,5 years. Parents from Rwanda. Likes to watch sports. |
| David, | 30 | Studying city planning. Swedish parents. Last year of bachelor studies, enjoys his studies. |
| Andrea, | 28 | Works in art gallery. Swedish parents. Has a cat and enjoys painting and having coffee with friends. |
| Amanda, | 22. | Last semester of bachelor degree. Swedish parents. Lives in Lund. Highly motivated in studies and extra job. |
| Adam | 25 | Journalist, studying masters at LU. From the Swedish speaking part of Finland, has lived in Sweden 3 years. Likes to jog and drink beers with friends. |

Personal identity discussed through the lens of advertising

I could laugh at some stupid joke about Jews, but I would never laugh at a joke about the genocide in Rwanda, cause I'm from there (Olof, 24).

This comment was made after the recorder had been turned off, while discussing 'funny' ads such as a Chinese TV advertisement for laundry detergent; where a black man steps into a washing machine and comes out a Chinese man. The quote above highlights the thread narrating all interviews; the audience react to what is relatable to their personal story, their family situation, previous experience or general philosophy of life. Identity is related to the political, which the analysis will develop further on. When understanding political engagement, or more commonly the lack of, one should keep in mind how citizenship is often related to national belonging (Castles & Davidsson, 2000:156), a concept which is becoming more fragmented in today's globalized world. It is particularly important in relation to these ads, which all have a desire to display a cosmopolitan society. This could be understood as media hospitality, where the media, in this case advertisers are inviting 'the other'

(Silverstone, 2006). There are many “others” in Swedish society, as said, this thesis is focusing on non-European immigrants, and -or darker skinned people, as for example in the Lucia ad. So how does people living in Sweden make sense of these ads?

I don't understand what the fuss is about, I think it's nice, but I don't understand why it's such a big deal. It's breaking a lot of norms, but I couldn't care less about it, (...) it shouldn't be a big deal. (Amanda)

This sentiment was echoed by others:

I wouldn't see it as political and showing diversity, I only see it as a clothing advertisement. (Andrea).

I thought she had a nice fur hat! (Laughs) But now that I'm thinking about it (...) they want to show diversity, but that often goes right past me. I'm just thinking; that's how it is. Like, a natural part of society. (Petronella about when she first saw Nordic tones)

This quote by Petronella also highlights how the interviewees became more critical as the interviews went on, another interesting finding which will be more thoroughly discussed further in the analysis. All these women above had a Swedish or Scandinavian background. By the women who had non-European background, the ads were discussed more passionately and with a larger interest. Lisa, when being asked about advertising in general, mentioned the Nordic tones ad with the woman wearing a hijab before it had come up as elicitation material, as “awesome”. To Leila who was impressed by H&M for the same reason, although she herself did not wear a hijab:

What a cool company! When I walk around in there and I'm shopping, I feel proud of the store I'm in, I think it's really cool.

To Elina, who expressed a sense of pride in regards to the ads from Åhléns, claiming they were taking a moral responsibility. Here we can draw a line which show people with a non-European immigrant background versus those with a Scandinavian background and their reactions: not necessarily good or bad, but *more attentive* towards these images, showcased with a clear, vocal reception.

The many layers of one person's identity

As audience research often show; humans are complex beings. While the data might show that those from an immigrant background showed more interest talking about the ads, and reacted to them rather personally, all of the women above had contradicting ideas of the ads, which will be discussed further on. Nonetheless, all women showed an overall positive interpretation of the ads from Åhléns and TV2. This can also be explained by the fact that Åhléns is essentially marketed largely towards women. During the process of interviewing, it became clear that this was probably a bias I had made as these are the ads were chosen by me, as a woman, and consumer of Åhléns.

Important to express is that this thesis is not claiming that interviewees with a Swedish background did not react to the ads. However the more emotional and in depth conversation occurred with those who felt the ads were linked to something they can relate to on a personal level. As Lisa praising Åhléns Lucia ad. She explained the importance it had to her and her partner: “Because, if we have a child, it might look like this.”

As Staiger claims:

All texts have political and social meanings and values; positive or negative, reinforcing or contrary to the beliefs of their various readers (Staiger, 2005:3).

Here identity comes into play. According to Hall (1996), all personalities consists of a fluid mix of identities and currents, a sort of constant battle. It became clear how discussing these ads served as a platform for people to explore their own identity, their own battles, and their own position in Swedish society. This was expressed in various ways by the interviewees, for example:”I can’t say anything because I’m not the one this is about” (Adam about Nordic tones) to “This is about me” (Leila about Skånetrafiken). The interviewees of Scandinavian descent did not bring up their national identity in regards to the ad. Or often when they did, as we can see with Adam, since the ads were displaying multiculturalism in some sort, he said he cannot say anything, since he is a Scandinavian looking male. Here it is important to consider how complex identities are. Even though an interviewee had an immigrant background, they were not automatically more affected by ads displaying diversity. This was noted by Edward who had no previous knowledge about the ongoing political debate considering Nordic tones:

Because we don't necessarily fit into all the ethnic groups, we don't know all the conversation that's going on in regards to it.

Showing how even though he saw himself as an immigrant he is not a woman and therefore the ads of Åhléns women's collection, is not directed towards him. This mix of identities, and their differentiating subject position, became viable for another interviewee with a non-European background, Adrian. After seeing the TV2 ad, he felt very emotional and expressed how much he liked it. He said:

It's personal to me. When there's was a bisexual guy who went up and was bisexual, I felt targeted as a homosexual. I can see that I'm a minority, but that we are still part of the group, we are all part of society.

Tufte (2003) claims that having an immigrant background brings a more complex process of identity work, needing to navigate more layers and world of meaning, not just one, sense of belonging. This can be understood further by Hall who claims that identities always consists of a fluid mix of identities and currents, for example the trends from the outside world, like these ads. While this thesis argues that those with an immigrant background speak about these ads on a more personal level, of course there are other identities which matter in the reception in the ads. While Adrian might have an immigrant background, it became clear that the ad affected him the most was the one who displayed a bisexual man, different from the heterosexual norm which he has been raised with, but not identified as. Showing how identities are constructed through - not outside of difference (Hall 1996). This means, what is different about us is often what identifies us. What stands out from the crowd, is often what is more emphasized in your persona, according to Hall (1996). This can be seen in all ads, what separates them is how they stand out, in the same way as a homosexual person or dark skinned person in Sweden might stand out from the norm. Again we are reminded of complex issues about audiences, and the difficulties of generalizing groups, since we all consist of many sides, many trait characters gathered within one person.

Engagement

The public media debate that followed the ads were about Swedishness, racism, representation and other similar matters. Therefore the interviewees were asked if they would consider these ads political. This part of the analysis deals with the findings related to civic engagement.

Meaning making

In the interviews, it became apparent how talking and conversing often served as a way to articulate who we are and what we feel. The conversations opened up nuances of meaning not only to me and my research questions, but interestingly, to the interviewees themselves.

Q: Do feel more inclined to shop at Åhléns because of this ad?

Lisa: No, not really. In a way it's still Åhléns. Like ok, they're brave enough to do these ads, but it's still a company that wants to make money. Maybe that's how they do it?! They want to provoke, with the ulterior motive of gaining even more customers? Interesting..."

While discussing the Lucia ad, Lisa suddenly became aware of a new aspect. Exemplifying another recurring theme: how the interview itself served as a starting point to analyze the images role in contemporary politics and society. As claimed, the purpose of this thesis it to continue the conversation surrounding these ads, as an active choice of engagement. This aligns with Livingstone's encouragement considering audience research; we need to not only understand the world but also change it by contributing what we know of media and media audiences so as to encourage more participation, less exclusion, and more responsive civic institutions (Livingstone, 2013:24).

See I never thought about that! That's so annoying! (Laughs) (...) But yeah when you put it like that. That's so stupid why would they do that? (Edward about Skånetrafiken)

This shows how knowledge is created while talking to, and meeting others, and it was also a way for me as a researcher to give back to those who had given me their time. The interviews enabled me to offer them something in return, in this case new perspectives on why these ads were being under debate.

Audiences analyzing images: Media literacy

This brings us to the notion of media literacy. Civic engagement goes hand in hand with media literacy, according to Hobbs & Martens, this thesis understands media literacy as:

evaluating the quality and credibility of the content (...) Reflect on one's own conduct and communication behavior by applying social responsibility and ethical principles. Thus leading to social action and working individually and collaboratively to share knowledge and solve problems in one's private sphere as well as a member of the greater community (2015:121).

There is a reason why this should be highlighted within the concept of cultural and media citizenship. In their study Hobbs & Marten (2015) investigate media literacy amongst high school students in regards to news and advertising. In this thesis the focus lies on the reflection on advertisements solely, while connecting them to the bigger societal and political picture. Here we understand the inclusive nature of photographs. Everyone can see an image and reflect on its value in a conversational setting, while reading a news article is less exercised by the all parts of society.

What I want to stress here is the fact that all media matters and should be reflected on; thinking critically about an ad could therefore be considered a step to being more civic engaged. This is particularly important in the current global debate on populist movements which has been on the rise the past ten years, which is often linked with fake news and online media literacy issues. In their study, Hobbs & Marten (2015) emphasize how high school students with better academic results show higher levels of media literacy, highlighting an early example of what Hartley would call a divide between "the knowledge class" and ordinary people (1999). This divide continues later in life, as we can see not only in the lack of audience research in advertising, (see under situating the research) and also in the current political climate. This divide between the intellectuals and the rest, can be understood by Hillary Clintons statement in 2016, calling Trump supporters "(...) A basket of deplorables (...) The racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic (...) you name it." (Reilly, 2016). It is difficult to see how this division of people leads to a more unified society. Dahlgren stresses that the political emerges in and through talk, sometimes in a highly politicized sphere, other times in casual conversation, as the interviews conducted in this thesis (2013:46). What this thesis argues for is the importance of the invitation for talk. But how can we talk when we cannot understand what is said? The strength of these ads lie in the visual, and the very few words being said in

the ads, making it accessible for all types of people. It is up to each person to make up their minds of what they represent, and their messages might be perceived differently, but the nature of advertisement is their need for attention, their need to be talked about.

“I don’t share things on Facebook anymore.“

The majority of the interviewees claim that they do not follow a particular political party. The reasons for this was often mentioned that:

(..) There is no party that can completely represent one completely in all matters (David)

This feeling of not being affiliated to a one and only particular party was echoed by many interviewees. When it came to political discussions, such as the ads might conjure, the interviewees all claimed they do not like to participate in political discussions online, as

Facebook isn’t the best medium for it, people get pretty snarky behind a keyboard and that’s not how I want to discuss things (Edward).

However, today, civic engagement is often expressed on one’s Facebook page. Napoli (2010) calls this the revolutionized audience, as today, due to the internet, we are able to talk about ads in a public space easily reachable from our homes. The interviewees were recruited considering this, by beforehand scanning their Facebook to see if they had shared or commented on civic matters in any little or big way, which they all had, in one way or another. However, most interviewees claimed they do not like sharing political statements on Facebook, which showed a paradox of the way I had viewed them, and their own self-image of their digital behavior. It also aligns with the critique of the internet, as not being the democratic, participatory tool it is often portrayed as (Dahlgren, 2013, Carpentier, 2011). However we must remember that identity depends on the situated social practice “who we are live in the way we live day to day, not just in what we think or say about ourselves” (Wenger, 1991:151) which means that the particular situation might need a particular social identity within us.

Understanding digital behavior

This interesting discrepancy of actual online behavior vs the behavior the interviewees put forward, can be understood in the book *Spreadable media*, (Jenkins, et. Al, 2013) which explains how we feel faster than we think (Shirky 2009). As Jonas claimed:

I don't share things on Facebook anymore. Unless I feel... Like, I have to share this. The last thing I shared was the siege of east Aleppo. I felt it would be strange to not share. Because it is such a huge disaster of our time. (...)

Here social media, and the fast way we are able to share things, becomes a tool for the impulsive, emotional side of humans. As seen, the self is a reflexive project (Dahlgren, 2009:63), and we adjust ourselves due to the situation we are in. Therefore, when later talking about oneself in a calm, reflective environment like the interview, most interviewees would describe themselves more reminiscing of the rational, cultivated human (Butch, 2008, and Frykman & Löfgen 1980) Which was explained by David who said he could make a comment but “Doesn't have the need to yell it out to 500 people” on Facebook. Therefore the third person effect, apparent in all interviews, can be seen as a way of trying to cope with one's own perception of self, by describing what they are *not*. Most interviewees claimed they are not bothered by the images in the ads, but that *others* might be.

Online distinctions

Cultural citizenship emphasizes the sense of belonging we might feel when watching a TV series or the cultural belonging of city, rather than belonging to a country. But what is culture, why do we like the things we like? This is a big question and one way of answering it is by bringing class to the discussion. Take Millers example on food (2007), where he uses food distinctions as an example to signal one's class; how the table is set or how fast food is commonly known as a food for the poorer, lower class (2007). As seen in David's description above, there is a positioning of oneself as *not* like those people who yell on Facebook all the time, but as a person who can contain oneself and only share things which will have importance. Furthermore, most interviewees agreed that advertising does have an impact, but few gave specific examples of how. Influence by the media is something which the individuals could decide for themselves, and not dependent on external factors. This was echoed in the perception of the ads as well, it was never the interviewees that have a problem with the ads,

but it was someone else, someone not like them. Then who is this person which is implicitly spoken about and referred to?

Class as digital divisions

In Danielssons (2014) excellent *Digital distinctions* he brings up how, even though often viewed as a thing of the past, class is still present in Sweden today. Although the internet has been mentioned as a tool for democracy and equality, the class structures, and class distinctions, are exercised in this sphere, as it is in any other sphere (2004:12), in his dissertations he explains that there are indeed high and low digital styles.

This thesis does not explore the complete in-depth family background of each interviewee, therefore I cannot make claims absolute about their class. However, if we are returning to Hall's idea of identities as becoming, the way you describe a class you do not like, is a way of separating yourself from it. Even though you may belong to the lower classes, you might talk about it like you are not, in a way, through talk, becoming the class one wished to belong to. As I mentioned, this thesis acknowledges a line between the knowledge class and ordinary people, which is present in global politics today. Danielsson (2014) explains that those with a higher cultural capital, value education more, as opposed to the lower classes. Therefore when the interviewees expressed that others might be more influenced by ads them, this can be referring to the less media literate class. And the use of media in the classes with more cultural capital, is more sparsely used and more regulated, in contrast to the lower classes (ibid). Emphasizing the rational, non-emotional side of one's online behavior is a way to highlight the difference between oneself, the middle class, from the working class. The working class are the racist, the lower classes, the ones who fall for populist rhetoric we can understand by the media framing of those who vote for anti-immigrant parties and populist politicians, as previously seen in Clinton's description.

Are these ads political?

In regards to whether or not these ads were perceived as political, Dahlgren argues how political action must be incorporated in the taken-for-granted, routine life (2009) This importance of habitual events, Silverstone (in Gauntlett & Hill, 1999:9) and Bird (2003) highlights how everyday routines can be analyzed as important small pieces when understanding power and ideology. This thesis is not viewing the ads as political actions, but

all interviewees felt that the ads could offer something little or big, yet meaningful, to Swedish society.

It's a very political statement to make with this image. It feels like they were prepared that the debate would come (...) If you have any idea of what's going on in society, with right wing currents, politically, and in all of Europe.. (...) Maybe that's what they wanted, for it to be a big deal" (David about Lucia)

There was another reason to ask if the interviewees considered the ads political or not. By phrasing the question in this way, the interviewees had to reflect on what political means to them. Cultural citizenship means moving away from a national identity, and finding a sense of belonging in other spheres, for example pop culture (Hermes, 2005). This can be further understood by the term 'sub activism' (Bakardjieva, 2010 in Dahlgren, 2013:54) which is when:

(..) norms are questioned, challenged and negotiated in the everyday life (...) where issues of justice are raised before the political has surfaced or any connections to the political has been made.

A sort of civic preparation, according to Dahlgren (ibid). These concepts are increasingly important and should be valued as a bridge between the popular and the political. If an image in corporate advertising serves as a platform to discuss nationality and ethnic belonging in Sweden, it might offer much to someone who lacks the educational capital to engage in these discussions otherwise. This could be understood by Lisa who claimed she needed much knowledge to share things:

If I share something, it's something funny or something with animals, because I like animals. But like, nothing political, nothing which shows what stance I have on important issues, honestly. I think I'm too coward to show that on social media (...) I don't know how I would have taken criticism or how I would deal with a political discussion. I've never experienced it but I consciously avoid it.

The last sentence above, highlights an important finding from Danielsson (2014:368) when he uses Bourdieu's term "Refusing what they are refused" in regards to the lower classes not being interested in engaging in political discussions, much due to their lack of educational and cultural capital from home. The lower classes referred and reserved this type of activity for

someone who knows better about the issues than they did. Again we see the internet as a space, for those with higher cultural or political capital, free to express themselves, while the lower classes feel less entitled to carry these discussions (2014).

Facebook a tool for self-branding

This quote also highlights how identity, or self-branding, takes place on one's Facebook page (Hearn, 2012). To be able to form an opinion about current affairs, a person needs to have all the knowledge about a matter, before expressing something about it. Here we see how posting and sharing instead moves away from the actual debate, for example consumption and Swedishness, to being more about the person behind the message, and how their brand, their personality, will be judged and perceived by others. Here we can claim that discussing something online, is influenced by the fears of being condemned, or not being able to portray oneself as aware of societal issues. To not say is more important than the risk of smudging one's personal Facebook brand. Returning to media literacy, where most interviewees expressed they enjoyed the conversation and gained new insights, it becomes clear that interaction with others, is one way of enhancing civic engagement. Therefore it becomes problematic when the online self, needs to be completely aware of all matters before engaging in them, as they feel they are not entitled to, or perhaps afraid of being exposed as not knowledgeable. This was expressed by many interviewees and how they all reflect on how their internet behavior might have social repercussions. Whether it's your future job as a teacher (Leila) or future employers might Google you (David). This highlights how the Facebook post becomes constant, forever imprinted in one's online identity.

Sharing what is closest to the self

When asked about what they did share, it was always something the interviewees felt they could completely stand up for. When understanding why it is so important to keep one's personal online brand intact. We can keep in mind Bauman's take on modernity (2007). Since we live in a world that is constantly changing, more so now than ever, the only thing we can have control over is the self, one's own brand (Bauman, 2007). As seen in the data, this sense of the self is expressed and made possible by social media - an image we can have complete control over. This uncertain, ever changing world is exemplified in the see the political climate, as a sphere where power is changing, a place where citizens feel they have little control over what is happening. According to Bauman, people seek a community, as well as

wanting to be individualistic (2007). Bauman sees the market as a place where this sense of belonging is offered. Markets, and consumption as a whole, offers people a “new dawn”; a chance to become someone new, to be an upgraded version of oneself. Here the image of a dark skinned boy as Lucia might offer us an image of a better world. An image of a Sweden where all Swedes live together in harmony no matter of the color of one’s skin.

The fact that advertising are following the political debate, often referring to the right wing currents in Europe and globally, was often brought up during the interviews. The data shows how this connection was made by many respondents:

If you have knowledge and you care, then you would see this ad as political. With the anti-immigrant currents in Europe, and Trump, everything he represents. Which is to divide the world in two - the ones who hate and the ones who love. Advertising wants to stand out, which it’s doing here with a political message (Elina).

Åhléns want to show that they are progressive, and they are making a political point, today this is a political standpoint. We are reacting to it. It's not the norm. (Adam)

I think it’s good to bring up discussions in something as simple as clothes (Andrea).

We see how these advertising images offer them a sense of hope and belonging in different ways. Here we see a clear example of Goldman’s legitimacy ads (1996) and the feeling of comfort they offer. The ads can then be seen as reflecting the political debate of good and bad, in visual images. If ads are crystallizing what is most desired in society, the ads are displaying a political desire. The message is delivered visually, however, exactly what is desired is not pinpointed nor suggested explicitly in a political solution (Goldman, 1996).

Ads and political engagement

In regards to institutionalized political engagement, the interviewees which would define themselves as left during the interviews, and they were also the three people focusing more on the capitalist underlying force, which is a common finding in audience research regarding ads (Jarlbro, 2006). One person claimed they didn’t like advertising, but these ads were “marginally better” as it offers something norm breaking to society. Another interviewee said that “if we are going to have advertising it's better to have these ads then to have what was before, but it's not like I’m saluting the company”. To a third interviewee who has discussed

the Lucia ad with a friend on Facebook with the main purpose to talk about the racist comments, while the interviewee said his agenda was more to critique the company:

I want to create a discussion about, yeah you're highlighting these racist comments, which is good, but look at these assholes using a child for marketing (Edward)

This idea of Åhléns exploiting an individual was also mentioned by Henning who claimed it is a nice image, but "they are using a child to sell more".

The critical audience

Most interviewees expressed a positive reception to the norm breaking element of most of the ads, often linking it to political awareness and responsibility from the company's side. At the same time, many interviewees expressed that, in the end it's about making money or gaining goodwill for the company. Only one interviewee, Leila, said that she felt more inclined to shop at Åhléns due to her positive reactions of the ads, while the others said they didn't care or felt indifferent towards the companies or organizations, even though they might like the image. While Leila felt proud of the company, she concluded that the end goal was to make money, but:

I personally think there is a double winning here. Even if the company is not doing it out of moral responsibility.

One key thing many interviewees expressed it that the norm breaking shouldn't be too obvious, that way lead to a phony multicultural representation (Henrik) (Leila) This boomerang effect, bringing an opposite reading to the preferred reading, could be seen in the perception of the Skånetafiken ad. This was the ad which that was the most problematized as being discriminatory or racist, according to the interviewees. Hutzel & Shin (2016) discuss how post racism is a theoretical concept well used in an educational setting, allowing people to discuss images from concepts of how non-whites and minorities are represented in different media. There was an awareness from my side to present the ads from both sides; highlighting both the praise as well as the critique which had been brought up in Swedish media (See under Photo elicitation). This was extra useful in regards to the Skånetafiken ad, since it opened up to engaged discussions with the interviewees.

The failed example: Skånetrafiken

In contrast to the other three ads, the Skånetrafiken ad stood out as a bad example of trying to show integration, but failing. Almost everyone thought the ad had flopped with their purpose of trying to display diversity. Some interviewees reacted strongly during the interviews, such as Elina:

Horrible! God damn it's horrible! It's just so wrong. It highlights a big problem in Swedish society and its being used as advertising.

Showing how the audience connected the image to a common stereotype: the highly educated immigrant who cannot find work within their field. This makes us return to the issues of post racism and ethnic minority representation in media: Is all ethnic minority representation good representation? In regards to the audiences reactions to Skånetrafiken, the answer is no. This is due to the stereotyping, a common critique from post racist scholars which emphasizes that while ethnicities are represented in television media, they often need to fit into all the stereotypes of their ethnicity (Enck & Morrissey, 2014). This was acknowledged by most of the interviewees. However there was one person who liked the Skånetrafiken ad, despite acknowledging the perspective given forward by the majority of interviewees he felt:

I don't think working as an architect is a finer job than working as a bus chauffeur. Why would he be in the ad if he doesn't like his job? (...) The most important thing is to ask him, and not assume that he is oppressed (Henrik).

This irritation of over-analyzing ads was mentioned by another interviewee in regards to Nordic Tones. The interviewee described Sweden as a country where “people always need to find things to complain about”. He exemplified this by comparing advertising in his mother's country, the Philippines:

Everyone in the ads in the Philippines are White or half-Asian-half-White. That's not how the majority of Filipinos look like. But the people don't complain about that, they complain about the crime and corruption.

Showing how the concept of post-racism is seen as overly deterministic, and is not necessarily embraced as an analytical tool or a way of looking at the world, just because a person has an immigrant background.

Legitimacy ads

In regards to the women wearing a hijab in the Nordic Tones ad, two interviewees noted how the model, and all the other models, are still conventionally beautiful (Edward, Petronella) and highlighting the lack of diversity in body types. This echoes Cottles conclusion of when ethnic minorities are represented, they are often given an assimilated representation. Or as one interviewee mentioned, ethnic minorities are often given an overly, exoticized version, as one interviewee mentioned that black women are commonly portrayed in exotic environments in fashion magazines (Elina). These discussions brings us back to Goldman's notion of legitimacy ads (1992), as Jonas put it:

They are exploiting current leftist opinion regarding representations and equal display of diverse people.

This is being done, while also creating what Bauman (2007), Jarlbro (2006), and Goldman (1992) would call a fantasy society. The interviewees often seemed stuck in between these two representations, that while the ads are showing society as it is today, they are not showing the whole picture according to Henrik:

In advertising every friendship group has a super blonde Swede, a Muslim, a dark skinned, equal amount of girls and boys. That's not how all friendship groups look like.

Discussing advertising with the interviewees therefore resulted in a cynical approach, while at the same time seeing advertising as an unexpected force to bring out representations of people not being shown before. This positive approach can be understood due to the many years of lacking ethnic minorities in media (Downing & Husband, 2005), and therefore fixing a long overdue problem, as well as following the ongoing public Swedish debate of immigration and 'Swedishness'.

Similarities with commodity feminism

As previously mentioned: the issues of post racism were raised by many of the participants in regards to Åhléns ads, that there is something not completely genuine with the portrayal, but that it did not matter, because it's for a good cause.

I think it's good, but they're being a bit sneaky, they can claim that it's not about the models looks but the clothes, they give themselves space in the interpretation of the image. (Olof), in regards to nordic tones.

This resembles the ambivalence which often follows the debate on commodity feminism, where feminism is used as a tool to sell goods by corporations, which many scholars argue is diminishing and belittling the feminist struggle Gill (2007) & McRobbie (2009) in (Jalakas 2016). While other scholars, such as Banet-weiser, see the matter in the perspective of cultural citizenship, where one should not rule out feminism just because it comes in different shapes (2004). This ambivalence is seen in the reception of the ads which this thesis deals with. The interviewees felt there might be something not genuine with the images, while also appreciating their existence in the media landscape. This ambivalence could however not be seen regards to Skånetrafiken, where the interviewees felt diversity is clearly used as a ploy and trend, not presented in a reliable way - creating an opposite effect with the audience.

Minions or critical consumers?

Overall, we can see how the interviewees clearly stand against the theories which is often put forward from scholars from the Frankfurt school: seeing advertising as the offender, and the audience as the offended. The audience might seem positive towards the messages put forward but they are not always fully convinced, since many keep in mind the driving force behind these ads; to gain something for the company. This aligns with Fawles critique of how the Frankfurt school only sees consumers as mislead, pliant minions which easily fall into the hands of the offender; the big businesses and capitalism (1996:65). It also highlights how people often make up their own meanings and their own position towards what is provided to them by the industry, and we can see the audiences as active in regard to what meaning they want to take from the ads, not always aligning with the intended message (Hirschman & Thompson, 1997). However, the critique given by the interviewees proved to be often contradictory and more of a resigned acceptance of the society we live in, as an imperfect

world. Few interviewees criticized the underlying structure, for example the consumption society.

The right to be seen

For the majority of the interviewees, the most important mission of these ads was the fact that they were showing all types of people in advertising. The interviewees often paraphrased the words “right to be seen” when considering immigrants and ethnic minorities living in Scandinavia. Thompson discusses seeing and visual culture in regards to how we view political individuals, but his reasoning is also helpful when understanding the way these ads are discussed by the interviewees. The interviewees were all of the age where they have used the internet since they were quite young, visual impressions from websites, as well as having visual representation online (Myspace, Facebook) as a taken for granted part of life. Interestingly, the right to be seen, connoted to a morally liable sender, the interviewees portrayed the advertiser as a civic actor that needs to answer to society. The sender has a responsibility to show the other in a respectful way, Thompson explains, to be seen here is not merely that we open our eyes and see the ad (2004). Seeing is shaped by the broader set of cultural assumptions and frameworks (Thompson: 2004:36). When the interviewees are arguing for the right to be seen they are in fact arguing for “the spoken or written cues that commonly accompany the visual image and shape the way in which the images are seen and understood” (2004:36) Which in this case, as previously mentioned, was often in regards to the political climate, the good and bad, the liberal versus the populist. Therefore a conclusion can be made that the companies, and images they offer, has a civic value. But what is interesting here is the dissonance between arguing for rights in a way which resembles political and human rights, applied for corporate sphere, particularly in regards to the Åhléns ads which the interviewees often mentioned as a positive force. This shows that while companies are becoming a stronger force in society, citizens feel as they need to take into consideration the power they have and the responsibilities that come with this power.

We are what we own

Bauman has a different take on ‘the right to be seen’. According to Bauman we all want to feel desirable, drawing the comparison to the struggle we go through when we are dating, since we all want to be chosen as a life partner. This need to be desired is big part of our

consumer society. Goods and brand carry value signals (Goldman 1992), and therefore the products we own hold different identities (Cronin, 2000:1). When these are accumulated our own identity gets stronger, as we can see within the commodities we own the different value signals which come with our bought personality. We become the values we own. But if the people in the ads, selling the commodities which are supposed to represent our values do not look like us, we can never be a truly desirable commodity without matching the image that carries them. Therefore the “right to be seen” as an ethnic minority, turns in to the right to be a desired commodity according to Bauman. What we can take from these two standpoints is that the people interviewed are deeply enmeshed in both a visual and a consumption culture, which is taken-for granted. The claims and opinions the interviewees expressed were shaped by these circumstances. However, this does not mean that the interviewees cannot think outside of these worlds, (which is explained under the chapters meaning making and the critical audience) but the overarching way of understanding and changing the world is often played out within these spheres.

Conclusions

The aim of this thesis has been a pursuit to investigate what all interviewees expressed; surely we are all influenced by ads, but we don't know exactly how. But as the analysis reveals, ads are also influenced by us, and political agendas. What was noticeable when The Elicitation material was presented, was an undeniable atmosphere which was hanging over the talk like a cloud. A cloud of undefined political angst, often mixed with cynical or resigned acceptance regarding institutionalized politics, both globally and in Sweden. However, the cynicism was mixed with hope for something better, displayed visually in front of them, but also combined with the knowledge of how bad it can go when one tries to do something good and failing, as Skånetafiken, which served as an example in the disbelief of ads and how they are just putting on a show, which we often fall for.

Advertising is a medium which is often overlooked or disregarded for having any chances of serving as a starting point for civic interest. This dismissal is understandable, because ads are, and should be regarded to their final intention; to make us do what they want us to do. Interestingly, this definition could also be applied to the ultimate goal of politics.

Discussing ads as media literacy

I believe ads like these, if they are discussed, can serve as an emancipatory resource for those lacking in the cultural or political capital for online civic talk. If citizens can talk about these ads, it can definitely be a starting point to civic engagement. But for this engagement to happen, and continue, there needs to be spaces where they can be talked about without the discussion being reserved only for intellectuals. As seen in the thesis, the skills of critical analysis of ads, can be developed, if people are able to reflect, think and talk about these matters in a relaxed, non-judgmental environment, where their opinions are not at risk of being critiqued and judged. A space where the comments which are being made are not under pressure to gain as many public likes as possible.

Personal identity

The way the audience react to these ads are clearly, as we know by all audience research, dependent on one's own identity. But one finding which made a clear division was how those with parents from outside of Scandinavia, where the people who paid more attention to the ads, and put a bigger personal value in their presence. As seen in the quote given by Lisa, the

Lucia ad had an emotional meaning since if she would have a child, it would not look like the stereotyped white, blonde, Lucia. While she was looking at the ads she was perhaps looking at the future, envisioning one's own destiny in relation to the images we are exposed to. This future was made unsure and disrupted due to the hateful comments which the ad received, and it made Lisa reflect on the future of her imagined child, if she would post photos publicly, would it get hate comments too? These feelings towards the ad were then further complicated when discussing Åhléns as using a political debate to gain revenue. All these thoughts came while speaking, showing how critical thinking, and the political, emerges from talk.

Talking as engagement

Talking might create understanding of one's situation, but life happens in the everyday practices which we do not reflect on and simply take for granted. Here another complicated and interesting theme arose, the discrepancy in how one perceives themselves and whether or not one acts according to these descriptions. This discrepancy was manifested when the interviewees described themselves as not engaging in discussions or sharing things online, while it was a behavior they all engaged in. Again, through talk this was acknowledged by the interviewees, and explained by the emotional, fast qualities of social media. The gut feeling, bringing out a good or a bad response; share first, reflect later. When an ad has reached this behavior, they have obviously reached their goal. Unless it is Skånetrafiken, which caused a reaction, but not a good one, according to the interviewees, while referencing to the stereotype of the unemployed academic immigrant.

But as the analysis shows, the further you dig into the concept of identity, the harder it is to make statements about different groups. The way you see, feel or make sense of something, depends on the position you have within the particular situation. A human being consists of many layers, which is why it is hard to measure or try and predict an audience's reaction to ads. One person might have an immigrant background but still think the ads have zero civic power to them, due to their critique of advertisement as a capitalist scheme. Another interviewee might not see civic value in analyzing these ads deeper, simply because they are not interested, which can be explained by the lack of educational capital or interest in discussing societal matters. Here class is a useful dividing line when understanding why people describe themselves in certain ways, but also explaining why online political debating is not something they feel like doing. Bourdieu's line 'Refusing what is refused to you' (Danielsson, 2014:368) helps us understand how taken-for granted political and educational

capital is when it comes to expressing oneself on political matters, especially online. This personal online brand should be shielded, unless you are a very strong debater; then the internet is yours to exist in, and freely express yourself in.

Doing citizenship

What has been a driving force in this thesis is to expand academic discussions about critical images to those who are not usual visitors of the academic bubble. To talk about these ads with thirteen people has been one sort of engagement, a way of “doing citizenship” which is one way of understanding who we are and what we make of this world (Hermes, 2005). As the data shows, citizenship is not a present virtue amongst people living in Sweden, it is not a trait most people would consider as a part of their identity. This exemplifies Bauman's deterministic theory of the picture he paints of the shopping-loving, uncaring citizen. But this all or nothing anti-capitalist ideology may lead to a crippling, non-constructive conclusion. Choosing audience research as a method was a way to work against these black and white conclusions. The interviews did in fact, serve a way as understanding how citizenship is not a subjectivity, but a practice (Dahlgren, 2009) (Hermes, 2005).

There has been an awareness, while interviewing, to not want to fall into the rabbit hole of dismissing everything (ads, opinions, feelings) as a capital hoax. While cultural citizenship expands the notion of citizenship, it should not be spared of power analysis. Power here, is the unequal playing fields we are born into, also known as class. Class distinctions should still be considered, especially in contrast to the emancipatory and democratic discourse which often follow the discussions about ‘the internet’. By images like the ones in the ads, we see how the political is brought down to an everyday, contextualized practice, available for all citizens to make sense of while they are walking past them on the street. We see how advertising, which Fawles (1996) argues resembles pop culture, is a way for the non-knowledge class to feel part of a community.

Understanding ads: Political division and Ambivalence

To make sense of these ads is to make sense of one little piece of the big and confusing world we live in. As Goldberg (1992) argues, when we see ads, we are not supposed to want to consume the products, but we supposed to want to consume its value sign. What value sign is being consumed, discussed, and approved? As the interviewees said, these ads are here

because of the world we live in. The world is divided in two; the ones who love and the ones who hate (Elina). The way these ads (except Skånetrafiken) can be understood as the good guy of politics. As understood by a common division of people; the smart ones vs and the populist ones; the deplorables, the racists. These divisions are easy to make in an uncertain world, especially seen in anti-immigration movements where we feel like we have little control about what's going on. The lack of interest for institutionalized politics show how there is little faith for the state and the collective. What do we then have left? One answer to this, as seen in the analysis, is the self. The internet is made up of miniature selves which is the only thing we are in control of, which shows why the importance of showing one's best side online becomes so important. However, amidst this dystopian Bauman (2007) vision of the lonely bowlers, we do have critical reactions to these ads, which opposes the division of good and bad politics and how hard it is to completely agree with one side, or completely dismiss the others opinion. Showing how, if they are included in the discussion, citizens do believe in a world which needs to be discussed and assessed, for ourselves, but also for the sake of others in our community. Just because the self is important does not mean the value for the community is gone. Neither are the interviewees buying all the messages which are being sold to them from advertisements without problematizing its content. As all the interviewees reflected on, we are all affected by ads but we can never know to what extent, therefore if advertising is an force which is manipulating all of us, let it at least represent the 'good' side of politics. The ones who want to unite us, the ones who care about people in need, and the ones who can envision a cosmopolitan society. This is made apparent by the mesmerizing power of advertising, and the ability is has to provide us with a utopian world.

Towards an inclusive methodology: Strengths and weaknesses

In regards to methodology, the thesis stems from the frustration of the exclusiveness of research in advertising. I previously questioned the benefit of conducting critical research into campaigns and consumption that is not disseminated, and more importantly understood by the people involved. So how far did this thesis take this inclusive stance? I made a conscious decision to reflect on *who* is being interviewed; this research did not want to give voice to known debaters or activists, the voices which often speak the loudest within debates. Instead I wanted to talk to 'ordinary people' who might have an opinion about the subject, a stance which required some reflexivity on my part. There is no such thing as neutral research, and while I aimed for diversity in regards to Scandinavianism and gender, there are other personal

biases that most definitely influenced my choice of interviewees. For example, what types of results would this thesis show if I would have interviewed only people over 50, those who have not grown up with an online personality, like all interviewees? And most importantly, if this project would only have targeted the people who actively spread hate around these advertising images? If we remember Heller's quote of modernity, and how it can be positioned in relation to the unmodern others;

Modernity asserts and reasserts itself through negation. Only if several things are constantly changed, and at least certain things are continuously replaced by others, can modernity maintain its identity (...) (in Robins: 1996:62)

This quote can be understood in regards to the ads in several ways, for example in Nordic tones, where the debate that followed had two sides; those who were against the commodification of the hijab and those who felt their representation were needed. While this thesis started with the assumption of the modern against the unmodern; which is the orient, the non-European immigrants in Scandinavia. The starting point to this project is the skepticism that occurs when this group is enters media representations, as a sense of media morality. This new found "right to be seen" for those with a Swedish immigrant background has been assessed critically, due to the fact as the presence is being offered by corporate industries. However, during the course of writing this thesis it turned out the 'other' in Swedish society does not necessarily have to be a person with immigrant background, but in this context, the other was the mysterious online troll who made racist comments about the Lucia ad. The interviewees expressed an ongoing positioning against this imagined person. This other came to represent the populist movement, the ones who hate, as opposed to those who are trying to make the best out of this world, the ones who love. Furthermore, this is a person who lacks the educational capital to understand the importance of these images, the one who lacks the media literacy skills which comes a part of the package of the higher classes in society. Perhaps this person does not exist, but is just an image which has been sketched as a way for the interviewees to be able to describe themselves better, which is always easier when positioned to something we are not.

This thesis stems from the rise of norm-breaking ads, and since the overall reception of them is positive, their presence will probably increase. Ironically, will this make them lose their element as norm-breaking? Will this make people increasingly cynical or will it actually,

result as a natural way we see the world. This could be furthered expanded on within research in future research. Furthermore, for future research it is important to continue on the aspect on an inclusive methodology, and stretching it outside of the researcher's own sphere of people and stories told. This way of trying to look beyond one's own world, especially in regards to whose voices are being heard, should be expanded to the 'underclass' or to the less interesting groups of society, for example those who do not even own a computer. In all, discussing advertising has been a way for people to understand their role in society and to share their stories. Advertising's role as a social force should not be underestimated and instead further understood and criticized, together with the audience.

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Image sources:

Photo elicitation 1

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Photo elicitation 2 (Image source: <https://asylkaos.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/nordiska-toner.png>) (Gathered 2017:04:26)

Photo elicitation 3

<http://www.sydsvenskan.se/images/gU5r4mLbLJb7hPo8k4YKeso6FYE.jpeg>) (Gathered 2017:04:26)

Video elicitation 1 (Video source https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3_52CULpJg) (Gathered 2017:04:26)

Appendices

Informed Consent Form



LUND UNIVERSITY

Researcher: Lili Sapi

I, the researcher, is a master's students of media and communication studies at Lund University.

For my master thesis I am conducting semi-structured interviews about advertising and political engagement in Sweden. You will be participating in an interview of max. 50min.

By signing this form you agree to participating in the interview and to being recorded. Anonymity will be ensured during the entire process.

A version of the interview conducted with you, and results of the research will be published publicly. Thank you for your time.

Date _____

Signature _____

Semi structured interview guide

Introduction

Explaining the study and their anonymity, and that they are free to leave whenever during the interview.

- Background and interests of the interviewee
- Do you usually discuss political issues friends or family?
- Do you use social media?
- What do you think of advertising?

Elicitation material

- Do you recognize this ad?
- (If seen it) Do you remember how you felt when you first saw it?
- What do you think of this ad?
- What is positive and what is negative about this ad?
- Do you feel more inclined to shop at Åhléns because of this ad?

Political engagement

- Would you say this is political? In what way?
- Have you discussed this ad with anyone? If so who? What did you discuss then?
- Do you usually participate in political discussions on social media? Or with your family? At work?
- Are you engaged in a political party?
- What do you think of Swedish politics?
- Do you think you will continue sharing things online, in the future?
- Do you think this message might change something in Sweden, if so what?

Discussions

- Could you consider sharing a photo of yourself with the hashtag #IamLucia?
- What do you think regarding the discussion that Åhléns will gain publicity from the online hate for their ads?
- Two sides of Nordic tones; those who claim the hijab reminds them of an oppression in their native countries, and those who claim this a right for Muslim women to be represented in ads? What do you think of this debate?
- Could you consider protesting against any of these ads?

- Could you consider using social media to support or to critique these ads?

