



# **Co-opting Feminism - How brands hijack social movements**

***A comparative study between the illustrative cases  
RedFit & Ladylike***

Master Thesis

MSc International Marketing & Brand Management  
2016/2017

Lund University School of Economics  
and Management

Authors: Emma Håkansson & Rebecka Lindholm  
Supervisor: Jon Bertilsson  
Examiner: Clara Gustafsson





## ABSTRACT

**Course:** BUSN39 Business Administration Global Marketing

**Authors:** Emma Håkansson & Rebecka Lindholm

**Supervisor:** Jon Bertilsson

**Key Words:** Social movement, Feminism, Co-opt, Cultural branding, RedFit, Ladylike

**Purpose:** The purpose and aim with this research was to understand how brands successfully can co-opt a social movement; specifically feminism, as part of their brand building-strategies. The phenomenon was explored by comparing one successful case, Libresse's 'RedFit' campaign, with a relatively the less successful case; that is, H&M's 'Ladylike' campaign.

**Methodology:** This study takes a relativist stance and adopts a social constructivist position of the research phenomenon. It followed an abductive approach and applied a qualitative research design with a multiple case- study strategy, in which the two cases have been selected based on their representation of two oppositional outcomes. The study further applied a mixed-method approach, in which different data collection methods allowed us to gain a multifaceted perspective on the phenomenon.

**Theoretical perspective:** In accordance with our abductive approach, the study first focused on reviewing the body of literature that was relevant for the research purpose. In terms of theories used we adopted an eclectic approach by combining an existing framework that explores the fit between two entities with a second one derived from Consumer-Company Identification theory, which supplemented with theories on authenticity helped us assess the crucial elements of what constitutes a successful co-option of a social movement.

**Empirical data:** This study applies a mixed method approach of the data collection, in which we conducted two semi-structured executive interviews and three focus group sessions with customers of both brands. This was supported by secondary data consisting of document studies, which included media material and campaign videos analyzed by a semiotic approach.

**Conclusion:** By referring to the developed framework for this context, our study has shown validity that a brand can successfully co-opt a social movement based on two main aspects; first, if it is able to demonstrate *trustworthiness, altruism and integrity*; and second, by resonating with consumers on an identification level by showing upon identity coherence, identity prestige and identity distinctiveness.

## **II. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

This thesis was developed throughout the spring semester 2017 and constitutes the Degree Project of the MSc programme; International Marketing and Brand Management at Lund University School of Economics and Management. During the past ten weeks this thesis has been developed from scratch, and involved a constant process of revision, edit and reflection to ultimately meet the aim of this study. This body of research would not however been possible without the contribution and help received from various individuals along the way. First, we would like to send out a big thanks to our supervisor, Dr. Jon Bertilsson, whose great amount of passion and knowledge supported us with his constructive feedback and valuable advice and helped us to stay motivated throughout the research process.

We would also like to thank the brand executives at Libresse, SCA, Margareta von Renteln and Helene Stenlund Gauthier, who provided us with rich information of the 'RedFit' campaign. Another big thanks also goes to all focus groups participants, who by their valuable opinions and perspectives helped us to gain profound insights of each case. Last but not least, we would also like to thank our friends and families, who supported and cheered us up during the research process.

Lund, Sweden 24th of May 2017

Emma Håkansson

Rebecka Lindholm

### III. TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1.1 Background.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1.2 Literature Review .....</b>	<b>5</b>
1.2.1 How consumers appropriate brands.....	5
1.2.2 From consumers to activists .....	6
1.2.3 Cultural branding .....	7
1.2.4 Meaning transfer effects .....	10
<b>1.3 Problematization .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1.4 Purpose and intended contribution .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>1.5 Delimitations.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>1.6 Structure of the study .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2. METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>4.1 Research Philosophy .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>4.2 Research approach.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>4.3 Research strategy .....</b>	<b>16</b>
4.3.1 Argumentation for selected cases.....	17
<b>4.4 Research design .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>4.5 Data Collection Method .....</b>	<b>18</b>
4.5.1 Semiotic approach.....	19
4.5.2 Semi-structured executive interviews .....	21
4.5.3 Focus group sessions .....	23
<b>4.6 Data Analysis - Narrative analysis.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>4.7. Trustworthiness.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>4.8 Limitations of the study .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>4.9 Reflection on ethical and political dimensions.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>3.1 Conceptual framework of ‘fit’ between two entities .....</b>	<b>32</b>
3.1.1 Brand credibility.....	32
3.1.2 The two-dimensional nature of social movement – brand fit.....	33
3.1.3 Altruistic attribution .....	33
<b>3.2 C-C identification theory.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>3.3 Preliminary framework .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>3.4 Authenticity.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>3.5 Mythologies .....</b>	<b>41</b>
3.5.1 Feminist myths in the media .....	41
<b>3.3 Summary of theories .....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>4. Case background .....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>4.1 Libresse .....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>4.2 H&amp;M.....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>5. Empirical findings and analysis .....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>5.1 Empirical findings of the ‘Redfit’ campaign .....</b>	<b>46</b>
5.1.1. Prologue .....	46
5.1.2 The Story .....	48
5.1.3 Epilogue .....	50

<b>5.2 Analysis of ‘Redfit’</b> .....	<b>50</b>
5.2.1 The fit between Libresse and feminism .....	50
5.2.2 The character of Libresse .....	52
5.2.3 Identity attractiveness of Libresse .....	55
5.3 Semiotic analysis of Libresse’s ‘Redfit’ campaign video .....	58
<b>5.3 Empirical findings of the “Ladylike” campaign</b> .....	<b>60</b>
5.3.1 Prologue .....	60
5.3.2 The story .....	61
5.3.3 Epilogue .....	64
<b>5.4 Analysis of ‘Ladylike’</b> .....	<b>64</b>
5.4.1 The fit between H&M and feminism .....	64
5.4.2 The character of the H&M .....	67
5.4.3 Identity attractiveness of H&M.....	70
5.5 Semiotic analysis of H&M’s ‘Ladylike’ campaign video.....	73
<b>5.6 Additional findings and summary</b> .....	<b>75</b>
5.6.1 Integrity .....	76
5.6.2 Summary of ‘Redfit’ .....	76
5.6.3 Summary of ‘Ladylike’ .....	77
<b>6. Discussion - comparison of both cases</b> .....	<b>78</b>
<b>6.1 The feminist consumer identity</b> .....	<b>78</b>
<b>6.2 The constituents of co-opting a social movement</b> .....	<b>79</b>
<b>6.3 Embodiment of feminist values</b> .....	<b>80</b>
<b>6.4 Feminist myths</b> .....	<b>82</b>
<b>6.5 Leading versus appropriating feminism</b> .....	<b>83</b>
<b>7. Conclusion</b> .....	<b>85</b>
<b>7.1 Main findings</b> .....	<b>85</b>
<b>7.2 Theoretical contributions to current research</b> .....	<b>86</b>
<b>7.3 Practical implications</b> .....	<b>87</b>
<b>7.4 Implications from a societal and political perspective</b> .....	<b>88</b>
<b>7.5 Limitations and suggestions for future research</b> .....	<b>88</b>
<b>References:</b> .....	<b>91</b>
<b>Appendix</b> .....	<b>103</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Topic guides executives interviews</b> .....	<b>103</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Topic guide: focus groups</b> .....	<b>104</b>
<b>Appendix 3: Video-elicitation utilized</b> .....	<b>105</b>
<b>Appendix 4: H&amp;M’s Ladylike marketing material</b> .....	<b>106</b>
<b>Appendix 4: Critique about the Ladylike campaign</b> .....	<b>108</b>
<b>IV. List of figures and tables</b>	
Table 1: Summary of literature .....	11
Figure 2: Data Collection overview.....	19
Table 3: Information about executives interviews.....	22
Table 4 Focus Group information .....	25
Figur 1: A joint framework between social movement -brand fit and C-C identification theory .....	37

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

In early 2016, an essentially new phenomenon appeared within the world of branding; a wave of global brands took an alternative route in their strategies as they started to include messages seeking for social change, justice and reconciliation in their marketing campaigns (Williams, n.d). Rather than using traditional brand messages focused on a unique selling point, companies such as Airbnb, Nordstrom, and Starbucks drove campaigns filled with political messages, resulting in both appraisal and outrage from the public (The New York Times, 2017; The New York Times, 2016a; The Telegraph, 2015a). In Sweden, an illustration of this trend could be identified when the Swedish Department store Åhlens demonstrated a stance for gender equality in its attempt to challenge gender constructions within the fashion industry in its Fall 2016 campaign (Resume, 2016a). In fact, the strategy adopted by these brands could be seen as an attempt to co-opt a social movement; involving “*forms of solidarist action which forces the conflict to the point of breaking through the system's compatibility limits*” (Melucci, 1996, p. 28). Specifically, these brands were seeking to make themselves culturally relevant by tapping into consumers’ values and connecting with them on a more meaningful level than ever before. Their activities involved promotion of an ideological position or support of underrepresented and discriminated groups, by joining in on debated topics, such as racial inequality and the global refugee situation (The New York Times, 2017; The New York Times, 2016a; The Telegraph, 2015). Essentially, this technique allowed these brands to redefine their value in consumers’ lives; and making themselves more significant than ever before by bringing political issues to the forefront of consumer culture, a phenomenon suggested to stretch far beyond conventional branding approaches.

Traditionally, brands have adopted so called *mindshare marketing* techniques that seek to attract consumers based on either functional or emotional benefits and recently, by catching cultural opportunities by using myths and subcultural references as part of their brand-building strategies (Holt, 2005). Conventional marketing approaches are historically grounded in psychology driven strategies that focus either on functional or emotional benefits, or both (Holt, 2005). This approach relies on the notion that brands succeed when they occupy a cognitive space in consumers’ minds. Over the years, theory has maintained that consumers would subconsciously associate the brand with a particular benefit, hence making the brand synonymous with the benefit itself. As Holt (2004) argues, these strategies are obsolete, first since functional benefits easily are copied by competitors, whereas emotional benefits such as how Coca-Cola’s capitalization of ‘happiness’ drives them to imitate the cultural orthodoxy of the soft drink category, limits brands’ ability to innovate since there is no connection to the deeper meanings within society or history. If these psychological strategies cause brands to become phenomena of the mind rather than society, culture and politics, then opportunities for innovation driven by historical changes in society become overlooked. Also, these types of mindshare marketing techniques, which rely upon unique selling propositions, simply do not resonate with 21st century consumers as the significance of brands today has shifted from the product to the cultural experience and personal narratives of identity and lifestyle (Holt, 2005).

In addition, the many radical changes experienced in the world in recent years ultimately suggest new implications for brands; increased social tension, inequalities and prejudices due to a number of globally disruptive events, such as the immigrant crisis, Brexit, racial issues spiraling in the U.S. and the presidential election of Donald Trump are increasingly evoking political polarization (Wall Street Journal, 2016; French, 2017;). As a result, the world has experienced a lower level of trust in public authorities, such as local governments, the EU and the UN (Edelman Trust Barometer, n.d; Euroactive, 2013; The Atlantic, 2016). Furthermore, globalization has also provoked complex social challenges linked to the rise of low-wage labor markets and new forms of extremism; causing higher levels of uncertainty that induce social tension even further. Within the immersive social media culture of the Western world, disruptive news and protests can easily diffuse, hence imposing even stronger social divisions and disharmony. In that sense, as political culture is becoming more divisive it becomes more critical than ever for brands to stand up for their values to be able to connect with consumers on a more significant level.

As previously implied these global challenges are reflected in a changing behavior of brands; rather than acting as passive bystanders, they are beginning to recognize the underlying opportunities provided by increased social tensions as a way to reconcile consumer values and act as catalysts for change, not by being exclusive of the social challenges that people are facing today, but rather as supporters of particular ideologies or social movements (Wittwear, 2014). These techniques do not only allow brands to resonate with people's deeper ideological values reflected in their identity as consumers, but also providing the brand's ideological function as a firm ground for consumers to rest their beliefs upon and construct a framework for how they should live their lives. This new approach is thus a way for brands to make themselves culturally relevant and act as mediators for consumers to express the deeper symbolic elements of their identity that goes beyond fashion and conspicuous consumption practices.

A particular social movement shown to found its place on the agenda of numerous brands in today's marketplace is *feminism*; in which we in this study will refer to as "*the belief in social, economic and political equality of the sexes*" (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d). We can suggest how the feminist rhetoric of well-known philosophers such as Mary Wollstonecraft (cited in Franklin, 2004) and Simone de Beauvoir (cited in Fallaize, 1998) has entered its way into Western culture today, for instance with the influence of Caitlin Moran's book "How to be a woman" (Brockes, 2012), the HBO show *Girls* as well as celebrities making outspoken statements about their feminist stance such as pop star Beyoncé and actress Emma Watson (Independent, 2016a; The Guardian, 2016a). Acknowledging its increased influence on popular culture, brands are increasingly recognizing the value of being part of the feminist movement (Huffpost, 2016). However, although the success of brands such as Airbnb and Nordstrom in adopting support for social movement as part of their strategies suggests new strategic opportunities for brands, it can nevertheless imply an increased level of reputational risk (The New York Times, 2017; The New York Times, 2016a; The New York Times, 2016c; The Telegraph, 2015). Controversial messages, such as New Balance's support of Donald Trump (New York Times, 2016b; Independent, 2016b), can induce major losses for brands such as consumer boycotts that over time can cause permanent harm in terms of and brand equity damages. In other words, brands must consider how the political messages they



communicate are received by the public. Specifically, this involves how brands should balance their market-driven interests that are being conflicted with their altruistic interests as well as how this is received by the public; especially avoiding being called out for hypocrisy when the public perceives that the brand is being overruled by its commercial interests. Overall, this implies that while one brand's attempt to co-opt a social movement can result in public appraisal and ultimately lead to stronger brand equity, another brand's attempts may result in a major backlash that can have detrimental effects on the brand. It thus becomes highly relevant for brands to understand the elements that ultimately can be crucial to either the success or failure of their attempts to co-opt a social movement, which is essentially what motivated this study.

Drawing upon the relevance of the phenomenon outlined above, the research question we aim to answer in this study is:

*How can brands successfully co-opt a social movement as part of their brand-building strategies?*

What ultimately decides what can be considered a successful strategy presumably rests upon certain critical aspects that we aim to uncover. By specifically applying the feminist movement as an illustrative example, we will in this study attempt to tap into how brands in the 'best' way possible can manage to co-opt a social movement in a way that is received well by consumers. Ultimately, we will use that as an explanatory example that can depict the phenomenon in the most illuminating way possible.

## **1.2 Literature Review**

In the forthcoming sections, we will explore the existing research that can reflect the suggested changing branding paradigm (Holt, 2005, Holt & Cameron, 2012). We explore brands as cultural, ideological and political objects; how they traditionally have been appropriated by consumers through discursive practices as part of identity construction and as expressions of a political stance, and how brands today are redefining their roles in consumers' lives by strategically entering the political sphere. A dominant researcher within our field of cultural branding is Douglas Holt, hence we will to a large extent rely on his ideas. Ultimately, we will use the knowledge gained in this literature review to find further relevance within our own research and use that as a point of departure for this study.

### **1.2.1 How consumers appropriate brands**

The case of how brands are adopted and discursively practiced by consumers has been extensively explored within academia, not least in terms of the value of rejecting the mainstream in the identity-building process among youth cultures. It has also shown how the power of youth cultures actively can transform the meaning associated with a brand and appropriate them in ways that fit their own values. The use of 'appropriation' has within literature been described as consumers using brands in a way that responds their own purposes, and to fit their own milieu and create meaning in their lives, thus creating new cultural and symbolic content (Sassatelli, 2007). Especially for young people in construction

of an identity of their own, it has been found common for them to adopt styles and/or brands that represent anti-establishment views and protest against authority (Milner, 2006). Their deviation from mainstream culture hence provides them with an identity in which they are allowed to sub-culturally resist the hegemonic views within a modern society (Clark, 1976). This type of resistance is expressed by consumption of various signs and symbols that may represent an alternative ideology. Sometimes youth subcultures can even perform so called symbolic plundering by appropriating symbols from another style in which these symbols capture new meanings that deviate from their original ones and hence come to represent the youth subcultural style (Hebdige, 1979). These types of discursive consumer activities often transcend into what Wipperfurth (2005) has coined as brand ‘hijacking; defined as ‘the act of commandeering a brand from marketing professionals and driving its evolution’. The act of consumers gaining control of a brand’s ideology can cause an altering of its intended brand meanings in which consumers’ expressions of brands can be both ironic and critical (Cova & Pace, 2006).

The agenda of how brands should be used by youth culture is thus often different from the intended goal of brand managers. Brands can for example be appropriated by a style that combines it with other symbolic meanings and thus the brand becomes a signifier for those meanings as well, which may be unfavorable or inappropriate (Bertilsson, 2009). The practice of discursive elaboration in which consumers within a social environment are negotiating and reach an agreement about the brand’s meaning is important in order for the brand to develop brand *literacy*, which refers to the social and cultural rules of how the brand is appropriately used and understood. The symbolic meanings are often co-constructed in which consumers have the power to mediate the meanings through their consumption practices, a phenomenon referred to as consumer agency (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). As the next section illustrates, research suggests that consumers’ roles are changing in which they have become aware of their civic responsibility as consumers.

### **1.2.2 From consumers to activists**

Historically, there has existed a dichotomous relationship between consumerism and citizenship. Naturally citizens are also consumers, but the dynamic of these two identities have often been portrayed as having oppositional values and motivations by existing within separate spheres. Within the commercial environment, consumers have been ‘trained’ to act according to their own self-interests and maintain their loyalty to brands. However, neo-liberalist ideologies have combined with new digital communication technologies facilitated consumer empowerment, hence enabling them to redefine their ideas of ‘what it means’ to be a consumer by integrating community-minded and selfless values more related to their roles as citizens. By unifying these two kinds of subjectivities consumption rather becomes a way to express their citizenship (Banet-Weiser & Lapsansky, 2008). The logic of neo-liberalist ideologies also suggests that the political motivations for consumption go even further when consumption itself turns into a form of consumer activism to express values of freedom and autonomy. From a critical stance the adoption of an ideological function by brands is their justifications of consumption as a legitimate activity. A paradox is thus created when brand appropriation of subversive ideas of the capitalist system becomes a reproduction of the

system itself (e.g. “one can only become a true feminist by using products belonging to a particular brand”).

A more extreme view that represents consumers’ changing roles can be found within the anti-branding movement demonstrated by Naomi Klein’s (1999) manifesto ‘No Logo’. In her book she criticizes the forces of capitalism and the corporate power of well-known brands as so called ‘brand bullies’, robbing consumers on their freedom by occupying their public spaces, and also exploiting low-wage labor in poor countries to make big profits. The anti-branding view was in the beginning adopted by more marginalized groups who served as brand activists by engaging in anti-corporate activities and seeking more alternative brands, but has in recent years grown to become a part of mainstream culture. It is thus considerable that the adoption of ideologies is an attempt for brands to portray themselves as more ‘benevolent’ and to resonate with more alternative groups. It is also conceivable that brands seek to reverse this relationship as a way to gain control and prevent consumers’ hijacking activities.

In preceding sections of the literature it becomes apparent that brands serve as important resources for managing power structures and resisting hegemonic views in society. Paradoxically, brands adopt this notion by integrating consumer activism and resistance into their branding strategies, hence deliberately removing the tension between ‘consumers’ and ‘citizens’. As made evident by the research conducted by Holt (2004, 2005), many successful brands have in recent years capitalized on the power of subcultural groups as a way to build on their iconic status within society to develop so called cultural branding strategies.

### **1.2.3 Cultural branding**

Nowadays brands compete in so called *myth markets*, rather than within the traditional product markets, by owning so called functional or emotional cues (Holt, 2004, 2005; Holt & Cameron, 2012; Godson, 2012; Furlow, 2013; Wipperfurth, 2005). The utopia of the myth market is to become a powerful symbol, (Holt, 2004, 2005, 2010). Nevertheless, in order to understand the ability for brands to transcend into symbols with the use of ideologies, we must first identify the elements that turn ideologies into powerful cultural resources for brands in the first place. An ideology is a set of ideas and values residing within a social movement that is constructed as consequence of historical changes within a nation, and sustained through mass- media such as TV, radio and newspapers (Holt, 2004). The dominant ideologies within a nation are relatively stable and require a moral consensus among the groups that carry them, thus the core set of values distinguishes what is considered ‘good’ or ‘bad’ within society. The public conversations centered on the ideologies are what Holt (2004) refers to as *myths*. Myths are crucial to understand since they are what sustain the ideologies adopted by brands. Brands perform and maintain myths by creating associated stories, primarily through advertisement. Hence, myths constitute the ideological explanation for the stories communicated by the brand. When consumers engage with the product they relive the story and hence the myths are strengthened. According to Holt, for a myth to be authentic, it relies on populist worlds, which are groups that express a distinctive ideology and fight against a privileged political elite. In other words, a powerful myth is one who anticipates the extraordinary anxieties experienced within the populist world, and thus it becomes perceived

as an authentic marker (Holt, 2004). In contrast, Goodson (2012) and Furlow (2013) argue that capability lies within how well these myths manage to uncover and inherit certain tensions within society, and transcend these into the use of the brand. For these myths to gain credibility among the public, people's actions within the populist culture must be motivated by beliefs and values, rather than interest (Holt, 2004). It is thus conceivable that the reason why brands fail when appropriating political issues is because of a lack in credibility in the myths that sustain the particular ideology. Also, to avoid inauthentic expressions of the populist world, the brand cannot just repackage the message for the mass audience. Rather, the public needs to perceive that the brand has an authentic connection to the populist world, in which the brand must fulfill two qualities: *literacy*, in the sense that each populist world has its own idioms, which the brand needs to become fluent in; and *fidelity*, demonstrated by the brand by sacrificing its broad-based popularity to stand up for the ethos the populist world possesses (Holt, 2004). However, research has shown that not only is a brand's influence on the populist world of significant importance. In recent years, a number of scholars (Schroeder, 2008; Schroeder & Salzar-Mörling, 2006) have shown that a brand's marketing activities have started to become dissected into whether they resonate with the *brand culture*; that is, the brand's historical context, ethical concerns and cultural conventions. However, although it has been claimed that these are relevant factors when assessing a brand's marketing activities, neither Holt (2004), Goodson (2012) nor Furlow (2013) have argued for its relevance when brand appropriating the myths embodied within a subculture or populist world, which indicates that the relevance for a brand's culture in these types of strategies remains unexplored.

In contrast, Wipperfurth (2005) has discovered that appropriating an ideology does not only lie within brands' interests, but can also allow for an active involvement of the market to discover, engage and help shape the brand's larger meaning, which he refers to as *co-created hijacking*. He even argues that a co-created hijacked brand play a far more inspirational role in people's lives compared to conventional brands, due to their ability to offer consumers a deeper sense of meaning within a cultural context. Hence, a co-created hijacked brand invites subcultures to co-create a brand's ideology, use and personality, which can pave the way for adoption of the mainstream. Wipperfurth (2005) provides several considerations on how to evaluate whether a subculture is a suitable market for the brand, such as whether the audience suggests a credible innovator for this type of strategy, and whether those within the subculture are willing to participate. Drawing upon this research, we can thus recognize how the value in these types of strategies goes beyond the brand itself.

The ideas presented above by Holt (2004, 2005) and Cameron (2012), Goodson (2012), Furlow (2013) and Wipperfurth (2005) mark a significant relationship between brands and ideologies; specifically by recognizing the importance of myths in upholding an ideology within society as well as the emphasis on sustaining authenticity of the subculture. In that sense, these scholars identify the crucial elements that brands need to possess in order to become powerful and authentic symbols within mass culture. However, although they (Holt, 2004, 2005; Wipperfurth, 2005) emphasize how ideologies and myths can become valuable markers of the brand and culture, their focus mainly remain on subculture and populist worlds and has not been explored outside within other domains.

With inspiration from Kim and Mauborgne's (2005) research on blue ocean strategies, Holt and Cameron (2012) further extend the cultural branding field by addressing how brands can ensure a strong cultural position within their industry, and in that way transform into what they refer to as *cultural innovators*; that is, a brand that delivers an innovative cultural expression. Holt and Cameron (2012) suggest that by opposing the cultural orthodoxy within their industries, brands should seek to diffuse a new compelling ideology that can allow them to continuously innovate. The new ideology is hence sustained through the creation of myths and cultural codes; specifically, instead of just feeding the markets' needs, cultural innovators create consumer needs and hence change the industrial structure. Nevertheless, in order to understand how cultural innovation works, the term 'innovation' must be perceived in a new way. From the perspective of cultural innovation theory, the entire market, competition and innovation itself is radically changed (Holt & Cameron, 2012). The cultural expressions employed by cultural innovators embody three constitutive elements: an *ideology*, *myths* and *cultural codes*; compelling and appropriate cultural content that serve to communicate a particular myth and allows consumers to easily comprehend the meanings of a product or a brand. Historically, cultural expressions have served as navigation tools for how we understand and construct our world, which then naturally also provides a substructure for our identity and what we consider meaningful (Holt and Cameron, 2012). Thus, the *aim* within cultural innovation is to deliver novel cultural expressions grounded within a meaningful ideology distant from the cultural orthodoxy, a place that Holt refers to as *cultural blue oceans* (2005). Furthermore, the reason why brands fail when adopting an alternative ideology is often because of their inability to cross the *cultural chasm* (Holt & Cameron, 2012), due to the mainstream market's inability to identify with the ideology. In other words, brands fail to recognize the different demands between early adopters and the mass-market. In terms of ideologies, businesses will hit the cultural chasm if they cannot succeed in making mass market consumers identify with the ideology, hence they will maintain their relevance solely to the specific niche market that the ideology is built upon. The problem is often that the mass market does not consider the ideology to be important enough and consequently, it becomes alienated (Holt & Cameron, 2012). Drawing upon these ideas, it becomes evident that it is essential for brands to express the specific ideology in an innovative way to resonate with the wider public.

Although Holt and Cameron (2012), make a significant contribution in understanding how brands today become relevant through cultural strategies, their focus mainly remain on brands' authentic expressions of ideologies as derivations from populist worlds and subcultures. Neither do they specifically address the strategic conditions that a brand needs to apply in order to cross the cultural chasm and become relevant to the wider public. Similarly, Wipperfurth (2010) mainly focuses on the qualities that should reside within a subculture in order for it to carry ideological opportunities for the brand. Furthermore, Holt (2005) suggests that the more successful the brand, the easier it will be for the ideology to diffuse within society. He thus implies that if a business possesses a large base of loyal customers, they will naturally identify with the ideology that the company promotes. With regard to the cases applied within this study, we choose to take a slightly critical position to these ideas. Nevertheless, in order to understand how brands become realized as an integrative part of a

subculture or a populist world, one should seek to explore the constitutive elements of this process.

#### **1.2.4 Meaning transfer effects**

In his study of 'meaning transfer', McCracken (1989) explores the particular processes that brands go through when being endorsed by celebrities. In the meaning transfer process he proposes how the symbolic meanings associated with the celebrity endorser moves from the celebrity to the particular product or brand. In that way, the symbolic meanings stemming from the cultural sources of the celebrity become attributed to the brand in the minds of consumers. Later in the subsequent stage of the consumption process, meanings move from the brand to the consumer, hence emphasizing the significance of the consumers' role in the meaning transfer process. Drawing upon how the effectiveness of celebrity endorsers traditionally has been based on the credibility and attractiveness of the celebrity, McCracken (1989) criticizes these models for their inability to capture the complexity of the meaning transfer process since they are based on assumptions that only apply to the 'message sender' rather than the celebrity endorser's role as a message medium, nor the continuity of the communicated meanings. In accordance with Gwinner and Eaton (1999), he points towards the importance of match-up between the celebrity endorser and the brand. Also, he argues that the symbolic characteristics stemming from the cultural meanings provide the most significant foundation for how effective the celebrity endorsement process is, i.e. the celebrity's ability to appropriately represent the symbolic meanings residing within culture. In other words, celebrity endorsement is then simply cultural undertakings in which meanings are constantly reproduced.

Similar to the sponsorship of sporting events, McCracken (1989) argues that the symbolic properties can transfer from the celebrity to the brand and vice versa. Furthermore, McCracken (1986) has demonstrated how meaning transfer effects also can move from *culturally constituted worlds*; that is, a physical and social world that presented to the individual through culture, to the consumer through the application of rituals, mainly by taking place through the advertising and fashion system. The culturally constituted worlds can be compared with Holt's (2005) populist worlds and subcultures, as it is the certain brand followers that carry out these rituals in ways that are seen as legitimate to the meaning transfer process. In that sense, McCracken thus recognizes the importance of culture and the consumer for these effects to occur. Nevertheless, although he highlights the importance for brands to select an appropriate celebrity endorser and hence contribute to an enhanced understanding on the phenomenon, his research is limited in the sense that it remains within the domains of celebrity endorsement and consumer rituals.

### 1.3 Problematization

Drawing upon the overall literature presented in the preceding sections both the analogy of how consumers adopt brands for their own ideological purposes, in which they often appropriate brands according to their own interests (Sassatelli, 2007; Clark, 1976; Cova & Pace, 2006; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). Brands today are also increasingly realizing the opportunities that can be found with interfering in ideologies and through the use of cultural oppositions, and how these can be adopted as a way for brands to create a breakthrough within culture (Holt, 2004, Goodson, 2012; Farlow, 2013; McCracken, 1989). These scholars suggest several implications for how to gain credibility when interfering in an ideological tension, such as integrating themselves as part of a subculture, inviting consumers to influence brand meanings through co-created hijacking, employ relevant celebrity endorsers as well as avoiding commoditization (Holt, 2004, 2005; Holt & Cameron, 2012; Goodson, 2012; Farlow, 2013; Wipperfurth, 2005; Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Olson & Thjomøe, 2011; McCracken, 1989, 1986). A summary of their main findings is presented in table 1 below.

**Figur 1: Summary of literature**

<i>Summary of existing research on the changing cultural role of brands</i>		
<b>Study</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>Findings</b>
Naomi Klein (1999); Cova & Pace, (2006); Wipperfurth (2005)	Consumer resistance and power	Reflects consumers' changing roles through use of alternative forms and discursive consumer practices as means to gain power
Holt (2004); Goodson (2012); Furlow (2013); Wipperfurth (2005)	Appropriation of an ideology	Brands tap into alternative ideologies and cultural tensions via subculture or populist worlds
Holt (2004; Holt & Cameron (2012)	Innovation on behalf of the ideology	Brands become cultural innovators by embodying a cultural expression of an ideology and diffuse its ideas into the masses
Holt (1998); Bourdieu (1984)	Risks when brands become adopted by the mass-market	The brand image risks losing authenticity and become commoditized when being adopted by the masses

McCracken (1989)	Celebrity endorsement	Meaning transfer effects occur between brand and endorser if the endorsers appropriately represents the symbolic meanings within a culture
------------------	-----------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

It thus becomes apparent how these scholars recognize how brands have found new way to reconcile with changing consumer dynamics and alternative consumer practices by tapping into cultural elements, but also the risks it implies when diffusing the ideological notions into the mass market. However, they do not specifically address how these strategies are linked to the brand’s historical relation to the specific ideology rooted within the subculture itself, nor the constitutional elements that a brand must to embody to be perceived as credible to the wider public. Furthermore, Holt remains his research on brands that are dominant players within Western culture, such as Whole Foods, Starbucks, Coca-Cola and Redbull, and suggests that the more successful the brand, the easier it will be for the ideology to diffuse within society. He thus implies that if a brand possesses a large enough base of loyal customers, it will be relatively easy for them to identify with the ideology that the brand promotes. In addition, he bases his research on a number of case studies, such as Mountain Dew, Budweiser Levi’s, Jack Daniel’s, Marlboro, Volkswagen, Harley Davidson and ESPN. The problem is that the majority of the presented cases are focused on brand stories that are based on masculine ideologies, which not only undermines his credibility, but also evokes the question of whether cultural branding strategies are most applicable for ideologies rooted within patriarchal notions. Finally, as previously suggested, the existing research (Holt, 2004; Goodson, 2012; Furlow, 2013; Wipperfurth, 2005; Holt & Cameron, 2012) remains within the limited context of subcultures and populist worlds and has not been explored further. As we have highlighted in the beginning of this study, the changing approach of brands reflected in their attempts to co-opt particular social movements, such as feminism, suggests that this as an area that is gaining increased relevance among brands. Although one can suggest certain shared characteristics between subcultures and social movements such as a common concern for the effectiveness of cultural politics, as specifically has been suggested, there is a dynamic of social movements that makes it distinct from subcultures as it involves a certain forms of solidarist actions not confined to the existing social order (Martin, 2013). In that sense, we argue that the research on the phenomenon has until this point remained within limited domains, and neither has it specifically explored how the relationship between the brand and the cultural elements it seeks to build upon mediates the strategic outcome. By recognizing these differences, this study seeks to answer the following question:

- *How can brands successfully co-opt a social movement as part of their brand-building strategies?*



## **1.4 Purpose and intended contribution**

The purpose of this study is to understand how a brand successfully can co-opt a social movement; specifically, the feminist movement, as part of its brand-building strategy. By comparing the illustrative cases of Libresse's 'RedFit' campaign against the relatively less successful case of H&M's 'Ladylike' campaign we seek to uncover the critical elements that constitute a credible branding strategy. In terms of our aimed theoretical contributions, this study will intend to extend the cultural branding field (Holt, 2004; Holt & Cameron, 2012; Goodson, 2012; Furlow, 2013) and hence explore how the co-opting actions of a brand can become realized within this specific context in a way that creates value for both the brand and the social movement itself. By acknowledging how brands increasingly recognize the value of becoming part of social movements (The New York Times, 2017; The New York Times, 2016a; The New York Times, 2016c; The Telegraph, 2015) this study will intend to develop a practical tool that is of value to brands in their attempt to move the brand into the political sphere. In other words, by shedding light on both the opportunities and risks that this type of strategy suggests, we intend to provide brand managers with practical implications of the critical elements that the brand should seek to master when co-opting a social movement.

## **1.5 Delimitations**

In this study, we have chosen to limit the focus to the illustrative cases of the Swedish feminine hygiene product brand Libresse and the Swedish clothing brand H&M and their feminist campaigns released in 2016. This study will solely focus on the campaigns were executed in Sweden, although they were both conducted on a larger geographical scale. To be able to answer upon how brands can successfully co-opt a social movement, we need to look at the phenomenon from both a branding perspective and from a consumer point of view. However, in this study the consumers' views reflect the target group of the brands. We should consider that H&M is a clothing brand, in which consumers might wear the brand as means to express feminist messages in a conspicuous way, while Libresse is a feminine hygiene product company that cannot be utilized by consumers for the same logic. Thus, this aspect must be treated with caution.

## **1.6 Structure of the study**

This thesis is divided into seven main chapters. Chapter 1 provides the reader with background of the phenomena as well as an overview of previous conducted research within the field, and purpose as well as the intended theoretical and practical contribution of this study. Chapter 2 describes the methodological choices conducted in this study and its research design. Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical lens used for this study in which we develop a preliminary framework. In Chapter 4 cases are introduced, and provides the reader with a background for two illustrative cases. In Chapter 5 the findings constructed as a narratives for each case as well as the analysis based on the adjusted framework is presented. In Chapter 6, the findings from the previous chapter are discussed in relation to the objective and the research question formulated in chapter 1. In Chapter 7 the study concludes by summarizing

findings and presents them in regards to existing literature. The chapter also points out the theoretical and practical contribution this study has generated as well as the limitations and suggestions for future research this study has provided.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The following chapter outline the methodological choices conducted for this study. The study's philosophy, research approach, strategy and design as well as its data collection, data analysis and quality of the study will be described.

### **4.1 Research Philosophy**

In this section we elaborate upon the philosophical position chosen for this study; that is, the ontological and epistemological approaches applied for this research. To answer upon how brand can co-opt a social movement to their favor, we consider it necessary to involve several perspectives of the phenomena. In other words we acknowledge several truths of reality, rather than one single truth, hence our ontological choice for this study takes a relativist position. This is aligned with our chosen forms of data collection as we seek to gather multiple perspectives through a mixed-methods approach, which enables us to collect diverse views on the phenomenon (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015; Bryman & Bell, 2015).

With regard to our epistemological consideration, we could either by acknowledging the collection of data as facts taking a positivistic stance or by analysing the interviewees feelings and attitudes towards how brands co-opt a social movement, hence taking an interpretivist stance (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Easterby-Smith et.al 2015). We consider the second alternative, the interpretivist stance, most applicable to our study, since we assume that different interviewees have different viewpoints of the phenomena, due to their different norms, values and positions. By acknowledging and including how the different social context of the interviewees shape their views of the phenomena, we thus hope to answer upon how brands can co-opt a social movement successfully (Easterby-Smith et al, 2015; Bryman & Bell, 2015). Moreover, the complexity of the phenomena calls for a more interdependent approach that involves collecting several different viewpoints and experiences of the given period, which will enable us to create a more profound and nuanced understanding of the studied phenomenon. Moreover, the nature of the phenomenon which is relatively unexplored within previous research calls for a more openly interpretive approach. Hence, our chosen relativist position is considered most suitable as it to a further extent allows for new theoretical insights to be generated (Easterby-Smith et al, 2015; Bryman & Bell, 2015).

### **4.2 Research approach**

With regard to that this research's aim, this we have chosen to adopt an abductive approach, based on two specific reasons; first, due to the extensive literature within the field; Holt (2004); Goodson (2012); Furlow (2013); Wipperfurth (2005) Holt & Cameron (2012). Second, due to the lack within existing literature to explain how brands can co-opt a social movement in their favor. Considering that an abductive approach is most applicable for this study, since we will use existing theory as a lens to study the phenomenon, which implies that we will use a deductive approach to a certain extent. On the other hand, we argue that the existing literature lacks in explaining thoroughly how brands can co-opt a social movement,

since it mostly have emphasized how brands can interfere in social groups or social causes to their favor and not social movements. Which implies that an inductive approach can be applied. However, since the influence of both deduction and induction is necessary for answering our research question, it hence becomes apparent that an abductive approach is considered most applicable for this study. This approach allows us to overcome the main limitations of the deductive and inductive approaches; such as its tendencies to be rigid and superficial due to a low priority of generating deeper insights of questions as *why* and *how*. Moreover, by relying on previous research and our theoretical lens as a starting base, we also increase our chances of overcoming common limitations within inductive reasoning, which lies within its difficulty of theorizing from a purely unstructured research (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2008). In that sense, our abductive process will allow us to borrow elements from both inductive and deductive approaches in a way that is considered with regard to the aim of this study.

### **4.3 Research strategy**

To distinguish how a brand successfully can co-opt a social movement, it is necessary to understand the dynamic and social context for each particular brand. Therefore, we argue that a multiple-case study strategy is considered most applicable given our research question. In accordance with Yin (2003), employing a case study approach is suitable when seeking to uncover contextual conditions of each case that might be closely linked to the research problem. Also, since we aim to answer *how* brands can successfully co-opt a social movement; that is, uncover the critical elements that are required for a such a branding strategy, a case study approach will enable us to gain more profound and in-depth findings (Yin, 2003; Stake, 2006). Among case study scholars we have chosen to position ourselves within Eisenhardt's (1989) view, which argues that case study research strategy should be centered on understanding the dynamic conditions present within a single setting. Furthermore, to understand what constitutes a successful strategy, a reference point is necessary, which urges for a comparative case study design (Bryman & Bell; 2015). This approach will allow us to be adaptive and flexible in terms of having multiple data collections methods and conduct both within case and across case analysis. Given our research question and problematization, in which we argue that this study will complement the existing body of knowledge, we further position ourselves in accordance with Eisenhardt's (1989) proposed case study strategy. Overall, we will use similar methods to the furthest extent possible for both cases. One should acknowledge that although the cases will be treated as similarly as possible, each case encompasses unique dynamic conditions, which in some instances can decrease their direct comparability. Another limitation that must be considered with a case study strategy is that the generalizability of the generated findings will be low, unless the generated findings will be verified (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Nevertheless, considering the close connection between the theory-building processes with the evidence within this type of case study research, it is likely that the resultant theory will be consistent with the empirical observation (Eisenhardt, 1989). Thus, we argue that although the generalizability is low for case study research, the validity of our findings will be high.

### 4.3.1 Argumentation for selected cases

To be able to determine what constitutes a successful co-option of a social movement from a branding point of view, it is necessary to analyze results based on some reference point. Thus, a maximum variation sampling technique has been applied, in which cases have been selected based on their representation of two different extreme situations (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The chosen company-cases of this study are Libresse and H&M. The main argumentation for why we specifically have selected these are based on several aspects. First, in an attempt to co-opt the feminist movement, Libresse and H&M both launched the feminist campaigns 'Redfit' and 'Ladylike' in 2016. Second, both 'RedFit' and 'Ladylike' was launched during same period, namely in September 2016, which implies that they both were exposed to the same hegemonic discourses in society. Third, the official campaign videos of both cases were constructed in a similar way, which enhances the semiotic comparability between their messages. Lastly, both the 'RedFit' and 'Ladylike' campaign consist of similar strategic elements, such as the brands' employment campaign spokesperson as well as their similar use of social media during the course of the campaigns.

As mentioned above, the illustrative cases has been selected with regard to their representation of two extreme situations, in which according to Pettigrew (1990) enables the process of interest to become more evident and transparent to the researcher. Based on numerous reasons that relate to the response the 'RedFit' campaign received within the media, we have chosen to consider Libresse as a representation of a 'success'. The campaign video was awarded at Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity (SCA, 2016a), and the initiative 'RedFit' was awarded for best campaign during Stockholm Media Week 2017. Second, as a result of the campaign, the Norwegian Olympics committee updated their health-protocols for female athletes (Interview 1, April 21st 2017). Third, the campaign also reached a new social media metrics record for the brand; the display ad generated 1.42% clicks, which is approximately ten higher than the for the average social media campaign (Interview 2, April 25th 2017). Based on these multiple factors, we will consider the 'RedFit' campaign as an illustration of success in its attempt to co-opt feminism.

With regard to the outcome of the 'Redfit' campaign, we have chosen to view the case of H&M's 'Ladylike' as a relative 'failure' in the brand's attempt to support feminism. In contrast to 'Redfit', H&M's 'Ladylike' received a large amount of negative critique (DN Kultur, 2016; Resume, 2016c; Aftonbladet, 2016; Mahdawi, 2016). Neither did the local activation in Sweden go as planned, when one of the three employed spokespersons for the campaign decided to end her collaboration with the brand just ten days after its launch, with the motivation for the collaboration being "against her moral values" (Dagens Media, 2016; Resume, 2016d; Resume, 2016e; Göteborgs-Posten, 2016). Drawing on these outcomes as well as a comparison with the 'Redfit' campaign of Libresse hence justifies our application of this case as a 'failure'. However, with respect to this study's ontological position we have to consider that labeling a case as a 'success' or a 'failure' can always be considered relative. In that sense, one can consider that we have chosen to rely on the multiple sources presented above in our assessment of the cases as either a 'success' or a 'failure' not in absolute terms, but in their relation to each other.

#### 4.4 Research design

With regard to the social constructivist position of this study, we have chosen to adopt a qualitative research design, as it enables us to gain more profound and nuanced insights on the phenomenon. According to what often is emphasized within qualitative research (Kvale, 1992; Bryman & Bell, 2015), we seek interest in the ‘particular’ rather than the general, in which the latter would have been more compatible with a quantitative research design. We also argue that choosing a qualitative research method allows us to better understand the full context surrounding the two chosen cases, since we are able to uncover the opinions and perceptions of multiple stakeholders (Kvale, 1992). Considering our multiple-case study design, in which we seek to focus on the dynamics present within the single settings within each case, we argue that in order to gain a holistic understanding of the context, we need to adopt mixed methods within our data collection (Eisenhardt, 1989). A central reason for the necessity of using mixed methods relies on the study’s assumption of multiple existing realities, which urges our need to gather multiple perspectives from diverse sources. In that sense, a triangulation approach is considered most optimal for this type of research (Easterby-Smith et. al, 2015). Overall, the qualitative methods will involve a collection of documentation studies, semi-structured interviews with brand executives and focus group sessions with customers, which will ultimately allow us to answer our research question in a profound and nuanced way. In accordance with multi-faceted qualitative methods we will be able to gain a multi-faceted and in-depth view of each case. We have chosen to study the phenomenon by adopting an intensive approach, which will allow us a to gain a thorough and deep understanding of both illustrative cases (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Bryman & Bell, 2015) and ultimately can help us answer our research question.

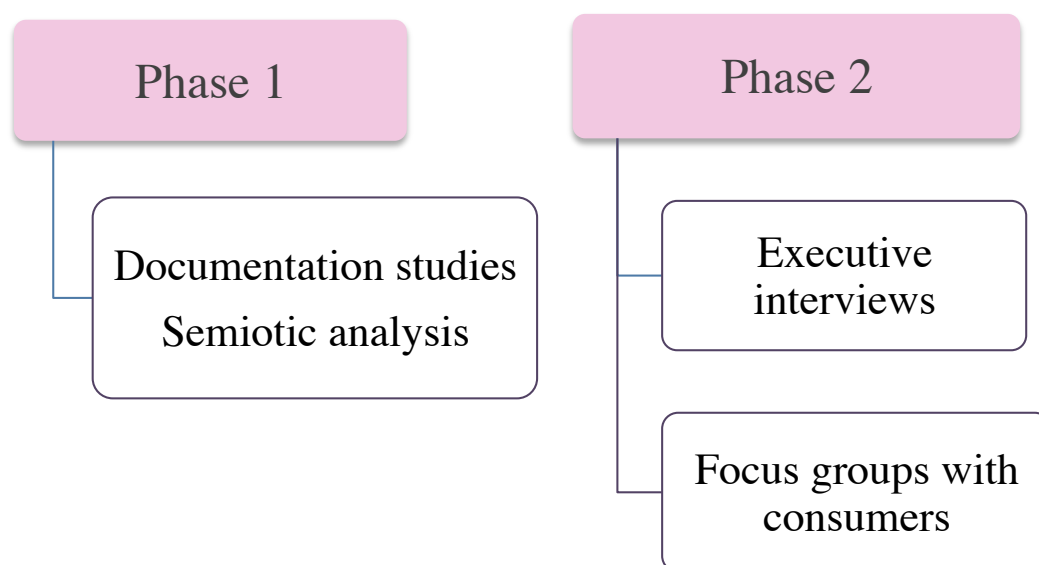
#### 4.5 Data Collection Method

In light of the purpose of this study, the data collection has been divided into two phases. In the first phase, in which we aim to gain a holistic understanding of each case, we conducted a collection of documentation study, which involved the collection of commercial campaign material as well as semiotic analysis of the campaign videos. Phase two involved semi-structured interviews with brand executives as well as focus group sessions with customers of both brands. A brief introduction of each data collection method is presented below, which in later sections will carefully be examined individually.

- **Document studies** -Here we refer to the relevant information of each case that is available online, such as the brand’s history, the industry in which it operates as well as all media surrounding the campaign. Using a document study enhanced our initial understanding of the phenomena and the unique dynamic present within each case.
- **Semiotic analysis** -This was performed during the first phase of the data collection, and involved a semiotic analysis of each brand’s campaign video. This allowed us to understand how feminist messages are conveyed in both campaign videos.

- **Semi-structured executive interviews** - This was conducted during the second phase of the data collection process. This allowed for an understanding for the motives behind the strategy and tactics of the feminist campaigns. One should acknowledge that we in this study only managed to conduct interviews with Libresse, and not H&M, despite the intense efforts to come in contact with relevant interviewees. Therefore the Ladylike campaign data has been supplemented with an extended document study.
- **Focus group sessions** - Similar to the executive interviews, focus group sessions were also conducted during the second phase of the data collection process. They provided us with a solid understanding from a consumer point of view regarding each brand's interference with the feminist movement. To prompt the participants memory and thus enhance the discussion, each focus group session began by showing participants the specific brand's campaign video.

**Figur 2: data Collection overview**



Each of the above presented data collection methods will further be described in detail in forthcoming section of this chapter. As previously mentioned, the use of multiple methods (documentation, semiotic analysis, semi-structured interviews and focus groups) and the triangulation of qualitative techniques enable the trustworthiness of this study to become strengthened (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1994; Easterby-Smith et. al, 2015; Bryman & Bell, 2015). Ultimately, they will combined provide a generous empirical foundation for our analysis.

#### **4.5.1 Semiotic approach**

For the analysis of campaign videos we rely on a semiotic approach, which follows semiotic theory; that is, the science of signs and symbols, proposing that “the symbolic order of a culture is constructed and interpreted through a system of signs” (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The purpose of using a social semiotic approach is to explore in-depth how the visual materials

used within the campaigns communicate myths grounded within specific ideologies. It thus allows us to explore how brands attempt to craft desirable images originated within contemporary feminist myths. From a more critical perspective, a semiotic approach also allows us to explore how feminist myths are used in relation to the commercial interest of the chosen brands, which might further help us explain the outcome of the cases of both Libresse and H&M.

The definition of semiotics provided by Umberto Eco claims that “semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign” (1976). It involves analyzing the hidden meanings of images, words, objects, sounds and gestures. In that sense, brands can be seen as constructions that convey and reproduce certain meanings within society (Santos, 2013; Danesi, 2006). Thus, semiotics is a useful method for examining the denotative and connotative meanings in commercial text. Exploring the relations between signs is crucial for determining its ideological meanings (Williamson, 1978). Since this study mainly is built upon the cases of brand campaigns, it is crucial to analyze how the campaigns been carried out in media text. A semiotic approach can thus allow us to tease out the hidden meanings within media text and understand how both brands communicate different forms of feminist meanings in their campaigns. It can also help us decode how the congruence between the meanings within media text and feminist movement can be used to explain what makes such as brand campaign successful or not. Drawing on semiotic theory will further allow us to explore the elements of authenticity on a more profound level and whether the signs and symbols integrated in commercial text is aligned with brand identity.

#### **4.5.1.2 Selection of campaign videos**

1. Libresse - Official ‘Redfit’ campaign video (Creator AMV BBDO; duration 1:23 minutes; officially released on 5th September 2016) The video was released on Youtube, where it has been viewed more than 237 000 times (Youtube, 2017), as well as on all of Libresse’s social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram in Sweden (Appendix 4). It features a series of female athletes struggling and bleeding in different sports, but without letting it defy their performance. The video was awarded both at Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity (SCA, 2016c) and during Stockholm Media Week 2016 (Stockholm Media Week, 2017).
2. H&M - Official ‘Ladylike’ campaign video (Creator: Forsman Bodenfors; illustration by Arvid Byström; duration 1:13 minutes; officially released on 16th September 2016). The video was aired on Swedish television and H&M’s Youtube platforms where it has been viewed more than 4 million times (Youtube, 2017). The video features women of all ages, who portray physical differences and personalities. It stars models such as Lauren Hutton and Adwoa Aboah as well as the transsexual actress Hari Nef (The Daily Record, 2016).

Both these campaigns were chosen due to their attempt to challenge contemporary gender stereotypes and conventional views on what is considered ‘feminine’. They thus contain aspects that serve as a construct for postfeminist identities, although this is expressed in



different ways in the videos. Furthermore, their similar structure of sequences further enhances their comparability and allows us to uncover their underlying symbolic meanings. They are also suitable for this study due to the high level of attention and scrutiny they received within the media. Based on these multiple factors, they provide an ultimate basis for our semiotic approach.

#### **4.5.2 Semi-structured executive interviews**

One part of the second phase of the data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews with brand executives who were personally involved in each brand's marketing strategy. The primary reason was our aim to outline the strategic elements and activities that were part of each brand's campaign. We specifically chose semi-structured interviews since the more open interview questions tend to give rise a higher degree of confidentiality, as the interviewee are able to respond in personal way, compared to structured interview, which is an aspect we considered to enhance our result, as the interviewees personally could reflect and elaborate upon the reason and outcome of the campaign. To support the conversation during the interview we used a topic guide that allowed us explore aspects relevant for the interviewee, but at the same time keep focus on the relevant aspects (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Easterby-Smith et.al, 2015). Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that despite intense efforts to obtain interview objects at H&M, these were rejected, which in turn decreases the overall comparability between the cases. By compensating for the missing data we have instead applied extensive documentation materials on the 'Ladylike' campaign.

##### **4.5.2.1 Sampling selection**

The interviewees were selected with regard to our limited access and the interviewee's potential availability; hence we chose to apply a convenient sampling technique (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Easterby-Smith et. al, 2015). The only criteria were that the interviewee had played a significant role within the feminist campaign and hence had a clear understanding of its strategic elements. In accordance with previous scholars (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Easterby-Smith et al, 2015), the regard to the limited access to the company and our dependence on the interviewee, a snowball sampling technique was further considered most applicable, in which our first interviewee could recommend another executive he or she considered appropriate for this study.

##### **4.5.2.2 Interview guide**

In semi-structured interviews a topic guide is often used, which refers to an informal lists of topics and questions to cover during the course of the interview (Bryman & Bell, 2015). To steer the discussion towards the research aim, our interview topic guide was categorized into three broader themes, which are presented in the following section. For full details see Appendix 1. A central advantage in using a topic guide is related to its flexibility, which enabled us to adapt and adjust the questions in a way that resonated with how the respondent's feelings and worldview (Bryman & Bell, 2015). *Laddering*, a common interview technique that involves asking interviewees to elaborate upon their answers by giving practical examples was repeatedly used (Easterby-Smith et al, 2015). This enabled us to

uncover subconscious motives and identify certain aspects related to the core values of the brand.

#### 4.5.2.3 Semi-structured interviews - location, design and steps followed

The semi-structured interviews were held on April 21st and April 25th via video-link, in which each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes (see table 2 below for details). The video-link was organized through “Skype for Business”, and provided by the company. As mentioned above, we did only conduct semi-structured interviews with Libresse executives, due to the denied access at H&M. There are certain limitations necessary to consider when conducting remote interviews as opposed to face-to-face, such as a lack of immediate contextualization and a decreased ability to consider non-verbal communication cues such as body language (Easterby-Smith, et. al, 2015). Although remote interviews limit our ability to grasp the full context, by integrating the video-feature during the interviews we could still capture the body language and to some sense the contextual situation. Another reason for choosing remote interviews was due to time-constraints of the interviewees, hence this method allowed for increased time flexibility. Aspects related to ethical as and legal aspects were highly considered (Bryman & Bell, 2015); first, in the beginning of each interview, interviewees were informed about the purpose of the study and how this material was intended to be used; second, the interviewees were asked upon their permission to record the session; and third, they were informed about their possibility to remain anonymous. Both of the conducted interviews was based on the same topic guide (see Appendix 1), but which was adjusted to a certain extent to fit the interviewee's role in the campaign. Each interview was divided into three blocks. First, initial questions were asked that addressed the role of the interviewee, followed by questions concerning critical events and activities that had a suggested impact on the outcome of the campaign. Lastly, the interview was asked to elaborate upon what he or she perceived as the largest risks and benefits in a brand’s pursuit of this type of strategy. The interview concluded with thanking the interviewee’s for the time and asking for permission to contact them again, if it should become necessary to complement the data.

**Figur 3: Information about executives interviews**

Interview nr.	Date	Duration	Interviewee	Position
1	April 21st	45 minutes	Margareta von Renteln	Project Leader RedFit campaign, Sweden
2	April 25th	35 minutes	Helene Stenlund Gauthier	Media Manager, Nordics (for Libresse, Libero & Tena)

### **4.5.3 Focus group sessions**

As stated in Chapter 1, a number of scholars have argued the importance of the consumer's role when assessing whether an interference of subculture or populist world is perceived as authentic (Holt, 1998, 2004; Bourdieu, 1984). Similar to when exploring a brand's co-opting attempts of a social movement, it becomes critical to involve their perspectives in our study. As part of our mixed-method design, consumers' views will be collected by the conductance of focus groups, which works as an exploratory tool to gain multi-faceted views on a certain topic. The method is beneficial when aiming to form a unified understanding of the respondent's world (Easterby-Smith et al, 2015). In this study, the method is appropriate as the aim lies within developing an understanding for how this type of political branding strategy is experienced and received by consumers. Hence, we it allows us to gain deep insights into how customers of both Libresse and H&M perceive the brands' co-opting activities of feminism.

#### **4.5.3.1 Sampling selection**

In total, three focus groups were conducted in which a two group consisted of six people and one with five persons per session, which according to Bryman and Bell (2015) is optimal for maintaining control and stimulate the discussions. Typical case sampling technique was used when selecting participants. It is a form of purposive sampling technique, which refers to choosing a predefined group of the population (Easterby-Smith et al, 2015). This sampling method is generally applied when the interest lies within the normality of the units and respondents are representative for the specific case; that is, customers of both Libresse and H&M. This sampling strategy was chosen as the participants had to obtain certain criteria in order to serve the purpose of the study. Thus, participants were chosen for the purpose to contribute the most value on behalf of the study (Easterby-Smith et al, 2015). The criteria for participant selection were constructed to collect well-grounded data from informed participants; that is, to discover the underlying meanings of their interpretations of the area of study. This required participants to either identify themselves as feminist or at least be familiar with the feminist movement. The selection criteria further included: 1) being a female 2) being a current/former customer of both Libresse and H&M, and 3) being familiar with the 'Redfit' and 'Ladylike' campaigns.

#### **4.5.3.2 Topic guide**

In a focus group there is generally not a list of structured questions. Instead, a topic guide is often used that covers the main areas of the direction of the discussion (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The topic areas were initially categorized according to broader themes likely to steer the discussion towards the research aim. For full details please see Appendix 2. The questions under these topics were designed to derive feelings and reflections from the participants. During the sessions we encouraged participants' to think freely by stressing the absence of no "wrong" or "right" answer. *Laddering*, an interview technique that involves asking participants to elaborate upon their answers and to give practical examples of a particular event and explain how they believe this affected them, was repeatedly used (Easterby-Smith

et al, 2015). This not only enabled us to understand how they form judgments of both feminist campaigns as well as the brands' relations to it, but also to uncover the underlying feelings of how they resonate with both brands and the feminist movement on a more profound level. In addition, all data was recorded and transcribed to simplify the analysis process and to increase the reliability of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Easterby-Smith et. al, 2015).

#### **4.5.3.3 Video-elicitation of the campaign videos**

To prompt the discussion, focus group participants viewed each brand's campaign video before starting off the discussion surrounding the campaign. For an in-depth outline of each campaign video's content and message, view section 5.3 for Libresse "RedFit campaign video and 5.5 for H&M's Ladylike campaign video. The power pointed with videos we utilized can be found in Appendix 3, as well as reference to the online videos. Video-elicitation technique has in recent years grown in popularity among researchers when conducting focus groups due to its ability to both stimulate recall as well as provide a basis for reflection among the focus groups participants (Roth, 2009). This was also the main reason for applying this technique, as each campaign video was broadcasted in September 2016; that is, seven months prior to this study. According to Schubert (2006), video-elicitation also facilitates the views of the participant on a certain event; hence allowing us to gain insights on their experiences and how their views were mediated by certain factors linked to both the campaign the specific brand. However, we must consider that the video-elicitation technique only provides a glance of phenomena through the campaign- video, and therefore does not capture a peripheral vision of the phenomena (Roth, 2009; Jewitt, 2012). But with regards to our possible alternatives, such as photo-elicitation, which can stimulate the participants elaboration and perception of the social phenomena more than video-elicitation (Rose, 2012), it did not prompt the focus groups participants memory to the same extent, which was the purpose with showing the campaign-video before each discussion.

#### **4.5.3.4 Focus group - location, design and steps followed**

The data collection of the three focus groups took place on April 21st, April 25th and May 3rd. Two groups consisted of six people and one group consisted of five people, which according to Bryman and Bell (2015) is optimal for maintaining control and stimulate discussions. A necessary aspect to consider is the choice of a good 'moderator' who has the ability to facilitate conversations and make participants feel comfortable (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Easterby-Smith et al, 2015). Since we both have experience of conducting previous focus groups, we felt comfortable in that role. Another significant factor to consider is the choice of an appropriate location, since this might influence the overall sentiment of the discussions (Easterby-Smith et. al, 2015). Therefore, focus group sessions were conducted in the living room of one of the researchers, which created a relaxed setting without any external distractions that allowed for a relaxed and intimate conversation among participants. In addition, participants were offered refreshments as a grateful gesture, which further increased the comfort and relaxed sentiments in the venue. Below follows a detailed overview of how each session was conducted and the specific steps followed.

**Figur 4: Focus Group information**

Focus group	Date	Duration	P#	Age	Stated identification with feminism
<b>1</b>	April 21st	1.45 minutes	1	24	Yes
			2	24	No
			3	28	Yes
			4	27	Yes
			5	25	Yes
			6	25	No
<b>2</b>	April 25th	1 hour	7	23	No
			8	25	No
			9	22	Yes
			10	25	No
			11	26	No
<b>3</b>	May 3rd	1.15 minutes	12	25	Yes
			13	22	No
			14	25	No
			15	23	No
			16	24	No
			17	26	Yes

Focus group sessions followed the outline of the topic guide (see Appendix 2 for a full overview of the asked questions). Each session lasted approximately 1,5 hour and consisted of three phases. The first phase included a short introduction, in which we notified participants about the purpose of the session and how we intended to use the generated data. Aspects of ethical and legal reasons were considered (Bryman & Bell, 2015); each participant was asked upon her permission to record the session as well as having the choice to remain anonymous. To be able to separate discussions between the two cases, each session was split into two where each involved a focus on each case separately; specifically, we first focused on the campaign by the first brand in which we presented its official campaign video. As described in section 4.5.3.3 (video-elicitation of the campaign videos), the time period that had passed since their launch in September 2016 called for methods that stimulated participants' memory of the two separate campaigns. After this initial step we asked participants to elaborate upon their views of the content seen in the video. The discussion was later steered into how they perceived the brand's relation to feminism and critical events that had occurred in relation to the campaign. Ultimately, the discussion was steered into areas which we sought to distinguish how participants resonated with the feminist campaign on a more personal level. One should consider that a central weakness with conducting focus groups is the dilemma of strong characters taking over the discussion and having a strong impact on the views of other other participants, which might cause focus groups insights to be influenced by only a few or one individual. The risk for such a situation is also more present when discussing such a delicate topic related to politics and values (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Easterby-Smith et. al, 2015). Although a few such incidents occurred during focus group sessions, we could apply

our previous experience to take control and steer discussions forward. Aside from that, we aimed to limit our own involvement by only interfering to offer explanation or clarification of the open-ended questions upon the request by participants. In the second phase, focus was shifted to the second brand in which the same procedure was repeated. In the third phase, the two cases were compared against each other, in which we sought to uncover how participants' experiences of both campaign were mediated in relation to each other. Ultimately, their views served as an empirical foundation that provided us with profound insights when analyzing the outcome for each brand.

#### 4.6 Narrative analysis

The narrative analysis of the collected data has been conducted as a mixture between *performative narrative analysis*, in which we also have taken inspiration from a *thematic narrative analysis*. A performative narrative analysis is frequently used when examining the plot of a story (main actors, critical activities, sequence of events etc.) (Riessman, 2008). We applied those to form a structure of how each brand's activities were performed, which in that sense allowed us to distinguish critical factors related to the outcome. Depending on the model of narrative analysis, focus lies within different steps in the analyzing process. This study specifically emphasized the context and view of narratives as being multi-voiced and co-constructed, in which one seeks to highlight factors such as linguistic markers and story sequence (Riessman, 2008). One could also argue that an *interactive narrative analysis* would be considered more relevant for this study since it specifically focuses on the context and the effect of the story, which would also be aligned with the purpose of our study. However, when considering both verbal and nonverbal interaction a performative analysis is considered most preferable. This approach also emphasizes how historical and cultural contexts influence the constructions of the narrative (Riessman, 2008). Thus, we consider a performative narrative analysis as most applicable for this study, which will be utilized to structure the campaign into sequences, as well as to identify its main actors, heroes, supporters, critical events and so on. In the analysis later steps we will draw inspiration from thematic narrative analysis, in which the focus lies within "what" is said, rather than the "telling" (Riessman, 2008). Using inspiration from a thematic approach enables us to form conceptual groupings from the data that ultimately allows us to identify specific themes. It also enhances our ability to interpret and evaluate the experiences of focus group participants.

The analysis was conducted in four steps: 1) *selection* 2) *analysis of the narrative* 3) *re-contextualization* and 4) *interpretation and evaluation*. First, the selection of the case stories was chosen due to its ability to shed light into the phenomena and research question. According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) one should acknowledge which type of data to include into the narrative. Since our objective was to specifically answer "how" brands successfully can co-opt a social movement, we considered it necessary to involve multiple perspectives that can shed light on the research question in a credible way. To present a thick plot to each case we thus included document studies, executive and consumer views as well as a background and context to each plot. In the second step, *analysis of the narrative*, the two different plots were carefully examined and critical elements were identified, such as beginning, middle and end. To provide a compelling and understandable

view as possible we chose to present each plot in a chronological order. In this step we were attentive to its dramaturgical elements, as well as its main characters (protagonists and antagonists) and critical events. In a performative narrative analysis the main focus lies within step two and three; that is, within the presentation of the co-constructed and multi-voiced narrative (Riessman, 2008; Easterby-Smith et. al, 2015). In step three and four, re-contextualization and interpretation and evaluation, the thematic approach was applied, in which emphasize was on “what” was told, rather the “telling”. Hence, in the third step the plots were re-examined with a special reference to the context in which they were told, such as background and historical links. To capture the context of both plots we included consumers’ views into this step. The thematization-technique was facilitated by advice from Ryan and Bernard’s article “*Techniques to identity themes*” (2003), and by combining the two different types of analysis, allowed us to identify certain aspects that might have been overlooked otherwise. In the final step, *interpretation and evaluation*, plots were assessed based on their meaning and function, which involved an evaluation of the reason behind the story, what made it interesting from the storyteller and the audience’s point of view as well as *why* it was told in the first place.

#### **4.7. Trustworthiness**

When assessing the quality of the study researcher often evaluate the study based on its replication, reliability, and validity. On the other hand, qualitative researcher has argued how these criterias does not capture all relevant aspects in in qualitative studies (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Kvale, 1992). With regards to this study’s qualitative research methodology it will thus be evaluated according to Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) framework of trustworthiness. By addressing the aspects of *transferability*, *credibility*, *dependability* and *confirmability* the trustworthiness of the study will be examined.

Transferability refers to what which extent the findings of the study can be applied to other situations or even the same situation at another time, which is often limited in qualitative studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Considering that the studied phenomenon is constrained to two cases that each are set within unique conditions, the transferability of this research is limited. At the same time, it could be argued that the distinct characteristics of each case allow for our findings to be more transferable than would be the case if they had been identical. Also, since the specific setting chosen for data collection of focus groups is difficult to imitate, the replicability of the assessed research is limited. In contrast, we can consider phase one of the data collection; namely the collection and analysis of each video campaign as well as the collected online material of the two cases as relatively easy to imitate, which thus enhances the transferability to a certain extent.

Credibility refers to how congruent the findings are to the reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To enhance the credibility of this study, we gained an early familiarity with the phenomenon and the brands chosen for this study. We also got acquainted with focus group participants; such as their relationship with both brands and the feminist movement. Furthermore, by allowing interviewees to comment on findings and conclusions we ensured that our interpretations accounted for their personal views (Easterby-Smith et al, 2015). Also, to account for as many participants’ personal views as possible, we ensured that one or a few individuals did not

dominate the discussions. This is further strengthened by the triangulation approach of this study; that is, the use of multiple methods such as focus groups, interviews and documentation studies. Moreover, by using video-elicitation techniques during focus group sessions, we enhanced participants' ability to recall experiences related to the campaigns in 2016, hence providing us with a more credible narrative. However, a major limitation in terms of the credibility of this study is due to the denied access of the second brand H&M, which thereby decreased the cases' comparability. This implies that the findings of this study might have been different if we had compared the cases with more equal material on both.

Dependability is synonymous to the concept of reliability within positivist research and addresses the issue of whether the study could be repeated in the same context, with the same participants and gain consistent results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The focus of this report has been to describe the research design in a way that enables future researchers to easily implement the processes and repeat the study. However, it should be acknowledged that methods have been appropriated to the subject of study, and observations of the conducted research are dependent on situational factors that could differ between focus group and interview sessions, which limits the ability to create identical outcomes. Dependability is although improved by consistent interpretation of data in which we compared our separate individual observations and analyses of data as well as document the research procedures in detail.

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results are biased and intruded by the researcher's values (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As qualitative research implies a certain aspect of subjectivity in describing and understanding the phenomena one must take into account the limited ability to remain objective in the interpretations made. In other words, it is vital to be aware of personal biases in interview-specific contexts and to adopt a contextually relevant self-position (Alvesson, 2003). To manage these risks we attempted to avoid a single, favored angle or vocabulary by taking on a reflexive pragmatic position both within the situation of the interviews as well as during focus group sessions. The reflexive approach was further applied within the semiotic analysis, in which interpretation of the feminist signs conveyed in campaign videos was supplemented by views from focus group participants. Another factor that enhanced the credibility of this research was how we applied inter-subjectivity by independently reflect upon the various research processes and exchange and compare our individual findings to become both receptive and reduce potential biases.

#### **4.8 Limitations of the study**

This study has a number of limitations related to the methodology used. A major limitation has been the limited access to the second case company H&M, despite persistent efforts to get in contact with managers involved in the "Ladylike" campaign. Although we have been in personal contact with both the company's advertising agency, Forsman & Bodenfors, as well as senior employees within H&M Group who assisted us in our efforts, we have not been able to obtain interviews with executives involved in the campaign. The denied access has thus affected the overall comparability between the two cases. In that sense, the 'Ladylike'



campaign lacks certain angles of the chronological narrative, which in comparison to the rich data collected from the 'Redfit' campaign suggests certain limitations of the credibility of the study. However, to compensate for the lacking data, the executives' views of Libresse have been supplemented by numerous press releases from H&M related to the 'Ladylike' campaign. Another limitation of this study concerns how the ages of focus group participants not fully represent the wide range of target groups of both brands. A sample containing the ages 15- 40 would be considered as optimal, but due to the specific criteria that focus group participants needed to fulfill (such as possessing knowledge on feminist issues and being a current/former customer of both brands), limited our ability to find further age varieties in the suggested time period of this study. This implies that the views of focus group participants could be representative of women within the ages 20-30 years, and thus not the entire target population of each brand. Finally, the 10-week time limit for this study did not enable us to conduct a pilot study in which we could test our topic guide, which generally is recommended within case study research (Eisenhardt, 1989, Yin, 1994). Overall, these limitations must be taken into consideration when assessing the validity of our findings.

#### **4.9 Reflection on ethical and political dimensions**

In this section we reflect upon the ethical and political factors that might have influenced our findings, which is a necessary procedure when addressing such a delicate topic related to political values (Easterby-Smith et. al, 2015) that feminism suggests.

Within business and management research, the ethical focus is mainly centered on securing the interest of objects, such as the interviewee and focus group participants used in this study (Easterby-Smith et al, 2015). With regard to this aspect, the interviewee's and focus group participants' right to personal confidentiality has previously been emphasized. Also, all human objects of study had the right to withdraw from the interview or focus group sessions at any time, as well as the option not to respond to a specific question whenever they did not feel comfortable answering it. Furthermore, prior to each interview and focus group session each participant was asked for his or her permission to record the session, and informed about his or her right to remain anonymous and how we intended to use the collected material.

Given the delicate nature of the study, it is crucial to reflect upon the political dimensions as well. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2012) identify four political factors that might impact the research focus and process; *1) the experience of the researcher 2) the subject of study 3) corporate stakeholders and 4) academic stakeholders*. It must first be acknowledged how our own backgrounds and personal experiences might influence the process. However, we argue that our different backgrounds and experiences arguably suggest rather diverse interpretation of our empirical findings. Second, as the subject of the research implies, feminism is closely tied with one's political views and can thus be a sensitive topic to discuss, an aspect that should be highly considered. Third, this study does not have any direct corporate stakeholders, as the data gained collected from SCA (Libresse) did not involve any formal collaboration. Nevertheless, we have been dependent on the organization to provide us with reliable and truthful insights and data, which are ought to treat responsibly and respectfully. In that sense, our findings might still be of interest of both brands addressed in

this study, but as stated above this research has been conducted independently without regard to any corporate stakeholders. Finally, the academic stakeholder in this case is Lund University School of Economics & Management, which regardless of a great deal of feedback has not influenced the research into a particular direction.

### 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter consists of the theoretical framework chosen for this study, in which we will provide an outline of these. To provide many theoretical viewpoints and uncover different angles of both cases, we have adopted an eclectic approach in which a combination of different theories are used. First, we draw upon elements of the theoretical framework proposed by Bigné-Alcaniz, Curras-Perez and Sanchez-Garcia (2009) in their research of cause-related marketing, in which they assess the ‘fit’ between the brand and a specific cause based on a number of critical aspects. These theories will be combined with consumer-Company identification theory (which we will refer to as C-C identification theory) developed by Bhattacharya and Sen (2003). The C-C identification theory focuses on a brand’s ability to develop identity attractiveness among consumers and how consumers evaluate a brand’s identity potential relative to their own. It might thus help us explain how brands should effectively construct and communicate their identity and what might cause them to fail when integrating support of a social movement as part of their branding strategy. While the conceptual framework of brand-social movement fit helps us understand how the success or failure of a brand’s co-optation of the feminist movement is influenced by how consumers perceive the compatibility between the feminist movement and the brand, C-C identification theory allows us to explore how the feminist movement can influence brand identity attractiveness based on its ability to resonate with consumers on an identification level. They are thus both critical tools for investigating different aspects of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, while this combined conceptual framework allow us to assess both the similarity and relevance between the social movement and the brand, it does not explore deeper aspects related to the cultural value of the brand that makes consumers perceive it as authentic (Spiggle, Nguyen & Caravella, 2012). Scholars have argued that while fit is culturally neutral; authenticity considers the cultural link of the brand that resides within its brand essence, aura and DNA (Brown, Kozinets & Sherry, 2003; Grayson & Martinec, 2004). To further explore a brand’s ability to deliver expressions of the feminist stance that are of cultural, semiotic and symbolic value, we will thus examine central aspects related to authenticity. These aspects will serve as a complement to the combined social movement- fit and brand identity attractiveness framework as they allow us form an in-depth understanding of what causes a brand to be perceived as legitimate and culturally consistent as it employs new meanings related to the social movement. To examine the underlying elements of the feminist identity it is also essential to explore how representations of feminist myths have been depicted within contemporary media. Ultimately, the four main theoretical aspects presented in this section will allow us consider the multi-faceted views collected on the phenomena and hence serve as a substructure for our narrative analysis.

### **3.1 Conceptual framework of ‘fit’ between two entities**

Within the research of cause-related marketing it has been found that consumers are generally positive towards brands supporting a social cause (Webb and Mohr, 1998; Till & Nowak, 2000; Lafferty & Goldsmith, 2005). On the other hand, research also suggests that consumers in the beginning often are skeptical towards these types of strategies (Dean, 2003; Forehand & Grier, 2003); believing that companies are using causes for their commercial interests rather than having altruistic motives. With regard to this, as a first perspective will draw upon the conceptual model developed by Bigné-Alcaniz, Curras-Perez and Sanchez-Garcia (2009) in their research on cause-related marketing in which they assess the ‘fit’ between the brand and a specific cause. The framework is built upon a number of factors suggested to influence the perceived fit between the brand and the cause, in which a higher degree of fit is able to evoke a more positive consumer response (Rifon, Trimble & Li, 2004; Becker-Olsen, Hill & Cudmore, 2006). Since the same values are considered applicable for the context of this study; that is, the fit between the brand and feminist movement, we will employ the framework within our research. Similar findings of how the congruence between the brand and a supported or endorsed entity (e.g. cause, event, celebrity) can influence consumers’ fit perceptions have been provided by previous research (Gwinner and Eaton, 1999; Olson & Thjømmøe, 2011). This theoretical lens is relevant since it allows us to examine how the success or failure of co-opting a social movement can be explained by the degree of compatibility between the social movement and the brand. The conceptual framework is built around three central parts that serve as a substructure for how the fit between the brand and the social movement is perceived, which will be elaborated in the following sections.

#### **3.1.2 Brand credibility**

The first construct of fit between the brand and the social movement is brand credibility, which is closely related to source credibility (Aaker & Brown, 1972). The components of source credibility has been linked to two aspects; source expertise and trustworthiness. Source expertise has within the marketing literature (Erdem & Swait, 2004; Trimble & Rifon, 2006) been defined as “the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions”, while trustworthiness is explained as “the degree of confidence in the communicator’s intent to communicate the assertions he considers most valid” (Hovland et, al. 1953). Specifically, it deals with the extent to which consumers can trust the communicated identity by the brand, which often involves its own claims of trustworthiness. In that sense, the way in which trustworthiness is communicated to consumers through media as well as other domains is a highly determinant factor. Perceptions of trustworthiness among consumers are also likely to depend on other significant factors, such as their historical relationship with the brand and its overall reputation (Chaudari & Holbrook, 2001; Gotlieb & Sarel, 1991). Consequently, brand trustworthiness often shows a high variation among consumers. We can thus see brand credibility as the extent to which consumers perceive the brand as having sincere intentions and also whether the brand possesses the necessary experience that has earned it the legitimacy to be seen as a true supporter of the social

movement, which then form their subsequent judgments about brand trustworthiness. As will be explained in section 3.2.3, judgments of brand credibility are also often closely linked with perceptions of brand motives.

### **3.1.2 The two-dimensional nature of social movement – brand fit**

The fit between the social movement and the brand has generally been understood as the perceived similarity and coherence between the social movement and the brand (Lafferty, 2007; Olson and Thjømmøe, 2011). Similar to C-C identification theory, the conception of ‘fit’ also addresses the coherence between consumers’ self-image and brand image, and as has been investigated there are a number of significant factors that constitute the basis for fit perceptions. In their framework, Bigné-Alcaniz et al (2009) incorporate two main aspects found within previous research (Olson & Thjømmøe, 2011) argued to be closely linked with perceived fit. The first criterion is functional fit, which concerns the extent to which the brand’s products are used by those who are part of the social movement. The second dimension refers to the image affinity (image fit) between the social movement and the brand; that is, the extent to which the brand image and its positioning is aligned with the image of the social movement (Lafferty, et. al., 2004; Trimble & Rifon, 2006). Both aspects relate to a sense of attitude similarity between the brand’s target group and the supporters of the social movement. The reason for these criteria is that they enable consumers to easily resonate and understand the brand identity, but also allow them to express it in an authentic way, i.e. in a way that resonates with their own goals and values. For example, if the feminism and the brand carry shared values and relate to each other on an identification level, the higher the likelihood of ‘fit’ between them. Since both functional and image fit generally correspond with each other, they are treated as a two-dimensional factor that serve as a critical component in the formations of fit perceptions between the social movement and the brand.

### **3.1.3 Altruistic attribution**

The last aspect that constitutes a part of the framework concerns the perceived altruistic intentions of the brand. According to attribution theory (Kelley, 1973), when people are unable to find information related to an event they tend to seek a logic or explanation that can help them to make sense (and thus, gain a sense of control) of their own lives and their circumstances. In other words, individuals assign causal attributions to things and events. Similar to a social cause, a brand’s support of a social movement may cause consumers to create attributional assumptions that might mediate their perceptions of the altruistic intents of the brand. Specifically, they tend to attribute two different motives to the brand (Forehand & Grier, 2003). First, they assign attributes based on the potential benefits for the social cause; that is, the brand’s altruistic motives. Second, they generally attribute the brand based on the brand’s egoistic motives. What research has shown (Becker-Olsen et al, 2006; Rifon et al, 2004) is that consumers assigned attributions tend to be dominated by their perceptions of either the altruistic or egoistic motives of the brand, which often will have an impact on their subsequent judgments. In other words, their judgments will generally rest upon their views of the brand as either altruistic or egoistic and consequently, guide their judgments of brand credibility (Bigné-Alcaniz et al, 2009). In that sense, the interrelationship between credibility and altruistic attribution suggests that if they believe that the brand has altruistic motives

related to the social movement, it will naturally enhance their perceptions about the brand's trustworthiness, skills and experience (expertise) when it comes to its association with the social movement.

It thus becomes apparent these conceptions of "fit" outlined above are significant factors that can influence consumer's attitude towards a brand's co-optation of feminism. More importantly, the conception of 'fit' shows that a brand's success in co-opting a social movement does not necessarily rely on how popular the brand is, but rather rests upon its relationship with the social movement. Hence, the potential of the brand to attract or alienate consumers when co-opting a social movement may not merely depend on its marketing messages, but whether the ideological lens that the brand is initially viewed from resonates with the feminist movement. In contrast, a poor fit has been suggested to cause a higher resistance towards the sponsoring message that can imply harmful effects on brand equity (Menon & Kahn, 2003). The reason for this is that it can easily distort consumers' perceptions about the brand and make them confused about the brand meanings. It is thus important to explore the relatedness of 'key meanings' associated with the brand and feminism respectively. On the other hand, a high degree of match-up between the brand and the social movement may lead consumers to become more accepting towards the brand's altruistic efforts, which in turn enhances the transfer effects in terms of both image and emotions between the brand and the feminist movement due to a greater coherence between those two. In that sense, these theoretical aspects of 'fit' are necessary tools for analyzing the empirical outcomes of this study.

### **3.2 C-C identification theory**

In order to understand the success versus failure of the illustrative cases, it is crucial to evaluate consumer's relationships with the brand in the first place. Specifically, how both campaigns are received by consumers largely depend on their perceptions of both brands, including the extent to which they are able to identify with them. Thus, we will draw on Bhattacharya and Sen's framework (2003) on consumer-company identification (C-C identification), which extends the concept of 'fit' by examining the relationship between consumers and brands, suggesting that as consumers gain knowledge and experience about a brand, their responses to the brand's behavior may be influenced by their perceptions of 'fit'. This framework thus explores the conditions in which consumers enter into strong and committed relationships with brands, which is here determined by the brand's ability to enhance identity attractiveness. As we will demonstrate, the C-C identification theory rests upon five important aspects that brands should consider in developing high identity value among consumers.

The theory is based on the relationship between the perceived brand identity and identity attractiveness (i.e. what determines a brand's identity attractiveness). The main argument is that a strong consumer-company relationship lies within the brand's ability to resonate with consumers on an identity level. Specifically, it builds upon theories of social identity (Brewer 1991; Tajfel & Turner 1985); that is, the idea that consumers go beyond their personal identity to develop an identity that seeks to resonate with how they wish to be viewed by others. In that sense, C-C identification theory claims that depending on their own perceptions

of brand identity, consumers make evaluations about the brand's identity attractiveness. The attractiveness depends on its ability to fulfill three substantial self-definitional needs: self-continuity, self-enhancement and self-distinctiveness. Based on these needs, we assess both brands' identity attractiveness in relation to the three criteria presented in the forthcoming sections.

The first criterion is how distinctive the brand is in the characteristics consumers value (i.e. identity distinctiveness). Drawing on social identity theory, people seek to express themselves in ways that allow them to be distinguished from others (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). People's opposing needs for fitting into a group while simultaneously wanting to maintain a sense of uniqueness solve this problem by identifying with groups that can satisfy both. Their need for identity distinctiveness depends on the cultural norms, such as the degree of individualization within society. Naturally, identity distinctiveness is also likely to be influenced by competitors in terms of factors such as their identities and degree of distinctiveness. In that sense, identity distinctiveness is a valuable trait for gaining brand identity attractiveness.

The second criterion is related to the brand's prestige (i.e. identity prestige). Within this context, prestige mainly refers to other people's views of the brand, which is of value to consumers (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). It focuses on consumers' needs to present and perceive themselves in a positive way. This also goes hand in hand with consumer's need for self-consistency. As has been identified within other studies, consumers seek to fulfill their self-enhancement need by identifying with brand's that express a prestigious identity, which in turn allows them to stand in that positive light. The brand attractiveness thus also depends on its ability to reflect consumer's positive self-images.

The third criterion articulates the importance for the brand to express identity coherence; that is, to display consistency in its behavior and meanings over time. A lot of variation or discrepancy in brand behavior is likely to cause an unstable brand identity that makes it more difficult for consumers to relate to. In other words, it is important that the brand does not articulate opposing behaviors within different domains, but rather a set of actions that together can turn into a stable and coherent image. This is especially important in terms of displaying consistent positioning strategies over time. A shift in brand identity can thus cause confusion and loss of resonance with consumers. Also, the ability for consumers to relate to a brand depends on how different brand traits relate to each other; that is, the defining brand characteristics should be connected and provide a stable foundation for the brand's personality. Lastly, a high number of brand communicators with different interests increases the risk of disrupting brand identity coherence, which today becomes more apparent within the realm of social media, where people often use brands as mediating devices to gain publicity (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2015). In that sense, the ability to maintain brand identity coherence is an important factor for gaining brand identity attractiveness.

Based on the criteria presented in the previous section, this framework subsequently suggests that the greater the brand identity attractiveness, the more likely it is that consumers will identify with the brand. The implications of that is that consumers hence can become attached to brands that can fulfill one or more of the above stated criteria, in which they in turn

develop meaningful and committed relationships with these. Over time, their loyalty towards the brand is likely to sustain during times when the brand engages in risky endeavors. This might imply that a part of the brand's customer base is still likely to support the brand even during times when the brand takes an alternative or controversial branding approach such as co-opting a social movement. This gives consumers the opportunity to show their support for the brand and immerse in a feeling that they are carrying some of the risk, in which their relationship with the brand often is further strengthened (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Nevertheless, the C-C identification theory might also help us a sense of understanding for why a brand fails when integrating an ideology into its branding strategy; that is, discrepancies between the brand identity and the social movement might intuitively affect the brand's identity attractiveness in a negative way. Also, it suggests that the brand must consider the goals of the social movement, which might not be aligned with its financially driven corporate motives, which again relates to the 'fit' between the brand and the social movement. In that sense, the C-C identification theory hence allows us to understand aspects related to consumer's ability to resonate with both the brand and the feminist movement and how their own motivations for supporting the brand are formed.

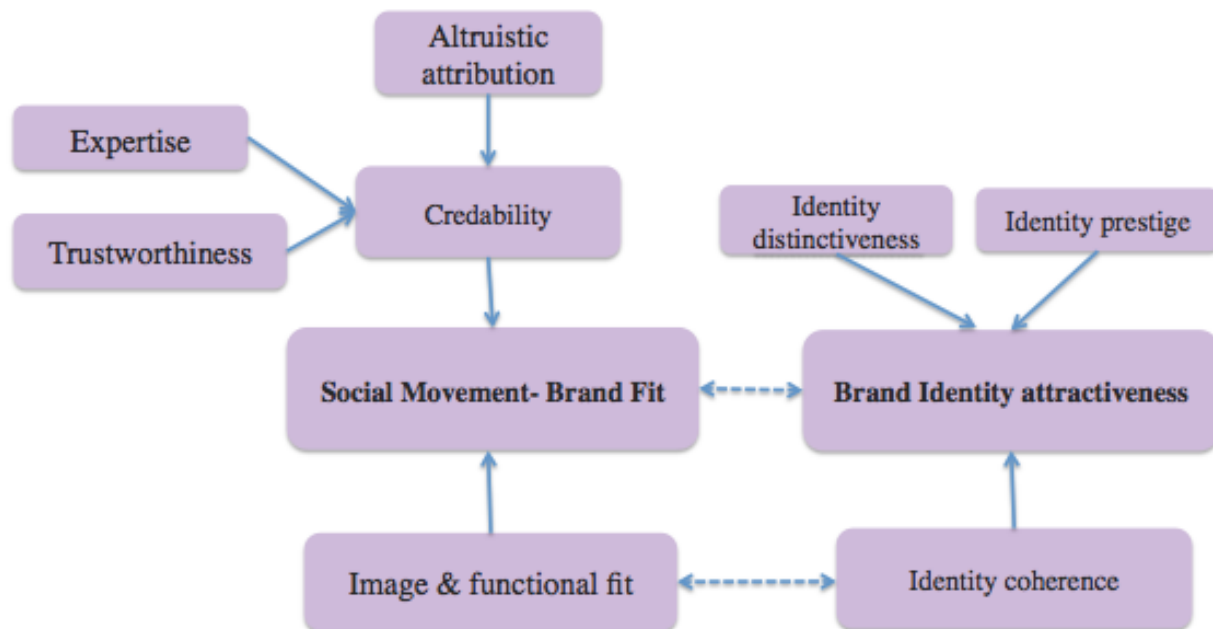
### **3.3 Preliminary framework**

Drawing upon the similarities between the C-C identification theory and the conceptions of 'fit' between two entities, we suggest that these frameworks could in fact supplement each other and together serve as a valuable tool when examining both cases in this study. They both recognize the importance of compatibility between the brand and the feminist movement, while simultaneously providing different aspects that might be of importance to understand; specifically, how the brand can assess its relevance to the social movement and enhance its identity attractiveness among consumers. They are thus similar in many regards, but also suggest a critical difference; while the ideas of 'fit' is linked to the brand's relationship with the social movement, the C-C identification theory functions as a supplementary tool that can extend this view by focusing on how consumers resonate with the brand based on their personal relationships with the brand. Since both frameworks are built upon the same ontological paradigm we can combine them into a joint framework that together will serve as a substructure for our analysis.

The combined framework is presented in figure 2 below.



**Figur 5: A joint framework between social movement -brand fit and C-C identification theory**



Since the separate frameworks focus on aspect that are of similar nature, we can hence suggest an interrelationship between the ‘fit’ and the brand’s ability to enhance identity attractiveness. Ultimately, the joint framework may help our analysis of what causes one brand to succeed and another to fail when attempting to co-opt a social movement. However, it must be considered that the preliminary nature of this framework has not been used within other studies, and the relation between all of its constitutional parts does not suggest full validity (thus, we use the dashed lines to represent the suggested indirect relationship between some elements). Rather, we use the framework as a guiding tool for our empirical data collection, while still allowing it for new theoretical insights to emerge.

As stated earlier, it is necessary to complement judgments of fit between the brand and the social movement with aspects related to authenticity to explore elements that stretches beyond the relevance between the brand and social movement. In other words, in order to understand the discrepancies between different types of feminist identities emerging from our focus group data, and brands’ capitalization of those, we must explore elements of brand authenticity. As becomes apparent in the next section, a brand’s ability to deliver authentic expressions is critical to its overall success in its pursuit to co-opt a social movement. As will be presented in the forthcoming sections, there are a number of aspects and techniques that brands need to consider when co-opting a social movement in order to be perceived as legitimate, preserving of its brand essence and to avoid brand exploitation. Using these dimensions as a way to understand how consumers perceive the fit between the brand and the feminist movement is thus necessary to evaluate the outcomes of both cases.

### 3.4 Authenticity

As notified in the literature review by a number of scholars (Holt, 2004; Holt & Cameron 2012; Goodson, 2012; Furlow, 2013), the ability for brands to remain authentic is of crucial importance when entering the areas of cultural branding, hence making it an aspect of high relevance within this study. In this section we will thus elaborate further upon authenticity by explicitly define it and distinguish what characterizes the concept as well as examine the roles played by different individuals and groups in developing brand authenticity.

The term *authentic* is often related to words such as “genuineness”, “reality” and “truth”, but is nevertheless a multilayered concept that can imply different things for different consumers in different contexts. This implies that authenticity is subjective, socially constructed and applied to an object by consumers, marketers and other stakeholders (Beverland, 2009). However, since the perceptions of authenticity are socially constructed, authenticity is socially negotiated within society, hence reflecting wider social norms (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). A number of researchers have previously discussed how the concept of authenticity is manifested in the marketplace. For instance, (Postrel, 2003) argues that brands are perceived as authentic if they possess certain factors, such as having a connection to time and place; that is, to reaffirm traditions. A second factor is whether an object expresses an inner personal truth linked to its originality. In contrast, Arnould and Price (1993) and Grandey (2005) argue that authenticity is derived from sincerity and genuineness of intent, which can be attained through showing less materialistic behaviour, or by being seemingly unattained by commercial concerns/interest. Although they all give manifestation on how to evoke authenticity (Kozinet, DeBerry-Spence, Duhachek, Nuttavuthisit & Storm, 2002; Holt, 2004; Grayson & Shulman, 2000; Postrel, 2003; Grandey et al, 2005; Arnould & Price, 1993), only a handful of researchers have explored the antecedents of the concept (Bruner, 1994; Evans-Pritchard 1987; MacCannell 1999; Peterson, 1997). In this study, we will thus use authenticity in accordance with the recognized research by Grayson and Martinec (2004) and Beverland (2008). While Grayson and Martinec (2004) help us understand which cues consumers apply when making judgements about a brand’s level of authenticity, Beverland (2008) explains how these cues are used to assess different forms of authenticity.

According to Grayson and Martinec (2004) there exist two central forms of authenticity: *indexical* and *iconic authenticity*. Indexical authenticity refers to whether a marketing offer is perceived as “original” or “the real thing”. Grayson and Martinec (2004) argue that indexical authenticity relies on cues, which have a factual or spatio-temporal link with something else, in which these links can be either physical or psychological. The authentic set of behavior represent those actions which reflect the actor’s true self, not imitated to achieve a particular effect. As this type is primarily linked to a product’s physical characteristics, we will in this mainly focus on the second type; *iconic authenticity*, which derives from an object whose physical manifestation resembles something else that is indexically authentic; that is, “a reproduction or recreation of something that is being perceived as very similar to something else” (Grayson & Martinec, 2004). In other words, iconic authenticity is closely linked to the brand’s ability to preserve its essence or “iconicity” in which consumers access their preexisting knowledge or expectations of the brand to assess the similarity between the two.

In that sense, to be able to assess a brand's iconic authenticity consumers need to be familiar with a brand's historical symbolism and its ideological meanings.

According to Beverland (2008), consumers draw on indexical and/or iconic cues when making judgments of authenticity. First of all, consumers often seek *approximate authenticity* in brands; that is, authenticity that is linked to its lived tradition; specifically, a connection between the past and present and how the historic traditions have evolved to meet the modern standards in a continuous way. In other words, it is of significant value to consumers who seek approximate authenticity that changes in the practices associated with the brand are not undermining the brand essence and DNA. Judgments of approximate authenticity are linked to both iconic and abstract cues (i.e. indexical cues) that combined can create a genuine impression. Furthermore, consumers openly recognize that certain cues exist due to its commercialized benefit, but still appreciate that brands retain important traditions and not hide away their contemporary practices (Beverland, 2008). Moreover, consumers who emphasize products with a sense of lived tradition often purchase brands to reflect a deeper sense of self (Arnould & Price, 2000). In other words, they often seek information that both appeal and enable them to achieve self-authentication by connecting to time and place. It has thus been argued by scholars that to enhance approximate authenticity, marketers should focus on creating emotional impressions by emphasizing the personal value and meaning consumers attach to the brand (Keller, 2003; Grayson & Martinec, 2004).

A second form is *moral authenticity*, which is less connected to the value of time and place, and instead focused on the brand having genuine intentions that overrule its financial objectives (Grayson & Martinec, 2004). It is demonstrated by the brand showing a real commitment to the social movement in a way that reflects consumers' own morals and values. Thus, to demonstrate moral authenticity brands should focus on creating a factual or emotional sense that they deeply committed to its moral practices, by for example emphasizing pure commitment to its CSR policies (Grayson & Martinec, 2004). It also involves iconic cues that consumers draw upon when making their judgments, since they seek characteristics that relate to the passion of the brand as opposed to being an impersonal mass-produced product.

In their study, Thompson, Rindfleisch and Arsel (2006) argue that traditional branding strategies such as emotional branding run the risk of inducing a 'doppelgänger brand image', which they define as a "*family of disparaging images and stories about a brand that circulate within popular culture*" (Thompson, et. al, 2006, p.50). Over time, these can create opposing meanings and result in a loss of perceived authenticity among consumers. In fact, the doppelgänger brand image effect is the consequence of a latent brand image problem that reveals contradictions within the brand's emotional branding strategies. In that sense, it creates incongruence between the image derived from the inspirational and intimate elements of an emotional branding strategy and the image linked to its profit-driven motives. Consequently, the loss of authenticity in brand image disrupts the identity value of the brand among consumers.

Drawing on the ideas presented in preceding sections, marketers should seek to create different forms of authenticity depending on the product or service of the brand. However,

mass-market firms often have difficulty in delivering authenticity since their claims of authenticity often are undermined by consumers since they fail in carrying out effectively (Beverland & Luxton, 2005). Holt (1998) claims that as soon as brands are adopted by the mainstream culture they become commoditized, hence losing their symbolic uniqueness. Similarly, Bourdieu (1984) suggests that when consumer goods become labeled as 'common', they will be understood as distasteful objects that possess a contagious power to intrude the public space, they thus losing their distinctive mark and become rejected by the more cultivated classes. In that sense, brands that initially symbolize uniqueness and alternative lifestyles risk not only to lose these meanings, but also to adopt new unfavorable ones when gaining wider popularity. Recognizing these challenges, we will finally refer to Holt's view (2004) of how companies can deliver authenticity and enhance their brand based on a number of techniques. Specifically, he claims that brands must derive both authority and authenticity from the legitimate sources that do not possess any commercial interest linked to its aim. One of these methods is coat tailing on cultural epicenters, which is the process in which the brand becomes realized as an integrative part of the sub-culture (or in this case the social movement) rather than an opportunistic appropriator of its ideological meanings. Another technique is 'life world emplacement', which is the organization of events related to the sub-culture or adopting a spokesperson seen as a legitimate figure to represent its ideologies and the brand. A third method is using stealth branding techniques, a curveball strategy in which the brand is advertised in a way to customers without their awareness, e.g. by the use of tastemakers that can assign their cultural capital upon the brand (Holt, 2004). In that sense, brands can gain both authentic and authoritative value in their support of the ideologies embodied within the social movement.

Since the views of what is considered authentic is debated within research and generally is considered a multilayered concept, it is necessary to account for the multi-faceted angles provided in the previous section to gain a nuanced understanding for how authenticity is assessed and valued by consumers. Although authenticity is closely linked to aspects such as brand trustworthiness, credibility and identity coherence, it highlights the complexity of the phenomenon and thus provides an extensional view of how brands can employ support of a social movement in a way that appears genuine to consumers. In our theoretical framework we will thus apply the presented forms of authenticity as a way to assess the brand's ability to express legitimacy and genuine expressions of the social movement without sacrificing its brand essence. In the co-optation of a social movement, these views are thus helpful in articulating the importance of the brand extending its meanings in a way that are aligned with its cultural, symbolic and semiotic value. To further explore the logic of brands' semiotic expressions of feminism, it is crucial to understand the development of feminist myths within the media.

### **3.5 Mythologies**

This section allows us to explore how brands attempt to craft desirable images originated within contemporary feminist myths. As a central perspective, we will rely on the ideas developed by Roland Barthes first presented in 1957.

According to Barthes (2009), a myth is ‘a type of speech, a mode of signification – it is not an object, a concept or an idea’. It is a phenomenon created by human beings during an historical context and is sustained by stories; that is, through the form of speech. Since everything can be talked about, everything can embody a myth. The Barthesian theory of myths considers myths as part of hegemonic ideologies, and is thus an important tool for understanding the significance of different ideological views within a culture (Chandler, 2007). Since commercial text expresses different forms of signs, it is of crucial importance to gain a sense of understanding of the meaning within these. Signs are created in social contexts and are interpreted by the public in a way that is aligned with the hegemonic system through social codes (Seiter, 1992). A sign consists of two parts; the signifier and the signified. For example, roses can be seen as a signifier for love (the signified); hence, roses and love together form a sign (Barthes, 2009). The relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, and “are quite detachable from “signifieds”, and can circulate freely among other signifiers, thereby creating meanings that have nothing to do with their “signifieds” (Corrigan, 1997). According to Barthes (2009), signs are the constitutional elements that build myths, which in turn transmit social and political meanings. Since myths can be conveyed through speech, and speech also is expressed in writing, photography, cinema, publicity and even objects, makes myths into a central element of study within semiotics. Thus, in order to effectively apply a semiotic approach we must also consider how the meanings of signs and symbols have originated from myths within society; specifically, how feminist myths have come to be represented within contemporary media discourses.

#### **3.5.1 Feminist myths in the media**

This section will thus provide an overview of how the media’s representation of feminism is grounded within deeper forms of cultural and political interests. In that sense, it provides us with an understanding of how feminism is used by both brands; as will serve as a substructure for our narrative analysis of both campaigns.

Research has early uncovered how media’s depiction of women has worked as a way to reproduce traditional gender roles (McRobbie, 2004). More importantly, it has revealed how women have traditionally been sexually objectified in advertising, magazines, movies and so forth; depicting women who fall within the range of what is considered “ideal” versions of beauty within Western culture; that is, representations of women who are young, white and thin (Bartky, 1990). Consequently, there has existed a tense relationship between advertising and feminism as it historically has depicted idealized representations of women that they should conform to (MacClaran, 2012). These strategies became increasingly criticized during the late 70’s and 80’s by participants of the feminist movement who emphasized their

manipulative intentions; suggesting it as a reproduction of a patriarchal system that seeks to control women through domesticity (MaClaran, 2012).

Acknowledging this, a number of scholars have during the last couple of years suggested a new form of women's representation in the media as a way for brands to reconnect with female consumers (Chen, 2013; Gill & Scharff, 2011), in which their depictions often has been linked to postfeminist views. The basis of post-feminism lies within its critique of power structures by challenging the normative meanings created within social contexts (Weedon, 1999). Its aim is to deconstruct knowledge that has been institutionalized within society in which certain discourses are reproduced that lead to negotiations of power in everyday life. By destabilizing these dominant structures and challenging these normative views, it thus helps women overcome and go beyond their identities established by social structures and instead take control by viewing these as influences of power and agency (Giddens, 1979). Post-structural feminism can hence address how discourses centered on women's feminine representations can lead to identity construction by inviting counter-normative narratives, especially from women, of how gender roles are performed in society (Pierce, 2011). Furthermore, it questions how the dominant systems has used language to reinscribe certain identities of women, such as survivors or victims and their empowering and disempowering effects (for example, women who have experienced sexual assault may view themselves as either victims or survivors depending on dominant discourse). The function of post-structural feminism is thus to allow for alternative narratives that help deconstruct contemporary views on feminine identity. Unconventional representations of gender roles by brands in the media thus offers consumers a wider diversity in their identity construction. According to Butler (1999), these conventional gender roles can be dissolved if they are being sufficiently challenged during a longer period of time.

Drawing on postfeminist views, other researchers claim that contemporary media is increasingly using the notion of freedom and female empowerment as a means to reflect new media strategies, in which the underlying feminist notions are conveyed by new forms of representations of women as active, liberated, self-controlled and independent (Burkett & Hamilton, 2012; Gill, 2007). Researchers have argued that the increased popularity has caused feminism to become commercialized and even commoditized (Johnston & Taylor, 2008; McRobbie, 2009), in which they claim that the reason for promoted feminist messages is to encourage women towards new forms of consumption as part of a more advanced capitalist system. Within research this has been conceptualized as *commodity feminism*, which specifically involves "the reduction of feminism to a commodity that can be bought and sold on the capitalist market" through so called femvertising which has been described as "advertising that employs pro-female talent, messages, and imagery to empower women and girls" (Bredberg, 2016; SheKnowsMedia, n.d). One of the earliest examples of such pro-female messages can be discovered in Dove's 'Real Beauty' campaign from 2004, which celebrated 'natural' women and their physical differences (Johnston & Taylor, 2008), hence opening up to a feminist consumer culture. A number of scholars argue that the reason for this emerging trend is because of changing capitalist needs that involves a new representation of gender roles, by suggesting a link between neoliberal and feminist ideologies (Chen, 2013; Gill & Scharff, 2011; Kauppinen, 2013). In other words, this reinterpretation of gender roles requires women to be depicted as free, empowered and independent. It has also suggested a

shift from “objectification to subjectification” (Gill, 2007); in which representation is shifting away from women as “passive objects of the male gaze” to “active, independent and sexually powerful” (Gill, 2008). Conversely, Gill (2007) argues that this could lead to a higher form of female exploitation in which the traditional male objectification becomes internalized and instead becomes a new form of self-objectification controlled by the woman.

Furthermore, these researchers have noticed a link suggesting critical similarities between postfeminist and neoliberal ideologies. The first common characteristic is that both are based on the notion of individual independence; that is, the rhetoric that individuals should be free and self-governed in terms of the choices they make without having to rely on other people (Gill, 2008). A second trait within neoliberalist ideologies is the idea of autonomy and self-regulation, tendencies that also can be observed within post-feminism. Specifically, these ideas suggest that individuals should be able to make their own choices without having to conform to any ‘external’ pressure forced upon them. Third, these scholars have found a link suggesting that there are messages within contemporary culture targeting women by promoting practices of self-transformation, which are realized through self-discipline (Gill, 2008). Women are thus supposed to desire products that can help them redesign themselves and that can reflect their new empowered self. With regard to these common characteristics, postfeminist messages do not only promote feminism *per se*, but are presumably also means to reflect neoliberalist ideologies.

These aspects can further be linked to the views of *governmentality* provided by Foucault (1977,1980), which highlight how power relations between ideologies are reproduced through discursive media practices. According to critics of the feminist discourse within the media, the paradox within this notion lies within its way to promote messages of self-acceptance and independence while simultaneously promote consumption of products that make women conform to new types of Western ideologies (Johnston & Taylor, 2008). In other words, it encourages women to purchase certain types of products as a way to make them feel empowered as if their feminist identity only can be expressed by the use of certain products or brands. These scholars further claim that this type of commoditized feminism reframes the importance of beauty and individual distinctiveness without proposing any social changes. Instead, the policing of feminism causes it to lose its political meaning and instead reinforces women’s relationship to consumer culture, although these strategies are seldom identified as such.

Although some might suggest that the new forms of femininity depicted in the media creates a diversity of feminine identities that is for the benefit of women, some topics that might jeopardize these normative notions of femininity still remain hidden within hegemonic discourse, such as issues centered on menstruation. Historically, discussions centered on menstruation have often been discreet or stigmatized within hegemonic discourse, hence resulting in period shaming among younger women (Bobel, 2008). In fact, the word “taboo” itself is said to originate from the Polynesian word “tupua” meaning “menstruation” (NY Times, 1982). The stigmatization of periods has also caused women to view their abilities as limited for certain things during menstruation, such as exercising (Kissling, 1996). The depiction of women in media during their period has often been stereotypical; either portraying them as emotionally unstable and irrational, unable to achieve anything, or as

expected to rise above any challenge, denying any problem associated with periods. Since periods also has been depicted as something that undermines femininity, they are suggested not to be discussed within male-dominated spaces (MacDonald, 2007). Naturally, communication around these topics has not been welcomed within dominant discourse.

By drawing on ideas provided by these scholars, we are allowed to create an understanding of how contemporary feminist myths communicated within the media are linked to deeper aspects within both culture and politics. We will use that as to understand the basis for how new female representations within advertising may serve as an empowering tool for women, but also how it represents a neoliberal rhetoric that might suggest negative implications for feminism. Ultimately, these ideas will help us understand the conflict between postfeminist identities and their recent 'commoditized' forms within consumer culture.

### **3.3 Summary of theories**

This chapter has thus provided an outline of theories that will be used for analyzing our empirical material. In sum, we have evaluated these theories to be the most applicable for this study, and which will provide us with the tools to understand the studied phenomenon on a more profound level that relates to brand identity, fit between the social movement and the brand and also aspects linked to authenticity. In reflection of our multi-method approach, a combination of these theories will hence allow us to address the phenomena from multiple angles and levels. As a first perspective, the C-C identification theory will facilitate our understanding for how consumers assess brand attractiveness based on an identification level. This view will be supplemented by the conceptual model of social movement - brand fit, which serves as an evaluative tool of how aligned the brand image is with the feminist movement and how this might influence consumer's response to this type of branding strategy. Also, our understanding of the representation of feminist myths within the media help us interpret symbolic meanings of both the brands and the feminist campaigns, which in combination with theories on authenticity will facilitate our understanding for how a brand's co-optation of feminist discourse can be effectively executed. Thus, the chosen theoretical angles will ultimately optimize our ability to answer our research question in a profound and nuanced way.



## 4. Case background

In this chapter the background and company profiles of the two illustrative cases will be described, which will provide the reader with an overview of each case.

### 4.1 Libresse

Libresse is an international brand producing feminine hygiene products. The brand occurs under different regional names such as Nana (France), Bodyform (UK) and Nuvenia (Italy). In Sweden the brand sells towels, panty liners and tampons. It is owned by SCA, a leading global hygiene and forest products company (SCA Group, 2014). The brand itself has been present since the 1940s and has been taking a leading role within the development of feminine hygiene products on the market, such as introducing adhesive strips and single packing. Of the group's total turnover of 115 Mrdkr, the product segment that includes incontinence, diapers and feminine hygiene products accounts for 30% of the total turnover; that is, 43 344 Msek (SCA Group, 2017).

In a previous interview Margareta von Renteln expressed that Libresse's products (towels, panty liners and tampons) can be considered typical low-engagement products, in which price is an important attribute in the consumer decision-making process. Its brand promise is "*A women should feel secure and safe, regardless if it's during her period or the rest of the month*". The brand mainly targets younger women, within the age group 13-20 years old, but post-pregnant women are also part of its segment. Their main competitor on the Swedish market is Always (Sundqvist & Hillborg, 2012). To preserve the red thread in their marketing activities, each campaign proclaims the brand's core message "Fearless". Previous executed campaigns by Libresse has for example been "Libresse Invisible", in which thousands of girls submitted their entry in a design competition constructing their 'panty-packing' design. Another example is their initiative of "Girls1st forum", in which young girls can get support and answers to all teenage-related questions (Interview 1, April 21st 2017). Traditionally Libresse has emphasized analogue media, such as TV-commercials, but in recent years it has shifted towards a sole focus on the digital environment (Interview 1, April 21st 2017).

### 4.2 H&M

The H&M group is one of the world's leading fast-fashion companies, with over 4350 stores in 64 markets and e-commerce in 35 markets. With the value proposition "fashion and quality at the best price in a sustainable way" H&M has since 2012 emphasized the environmental aspects within its business model. The brand's sustainable vision accelerated in 2016 to lead a change towards a circular, fair and equal fashion industry (H&M Group, 2017). As a result to their sustainability efforts H&M climbed the ladder from 75th to 20th place in the "world's most sustainable corporations 2016". The H&M sortiment covers both men, women and children wear. In the 2016 'Ladylike' campaign, H&M only focused on the women's wear, which accounts for the largest part of their assortment and specifically directed to the women

between the ages of 20 - 40. However, the wide assortment with numerous sub-brands such as Divided, L.O.G.G., Conscious collection, H&M Trend and so on, allows H&M to reach a wide target group by offering many different styles of fashion (H&M Group, 2017).

In comparison to their competitors such as other fast fashion brands (Lindex, Zara, River Island), H&M put large investments into high-end marketing activities, both in terms of collections designed by exclusive designers such as Chanel designer Karl Lagerfeld, Jimmy Choo, Stella McCartney; as well production of custom-made celebrity wear for exclusive events such as the Oscars (Business for fashion, 2013). In recent years, influencers has become an important part of the brand's marketing activities; the Balmain collection fronted with influencers such as the reality star Kendall Jenner and Victoria secret angel Jourdan Dunn (Crimson Hexagon, n.d). However, the brand still uses traditional marketing methods, and is still a big buyer of TV-ads. Despite its global presence, H&M attempts to work locally with its marketing efforts, by for example employing local influencers (Resume, 2016c).

## **5. Empirical findings and analysis**

In this chapter we will present the empirical findings and analysis of our research. It contains two main parts, in which we will investigate the case of Libresse first and H&M second. Each case is built upon three blocks. The first block represents the empirical findings of our study, with regard to the focus group, executive interview and document material. First, a chronological narrative will be given of the case-related events, starting with a prologue of events that presumably had an impact on the campaign before its launch. Second, the chronological narrative will outline the sequence of the critical events during the campaign, followed by an epilogue related to post-campaign events. In the second block, the chronological narrative and our findings generated from our thematization will be analyzed with support of our theoretical lens. The third block will contain a semiotic analysis of the visual material used within the campaign to explore how feminist messages are expressed by the brand.

### **5.1 Empirical findings of the 'Redfit' campaign**

In this section we will present the empirical findings of the Libresse "RedFit", which consists of the generated data from focus group sessions, executives interviews and documents gathered from the media. The presentation of the plot will follow a chronological order, divided into prologue, story and epilogue. The narrative will then later be analyzed in subsequent section 5.3.

#### **5.1.1. Prologue**

In 2015, a photography by Rupri Kaur featuring a menstruating woman was censored on Instagram. The restriction of posting photos like this one resulted in a public hysteria on social media addressing what is considered appropriate and not to discuss about menstruation

(Independent, 2016c). The stigma surrounding women during their period has historically had a negative impact on women's lives since it involves embarrassment and pressures them to live up to predefined expectations (Bobel, 2008; Kissling, 1996). Also, it is often used as weapon to put them in an inferior position, such as Donald Trump's comment; *"blood coming out of her wherever"* on Fox News anchor Megyn Kelly (Abc News, 2016). As a response, women are increasingly making acts of protests globally, both on social media and through organized demonstrations (Jones, 2016; Independent, 2016d).

In September 2016, Swedish Youtube star and blogger Clara Henry wrote a book on the topic, with the title *"Yes I'm on my period, so what?"*. The book discusses the topic in a humoristic way by outlining the history of period stigmatization (DN Kultur, 2015). Another incident that gained attention was when Chinese swimmer Fu Yuanhui said in her post-race interview after finishing at third place during the Olympics in Rio on the 15th August, that the reason for her non-optimal performance was because she was on her period (The Guardian, 2016b). By admitting that she was physically affected by her period, she opened up to a discussion that for a long time had been stigmatized, especially within sports (Independent, 2016e). Her comment received a major outmark online, which was the beginning of a major public breakthrough surrounding the stigmatized subject.

As a response to the menstruation discussion in 2015, British researcher and marathon runner Georgie Bruinvels found interest in the topic on how the menstrual cycle affects the physical performance of women. She applied for sponsorship for her research project at SCA, Libresse, which thereby became the growing seed of the "RedFit" campaign. Since then she has supplied Libresse with her findings focused on highlighting the correlation between physical performance and periods. According to Digital PR Manager of Libresse Margareta von Renteln, the logic behind the brand's support for this type of research initially derived from an historical interest that opened up to a new opportunity for the brand:

*"We have always focused on empowering women all around the world, but when Georgie approached us it felt so natural, and almost strange that we hadn't thought about this correlation before"*(Interview 1, April 21st 2017).

Ever since its long-term initiative and core message "Fearless" established in 2014, Libresse has challenged the communicative norm around menstruation in similar campaigns, such as: Bloody serious, Sister by heart and Voice Edition, in which each campaign shares the notion of empowering women as independent and powerful who dare to do everything they want. Nevertheless, in contrast to previous campaigns, 'RedFit' is the first one not directly related to any Libresse products. It is also the most radical and outspoken campaign so far (Interview 2, April 25th 2017) and different in the sense that it goes beyond the typical lifecycle of a campaign: *"For us a campaign has a beginning and an end, we see "RedFit" as an initiative, since we will work with this for a longer period of time"* (Interview 1, April 21st 2017). According to project leader of the Redfit campaign in Sweden, Margareta von Renteln, the purpose of the 'Redfit' initiative was *"to change how issues surrounding menstruation are silenced within many arenas, especially within sports... It is a shame that something so normal is still being treated with so much prejudice and stigmatization in today's society"* (Interview 1, April 21st 2017). In other words, Libresse's aim was to disrupt the mainstream

dialogue by de-stigmatizing the discussion around menstruation. Initially, the launch of the “RedFit” campaign was planned to be released before the Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, but due to the public comment of swimmer Fu Yuanhu, the delay turned out to be beneficial for the campaign: *“The delay was an unexpected success, and the fact that this girl from China commented on such a stigmatized subject was perfect for us”* (Interview 1, April 21st 2017).

Before its launch in Sweden, UK was first out to try the concept of the ‘RedFit’ campaign by releasing it in June 2016 (Quartz, 2016). This opened up to a benchmarking opportunity for the Swedish ‘RedFit’ team, in terms of level of engagement on social media (Interview 2, April 25th 2017). Another key insight that derived from the UK campaign was the need to support the commercial material with scientific insights. Thus, a survey focused on women’s physical and emotional experience during their period was conducted, in which over 1000 women participated (Interview 1, April 21st 2017). This would later function as a scientific basis that facilitated the public engagement of the campaign.

### 5.1.2 The Story

On 5th September, 2016, the ‘Redfit’ campaign was officially released by Libresse, initially on social media and later also through press via their media partner, Zenit (Interview 1, April 21st 2017). The content consisted of a two-minute long campaign video, focusing on the struggle of women’s athletic performance, with the central message “No blood should hold us back”, which circulated through multiple social media channels (see section 5.5 for a more detailed overview of the campaign video). The rest of the content was published on its own media pages (website and girls1st forum) as well as on other media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Youtube and Instagram, which according to Margareta (Interview 1, April 21st 2017) facilitated and nurtured discussions. Based on the amount of gained mentions in the initial stages of its launch, Twitter was the most influential channel, followed by Facebook and Youtube (Interview 2, April 25th 2017).

The campaign’s focus on the correlation between menstruation and athletic performance was further extended with educational web-videos featuring the interconnection between menstruation and women’s motivation and diet needs during different stages of the menstruation cycle (Interview 1, April 21st 2017).

On September 8<sup>th</sup>, three days after its launch, the Swedish professional football player Lotta Schelin made an appearance on the Swedish TV primetime show “Nyhetsmorgon”, in which she discussed the physical limitations she experiences during her period and more importantly, the problem with no one addressing these issues within the female sports industry (Nyhetsmorgon, 2016). It immediately evoked major attention on social media among both feminist groups and the public, praising her for taking a stance in these issues (Svt Sport, 2016; Fotbollskanalen, 2016; DN.Sport, 2016; SydSvenskan, 2016; Omni, 2016). The day after Lotta Schelin’s appearance on national TV, Libresse conducted a press release stating their sponsorship of Lotta Schelin and announcing her as a spokesperson for the ‘Redfit’ initiative. In the press release the results from the survey were also included, which emphasized how women were affected during their periods (Mynewsdesk, 2016). The initial

non-transparency about Libresse's involvement with Lotta Schelin resulted in some negative critique (Sveriges radio, 2016). This was also recalled by numerous consumers in focus group sessions.

*“To find out in retrospect that she has been given money by Libresse to push this discussion, made me mad, and my trust in the campaign's content decreased radically”* (P6, focus group, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017).

*“I felt fooled by them (Libresse) when they the day after stated that she (Lotta Schelin) represented Libresse, if they would have expressed this from the beginning I would have been more okay with it”* (P3, focus group, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017).

Although the incident caused the brand some critique online, it did not affect the campaign to a higher extent (Interview 2), while numerous focus group participants still felt that Lotta Schelin was a suitable spokesperson for the subject topic.

*“Personally, I think that she (Lotta Schelin) and this campaign fits well together. I feel like I can trust her intentions, she really radiates girl power and grit and based on my previous knowledge of her, I feel like she is a suitable spokesperson for feminism”* (P11, focus group, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017).

*“I believe the statements she's making since I think she's a likeable person. She is a true role model and at the same time very humble. I've seen her in interviews before and she feels stable in her personality”*. (P12, focus group, May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017).

*“This issue is so relatable, so even though she's a 100 % sponsored, I can relate enough so it doesn't matter. She represents an issue that affects half of the global population!”* (P5, focus group, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017).

Not long after the initial stages, the online activity surrounding the stigmatization of periods was high (Svt Sport, 2016; Fotbollskanalen, 2016; DN Sport, 2016; SydSvenskan, 2016; Omni, 2016). A key contributor to the high online engagement was presumably the Swedish newspaper Aftonbladet, which released its initiative “#Mensendå” on September 16th, a mere week after the “RedFit” launch (Interview 1, April 21st 2017; Aftonbladet, Mensendå, 2016). “#Mensendå” consisted of a platform addressing the experiences of female athletes during their periods based on a second study of 301 national female athletes, in which Lotta Schelin also was featured (Aftonbladet, Mensendå, 2016). The online ‘buzz’ surrounding the campaign reached its peak during the first two weeks, soon after the initiative of newspaper Aftonbladet. Although its campaign-related activities slightly decreased, the brand continued with regular social media activities until the beginning of November 2016 (Interview 2, April 25th 2017).

### 5.1.3 Epilogue

Reflecting back upon the campaign, Libresse managed to reach an all-time high in its social media performance; the official campaign video reached 4 million views in Sweden and the display social media ad generated 1,42% clicks, which is approximately ten times higher than for the average campaign. According to Helene's view, one of the main reason for the campaign's success was the overall combination of paid media, a suitable spokesperson and overall a highly engaging content (Interview 2, April 25th 2017).

As a result of the efforts during the 'RedFit' campaign, the Norwegian Olympic, Paralympic Committee and the Confederation of Sports changed the official health examination procedures by involving questions on how the performance of female athletes is affected during their period (Interview 1, Margareta). The "RedFit" campaign was also awarded for best campaign during Stockholm Media Week 2017, with the motivation;

*"A disruptive and fresh breeze within a category that is generally characterized by stereotypes and predictable communication. A brand that dares to lead an important question and opens up for a discussion.... They take the work 'bloody seriously' as they dare, want and succeed to break the taboo within an area filled with prejudice and stereotypical perceptions..."* (Stockholm Media Week, 2017).

## 5.2 Analysis of 'Redfit'

In this second block we will analyze the chronological narrative and support it with findings generated from our thematization. In accordance with our preliminary framework, we have chosen to analyse the outcome of each case based on three subsequent levels; the assessed fit between the social movement and the brand, aspects related to brand character, and its ability to elicit identity attractiveness. It should be noted that not all elements of our preliminary framework have been elaborated separately; some of them, such as "trustworthiness" and "expertise" are linked to various parts and are hence included in these. This might help us identify what particular long- and short-term initiatives established a certain credibility that was crucial to the relatively different outcomes of the 'RedFit' and 'Ladylike' campaigns. In this part of the study the empirical findings of Libresse will be presented, in which we will account for how the 'Redfit' campaign was received by consumers as well as how their views corresponded to the strategic intentions of the brand. Lastly, we will incorporate our semiotic approach of the official campaign video to uncover the feminist messages conveyed in the video. Ultimately, we will use of all these analytical perspectives to understand the critical aspects that was linked to its successful outcome.

### 5.2.1 The fit between Libresse and feminism

As a first level, the degree of credibility is assessed with regard to how aligned the brand is with the feminist movement. Thus, the extent to which we can assess Libresse as aligned with

feminism was influenced by various factors, such as the functional and image fit, the brand's historical link to feminism as well as the chosen spokesperson Lotta Schelin's ability to deliver authentic expressions of feminism. Furthermore, an aspect of high significance was linked to how consumers perceived its altruistic intentions during the course of the campaign.

### **Functional and image fit**

As demonstrated by Olson and Thjømmøe (2011), consumers' perceptions of fit can be linked to the functional and image fit between the brand and social movement; firstly, the extent to which the brand's products are used by those who are part of the social movement and also secondly, how brand image and its positioning is aligned with the image of the social movement. In our study, brand perceptions of fit in terms of both functional and image aspects relative to feminism became prominent by the suggested shared target audience.

*“Although I believe many brands are using it to gain publicity and popularity, I trust Libresse since it already targets women...”* (P1, focus group, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017)

*“Just because it's Libresse, it feels trustworthy; they have a product for women which makes this feel relevant”.* (P3, focus group, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017)

*“They are creative and represent girl-power!”* (P8, focus group, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017)

Findings thus show that the positioning and goals of Libresse was perceived to be aligned with the feminist movement, in which the feminist values also could be reflected by the views of Project leader of “redFit” Sweden, Margareta von Renteln.

*“There is nothing to hide, instead we have to keep on fighting within this patriarchal society that we live in...it feels so right to stand up for these types of questions.”* (Interview 1, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017)

Overall, it thus became prominent that the feminist associations linked to the brand was a significant factor in their judgments of credibility which had implications on perceived fit between both its image and functional attributes. Furthermore, it was found that participants used their historical knowledge about Libresse to assess its degree of alignment with the feminist movement; for example, some participants recognized how Libresse had embodied feminist values outside of the marketplace, by recalling how the SCA Group, the parent company of Libresse, was the only all-female participating team at the Volvo Ocean Race in 2015 (SCA, 2015). Thus, the functional and image fit showed upon a high alignment with feminism.

### **Spokesperson**

In accordance with Bhattacharya and Sen (2003), findings show that participants assessed brand credibility based on *how* it was communicated by the brand, as well as the alignment in

its actions during the campaign. As previously mentioned, the Swedish professional football player Lotta Schelin was chosen as spokesperson for the campaign, and as it was found, credibility was assessed based on her ability to act as a message ‘medium’ for feminism.

*“Personally, I think that she (i.e. Lotta Schelin) and this campaign fits well together. I feel like I can trust her intentions, she really radiates girl power and grit and based on my previous knowledge of her, I feel like she is a suitable spokesperson for feminism.”* (P11, focus group, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017).

*This issue is so relatable, so even though she’s a 100 % sponsored, I can relate enough so it doesn’t matter. She represents an issue that affects half of the global population!”* (P5, focus group, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017).

McCracken (1989) argues that the symbolic characteristics stemming from the cultural meanings provide the most significant foundation for how effective the celebrity endorsement process is. Since Lotta Schelin possessed a high ability to convey the symbolic meanings associated with contemporary feminist values it increased her effectiveness as a spokesperson for the campaign. Her high level of relevance to the issue thus enabled her to be perceived as source of high expertise and valid assertions; an aspect linked as central to evoke credibility (Erden & Swait, 2004; Trimble & Rifon, 2006). Furthermore, in accordance with Holt (2004), one of the most central techniques to derive both authority and authenticity in pursuing within cultural branding, is the adoption of a spokesperson that is seen as a legitimate figure to represent the particular ideology and the brand (Holt, 2004; Beverland, 2008). Specifically, he claims that a spokesperson serves as a legitimate source if it does not possess any commercial interest linked to its aim. As emphasized in focus group sessions, a majority of participants disregarded the fact that she was sponsored. Lotta Schelin was rather identified as an authentic source of feminist notions since the issue of period stigmatization that Libresse specifically focused on was considered as high relevance to her as an athlete. With regard to these views, we can partly derive the brand’s success to the employment of a legitimate spokesperson as communicator of feminist messages.

## **5.2.2 The character of Libresse**

As a second level, we have chosen to assess the brand’s relation to the feminist movement linked to its overall character. This involves aspects related to brand values, authenticity and altruism. Our analysis of empirical data has also shown great tendencies towards an emergent aspect that we identified as related to brand *integrity*.

### **Brand credibility**

First, our examination of empirical data has shown that consumers’ assessment of character of Libresse is closely linked to perceptions of the brand history and its overall reputation. Specifically, their historical views of the brand often served as a substructure for how they assessed the degree of trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is often treated as a factor that grows



over time and has been defined as “the degree of confidence in the communicator’s intent to communicate the assertions he considers most valid” (Hovland et. al, 1953). Hence, it is related to whether the brand has established a previous legitimacy that makes it easy for consumers to trust the brand’s own claims. Since the majority of focus group participants possessed a fair amount of knowledge of Libresse, they could easily make judgments of brand behavior and its relationship to trustworthiness. Furthermore, their assessment of trustworthiness was not necessarily based on whether they perceived its reputation to be linked to feminism, but rather served as a first basis in which they assessed its history as either *positive* or *negative*. They also made judgments based on the historical ability for the brand to display values of goodwill and sincerity.

*“Libresse doesn’t carry any negative baggage from the past, and they’ve always had a good reputation, which I think is important.”* (P17, focus group, May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017)

*“If the brand has built up a collection of values and expressed sincere intentions from the start it feels super authentic!”* (P10, focus group, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017)

Their previous knowledge thus showed to be a significant factor that enabled them to assess the brand’s trustworthiness when pursuing this type of strategy. Drawing on the ideas presented by Grayson and Martinec (2004), if brands are able to show upon a connection between the past and the present that is linked to its lived traditions, consumers are more likely to derive approximate authenticity. In that sense, how the historical values of Libresse reflected this type of sincerity thus increased the tendency for consumers to link its actions to authentic expressions. In contrast, participants who did not possess a lot of knowledge about the brand’s historical character, instead tended to make judgments of it based on its actions during the campaign; specifically, in terms of how they perceived its degree of transparency. For example, there were certain aspects in terms of Libresse’s campaign that suggest a lack in transparency and which showed to have an influence on consumers’ perceptions

*“At first sight it was not clear that she represented Libresse, and when you find out afterwards (the TV interview) that she has been sponsored to say certain things on television it really made the whole thing less trustworthy. If they had told it from the beginning it would have been fine.”* (P7, focus group, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017)

*“The message immediately feels more ‘bought’ when they are covering it up (i.e. Libresse’s sponsorship of Lotta Schelin)”* (P6, focus group, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017)

In other words, a critical aspect that Libresse was judged from was related to its inability to clearly communicate its collaboration with spokesperson Lotta Schelin, which caused a disruption in the brand’s credibility both in the media and among participants. Thus, the ability for the brand to be open about its feminist campaign intentions represented a significant strategic aspect that can be considered crucial in terms of how consumers form

judgments about the brand. In accordance with previous research (Forehand & Grier, 2003) on brands' support for a social cause, it is important for brands to communicate in a way that is not coupled with its commercial interests to prevent consumer skepticism. Drawing upon these findings, we can thus suggest that it is essential that the brand expresses a sense of honesty in its intentions within all of its domains when pursuing this type of strategy.

### **Altruistic attribution**

How participants judged the brand's support of feminism showed to be highly mediated by altruistic attribution; that is, the extent to which participants perceived its motives as either altruistic or egoistic (Forehand & Grier, 2003). In other words, findings show that assessment was based on how they perceived the brand's intended contribution with the feminist campaign.

*“I think it's important to show that you're actually trying to make a real difference and create a positive change as opposed to just spreading a simple message. That feels more real.”* (P11, focus group, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017).

*“Their ability to open up to a discussion is very important; it creates a ripple effect in which bloggers and other influencers can spread the message even further.”* (P9, focus group, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017).

*“This way of thinking has never existed before, to highlight the question (on menstruation) and in addition to back it up with scientific-based knowledge I think is great.”* (P13, focus group, May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017).

In accordance with previous research (Becker-Olsen et al, 2006; Rifon et al, 2004), the assigned attributions were often dominated by their perceptions of either the altruistic or egoistic motives in which the brand was seen as either “good” or “bad”. Furthermore, values linked to its altruistic character was not just assessed based on its altruistic efforts in the past, but also linked to its altruistic intentions during the campaign, in which they assigned attributes based on the potential benefits of the feminist movement. The ability for the brand to show that it can make a concrete contribution to feminism by building a concrete agenda for how it will create change implied a demonstration of *moral authenticity*, in which the brand shows upon a real commitment to the social movement that can overrule its financial motives (Grayson & Martinec, 2004). Its moral authenticity was evidently also enhanced by the knowledge based approach which involved sponsorship of research project of how periods affect the physical performance of women and developed into a manual on how women should optimize their performance and health during different stages of their menstrual cycle. In that sense, Libresse made its efforts to making a real contribution to feminism prominent, hence demonstrating upon altruistic brand values. This is aligned with what Margareta von Renteln (Interview 1, April 21st 2017) identified as an aspect that enhanced the credibility of the campaign.

*“Our sponsorship of a research project creates a deeper relevance...creating knowledge around this subject empowers women”* (Interview 1, April 21st 2017).

In addition, credibility was enhanced by the scientific survey that functioned as a supplement to its commercial material as well as the publicity gained from multiple authoritative sources (Svt Sport, 2016; DNSport, 2016; Fotbollskanalen, 2016; SydSvenskan, 2016). With reference to Holt's (2004), Trimble and Rifon's (2006) views, gaining this kind of authoritative position in which the brand was able to combine its commercial messages whilst demonstrating upon a high level of expertise within the area arguably resulted in the campaign appearing more authentic.

In sum, the character of the brand showed to be a critical aspect in terms of how consumers attribute its motives of the campaign, in which they assessed its righteousness to be involved with feminism based on its ability to demonstrate a sense of moral. This was mainly influenced by their long-term views of the brand, but also on how it demonstrated its altruistic contributions and intentions during the course of the campaign. Drawing upon the findings in preceding section, we suggest that how consumers perceive the brand's credibility is heavily determined by their assessments on the brand's historical character. Specific for this study, the aspects linked to reputation and whether the brand expresses sincere core brand values caused participants to make judgments of whether the brand even had the right to be involved with the feminist movement. In other words, these judgments were not only based on previous events and their historical relationships and experiences with Libresse, but also on the brand's efforts to enhance credibility during the course of the campaign.

### **5.2.3 Identity attractiveness of Libresse**

On a third level, we assess the brand's involvement with the feminist movement in terms of aspects that specifically relates to its ability to elicit identity attractiveness, which was found to be an essential aspect when considering how consumers are motivated to show their support for a brand's political initiative. According to Bhattacharya and Sen (2003), the brand is able to gain identity attractiveness when it invites consumers to feel a particular belonging and identification with the brand. While the brand's historical link to feminism greatly influenced how participants perceived the 'fit' between the two, their judgments of brand identity attractiveness were mainly assessed based on their own personal relationship with the brand.

#### **Identity coherence**

The ability for participants to identify with the brand largely rested upon how the display of brand meanings historically. In other words, how consumers choose to assess its identity attractiveness evidently showed to be related to the brand's ability to express identity coherence; that is, to display consistency in its meaning and behavior over time (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Based on participants' views, Libresse demonstrated an inherently strong identity coherence that suggested a connection to the brand's past.

*“I think that the time aspect is crucial if you have a particular association of the brand already in your mind. To be able to relate to it, it has to follow a certain continuity.”* (P10, focus group, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017)

*“It definitely helps that they’ve (Libresse) had similar campaigns in the past and always pursued this ‘girl power’ agenda. It makes you buy into the message so much more easily.”* (P3, focus group, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017)

*“Libresse has a history of girl power messages, for example in its packaging, by being inventive and trying to make periods cool. This feels like a very natural approach for them”.* (P12, focus group, May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017)

Drawing upon the empirical findings, it thus shows upon an historical connection between the brand and feminism, which the brand also has demonstrated in its long-term initiative ‘Fearless’ (Interview 1, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017). Their views were also aligned with Margareta von Renteln’s claims regarding the brand’s history of female empowerment messages and how Libresse had challenged the communicative norm around menstruation historically.

*“We have always focused on empowering women all around the world...disrupting the stigmatization around menstruation is something that we have always aimed for.”* (Interview 1, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017).

As shown by Bhattacharya and Sen’s (2003), this type of historical coherence between feminism and the brand’s target group enables consumers to easily understand brand identity and express it in an authentic way that resonates with their own values. This also became prominent as some participants expressed their meaningful and committed relationships and with the brand over time.

*“During my teenage years I used to visit Libresse’s forum, and the brand became like a personal supporter that could answer all the questions I couldn’t ask anyone else. For me, Libresse feels like a community; as opposed like a sanitary ware manufacturer, they are not very product-focused and they really make a difference in increasing confidence in girls!”* (P3, focus group, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017)

*“I’ve been loyal to Libresse ever since they changed their packaging, and I switched from another brand even though I think the previous brand makes much better products! From that moment, I was sold, and this initiative just made me like the brand even more. Therefore, it is important for me to make conscious choices and show my support for this campaign.”* (P17, focus group, May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017)

It thus becomes evident that some participants were easily able to resonate with the brand by recognizing expressions of approximate authenticity, which has been emphasized by Beverland (2008) as it reflects how the brand is able to embrace its historic traditions in a

continuous way. Thus, the brand's long-term efforts of female empowerment enabled participants' views of the brand's intentions as 'genuine' and hence their own ability to deliver authentic expression of the brand. From another aspect, scholars have argued that when brands engage in risky endeavors it gives consumers the opportunity to show their support for the brand and immerse in a feeling that they are carrying some of the risk, in which their relationship with the brand often is further strengthened (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Tendencies of this also became evident in our findings in which the defensive stance taken by some participants suggests such feelings. Drawing on the findings of our study, the implications are that participants who had become attached to Libresse over time showed a greater interest in expressing their loyalty towards the brand during such times when it has taken an alternative and suggestively controversial approach with its feminist involvement. Overall, findings suggest that participants' loyalty towards the brand was strongly mediated by its long-term identity coherence.

Another aspect that was not initially expected in this study was related to how some participants suggested a low sense of identification with feminism while simultaneously expressing a strong loyalty towards the brand.

*"I don't necessarily see myself as an active feminist.... this campaign doesn't affect my behaviour or preferences, I would never give up on Libresse!"* (P16, focus group, May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017)

*"I'm definitely not at 'that level' of feminism, but I can still relate due to its sense of girl power."* (P13, focus group, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017)

In other words, some participants still expressed a strong support for the brand despite their stated inability to resonate with feminism. According to Pratt (1988), the need for self-continuity is an essential aspect that consumers consider in their loyalty towards brands. The way in which some participants avoided to embrace a feminist identity suggests how some of them perceived 'feminism' as a pejorative word that they avoided being associated with. Still, their strong level of identification with the brand suggests that they easily could resonate with the 'girl-power' messages that the brand projected. In that sense, this demonstrates the ability of Libresse to communicate feminism in a way that facilitated consumers' ability to identify with it.

### **Identity distinctiveness and prestige**

The findings within this research suggest that the supportive approach taken by a number of participants is rooted within a deep commitment to the brand in which their stance enables them to gain a particular identity prestige as well as express distinction from non-supporters. The extent to which consumers choose to openly show their support for the brands' feminist initiative was heavily mediated by the brand's ability to convey a prestigious identity; that is, how consumers could present and perceive themselves in a positive way to others (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). Although this aspect did not gain strong prominence in the case of Libresse, feminism itself was implied by some as a current trend that could enhance social belonging and status.

*“Before this subject felt very taboo and feminism in general felt very extreme and controversial, but now I feel like it’s cool to represent it and at the same time it’s something that has become more accepted within society.”*(P8, focus group, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017)

In accordance with the ideas proposed by Bergami and Bagozzi (2000), participants’ willingness to express their feminist stance both through consumption and by engaging with the campaign on social media relates to their need for self-enhancement. In contrast, some participants pursued feminism as a consumption style that allowed them to distinguish themselves from others and express their political stance.

*“I am definitely choosing Libresse over another brand just because of its feminist initiative. It is important for me to show where I stand in this question, and if Libresse supports women and can enhance our power, it speaks to me directly.”* (P1, focus group, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017)

*“With Libresse’s campaign I’m able to share and discuss the video, and spread the message on social media, which I believe creates a large effect (for feminism) and also gives me an opportunity to take an active stance.”* (P4, focus group, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017)

Furthermore, drawing on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1985), which suggests the opposing need for individuals to both fit into a group while simultaneously wanting to maintain a sense of uniqueness. With respect to the preceding statements, it becomes prominent that showing their feminist stance in conjunction with the brand enabled participants to seek belonging with the movement as well as express a certain level of identity distinctiveness. In other words, they often perceived Libresse as a brand that allowed them to stand out from the masses; in which their feminist stance implied a certain ‘edge’ that added nuance to their identity-building projects. Overall, although the findings show upon certain tendencies in which we can demonstrate upon the brand’s ability to exert identity distinctiveness and prestige, these aspects did not become as prominent as others when examining our empirical findings.

### **5.3 Semiotic analysis of Libresse’s ‘Redfit’ campaign video**

In this section will conduct a semiotic analysis of the official campaign video that Libresse promoted during the course of the campaign. By drawing on the work of Barthes (2009), we seek to identify how female empowerment is constructed in the video and its relation to contemporary myths around feminine discourse. We will also take into account the views of focus group participants to further evolve the depiction of feminism in the video and how it resonates with them.

On the September 5th 2016, Libresse released their campaign “RedFit”, in collaboration with the British ad agency AMV BBDO (Agency Spy, 2016). On Libresse’s Youtube account, the brand states its campaign message:

*“Don't let your period hold you back no matter who you are. Periods shouldn't stop us from keeping fit.”*

The official campaign video features a number of athlete women and is framed to convey a sense of fighting spirit of women with the message “No blood should hold us back”. It features a series of sequential shots of female athletes who struggle in their performance of different sports, in which the depiction of blood is used as a central element. No Libresse products are featured in the video; it can thus be interpreted as a pure branding commercial.

### **Physical agency: ‘Redfit’ as a depiction of ‘fearless’ women**

Drawing upon the use of mythologies by Barthes (2009), we can suggest how the ‘Redfit’ video is attempting to convey notions of both the physical and mental strength of women. During the first seconds of the video, we see women performing different sports, such as rugby, football and rock climbing; signifiers that suggest denotative meanings of masculinity and physical power. Their extreme and determined facial expressions could here be used to signify the fury and rebelliousness of female ‘warriors’. It conveys notions of ambivalence as these women struggle while covered in bruises, hence highlighting the central theme of the campaign; blood. We suggest that the use of blood and injuries in fact address the anxieties of women in terms the expectations on how to behave forced upon them by society. The torn clothing that accompanies the blood is used here to further signify these difficulties, but more significantly how women do not let this defeat them. Moving into sequences that features women performing other sports such as surfing, skating and running, it could in fact be meant to signify liberated notions of escape and independence in which women are able to break free from these anxieties. In other words, one could suggest that the signifier of blood portrays both the physical and mental struggles of women; but how women despite societal myths on how they should feel and behave during their periods never should let it hold them back. In the ending sequence, the video features a female knight, which gestures suggest significations of courage and defiance. Finally, we can thus suggest that this may in fact represent a mythological fight for women’s equality; suggesting how it ‘underdog’ elements of women never get deprived by resilience and always keep on fighting against patriarchal structures. Unlike the traditional reproductions of stereotypical gender roles within media, this ad conveys the opposite role of women. In that sense, by drawing on contemporary feminist myths, it ultimately constructs women as heroes; an attempt to eradicate contemporary myths of how women are expected to behave during their periods (Kissling, 1996). It is reproducing myths of today’s women as physically active, courageous and, like the ad message implies; unstoppable, which suggests a close link to postfeminist views (Burkett & Hamilton, 2012; Gill 2007). In accordance with Giddens (1979, 1984) we can thus identify how the dissolution of female stereotypes in the ad creates a wider diversity of gender identities that allows women to break free from conventional views of femininity.

The central elements ultimately facilitated focus group participants’ abilities to resonate with the campaigns. In other words, it becomes prominent how feminist messages come across to the audience in a way that is easy for consumer to identify with.

*“As opposed to traditional ‘objectification’ ads, I can easily identify with this one; I’ve done sports!”(P13, focus group, May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017).*

*“This is indeed ‘girl-power’ and a powerful message to women.”* (P1, focus group, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017).

*“I’m so tired of seeing the blue-colored liquid in period commercials, I’ve read somewhere that it is because men are not ready to see real blood in these types of ads since it becomes too realistic.”* (P4, focus group, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017).

The alternative approach to use blood in the video further reflects its goal to disrupt the stigmatization around periods. Drawing on participants’ views, this relates to the agony that (MacDonald, 2007) describes as a reason for why the menstruation discourse historically not has been welcomed in society. By shifting focus away from traditional period commercials, Libresse conversely attempts to bring menstruation to the forefront by not censoring blood, but instead let it represent a central element of the campaign. In fact, the representation of this as a pure branding campaign with the absence of any products suggests that consumers are able to resonate with its message on a more profound level. In other words, this relates to the ideas of cultural branding developed by Holt (2004), in which he suggests how companies should tap into those elements that suggest a certain cultural tension, and build upon this tension in relation to their brands to gain what he refers to as *iconicity*. Drawing on how feminist myths have been depicted in the media, we can ultimately derive the signs identified in the ‘Redfit’ campaign to notions of both postfeminist and neoliberalist ideologies. However, by conveying myths not related to the objectification or the sexualization of women, but rather feminist notions of physical agency and liberation from stereotypical images, Libresse was able to express its feminist position in a way that resonated with the values of consumers.

### **5.3 Empirical findings of the “Ladylike” campaign**

In this section we will present the empirical findings of the H&M “Ladylike” campaign, which consists of the generated data from the focus groups and an extended documentation study in support of the lack of executive interviews. The presentation will follow a chronological order, divided into prologue, story and epilogue, which later will be analyzed in subsequent section 5.4.

#### **5.3.1 Prologue**

According to the New York Times’s author Friedman (2016), the fashion industry in 2016 can be summarized as: *“It was the year politics took over our closets, and clothes went beyond products to become positions.”* An example of this was when the New York fashion Week kicked off with a dress featuring a mosaic of the different states in various shades of blue as a tribute to president candidate Hillary Clinton. The same month Stella McCartney launched her ‘Lace & Cotton loungewear’ collection, which only proclaimed female empowerment and anti-fur slogans (Forbes, 2016). In H&M’s assortment the trend was reflected in items such as print shirts with the message: “Feminism - the radical notion that



women are people” (H&M, 2016a) and “Feminist” (H&M, 2016b). In that sense, the feminist fashion trend was relatively early recognized by the brand.

Historically, the brand has been heavily scrutinized and criticized within the media for its allegedly unethical production methods (CNN Money 2016, The Sun, 2016), which gained further prominence in Sweden when newspaper Aftonbladet conducted an investigation on the poor work conditions in H&M’s textile fabrics, especially for women who had allegedly been fired during their pregnancy. The report initially was published by Asia Floor Wage Alliance in May 2016 (Aftonbladet, 2016) and post-events indicate that H&M did not to respond to the publication.

Despite all critique received within the media, H&M decided to take a public stand for women through the the development of ‘Ladylike’, which was created in collaboration with the advertising agency partner Forsman & Bodenfors (n.d.) as a global campaign linked to H&M’s ‘Fall Fashion’ Collection release. According to H&M, the campaign’s purpose was to redefine the definition of the concept ‘ladylike’, pointing towards its outdated definition; “*appropriate for or typical of a well-bred, decorous woman or a girl*”, which the brand argued does not embrace all the different sides of a lady. Hence, as stated in H&M Magazine, the aim of ‘Ladylike’ was to embrace a contemporary definition of the term; “*This month, the brand introduces a new set of words to define what proper ladylike behaviour could be: badass, independent, free-willed, entertaining, opinionated and off-beat*” (H&M, 2016c). By taking this feminist stance, H&M officially entered into the political sphere.

### 5.3.2 The story

On September 16th, H&M’s Ladylike campaign was officially released in Sweden. The Ladylike campaign was aired on national television from 16 September to October, as well as on social media channels including Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and Youtube (Appendix 4). The content consisted of a two minute long campaign video with the stated purpose to disrupt the stereotypical depictions of a woman (H&M, 2016d). The campaign was fronted with ambassadors such as Lauren Hutton (American supermodel and actress since 1963), Jillian Hervey (singer and dancer), Hari Nef (model and transgender activist), Ashley Graham (plus size model) and Adwoa Aboah (fashion model and feminist activist) (The Daily Record, 2016).

A few days after its launch, local H&M stores in Sweden removed multiple plus-size garments from their assortment. Fashion websites such as Chic, Revelist and Veckorevyn picked upon on this action: “*The most ironic part is that H&M has been praised by the whole world for letting Ashley Graham front the Fall campaign 2016 without labeling her as a plus size, and just letting her be the face outwards without making any comment on her size. Interesting that you only can find her clothes online then...*” (Chic, 2016; Revelist, 2016; Veckorevyn, 2016).

The same incident was also picked up by consumers in focus group sessions: “*If I watch the campaign and then walk into a H&M store I will only see posters of girls who weigh 20 kg*

*anyway, it doesn't match" and "It's insane that the collection did not have any XL sizes, I don't think they have the right to market themselves in this way if I can't even buy clothes in those sizes".*

Since 'Ladylike' was a global campaign, H&M launched a local activation of the campaign in Sweden one week after the official release; that is, on September 30st, in which a number of ambassadors with an outspoken feminist stance promoted the campaign on their instagram accounts. First out was, Kakan Hermansson, Swedish anchor, comedian and author (@rnbhermansson), who in her post wrote: *"She's a lady - she's a sister...Nobody, no narrow gender roles can decide if you are a woman or not. Transwomen often get excluded in the sisterhood and in the feminist battle. We who are cis-women have a responsibility to include and fight for transwomen's lives and rights. Do not walk in the footsteps of the oppressors, inspect yourself and welcome ALL women in the sisterhood!..."*(Appendix 4).

Four days after, on October 3rd, fashion influencer and blogger Fanny Lyckman published a similar Instagram post: *"...I have always considered myself as a boy-girl. Particularly at a younger age. As a small kid I was obsessed with makeup and horses, but on the other hand I loved soccer, baggy-jeans and sneakers. To me the definition of #ladylike is about daring to feel comfortable with yourself and what you wear. How cool is it that you decide what is #ladylike for you..."*(Appendix 4).

Kakan Hermansson affirmed with an additional Instagram post: *"... I have rarely felt like a lady but always been aware about the wider perspective of what a woman should be like. You can be a lesbian, flat, hairy, horse-girl, have the highest grades in everything, have any gender, have two breasts, have one and a half breast. You can have a scar where your breast once has been, your stretch marks can be fat and deep or have faded away. It is exhausting to try to live up to the role of being a woman. I am always tired. You too perhaps? Now I am lying in my hotel bed in a very lesbian shirt at least."*(Appendix 4)

The local marketing campaign was on the same day followed up by a third post which featured the musician and feminist activist Little Jinder, who endorsed the H&M 'Ladylike' campaign on her Instagram: *"All that matters to me is that all ladies should be exactly like they want to be. Especially us who deviate from the classic definition of "feminine". Here I stand in collaboration with #hm and dream about talking, writing and taking up the space I want without constantly getting defined as a annoying and provocative girl..."* (Appendix 4). However, only one day after the sponsored post by Little Jinder, she responded to a critical comment of the campaign made by journalist Liv Strömqvist: *"...They have bought me (& other feminist profiles as @rnbhermansson) because feminism is apparently cool right now, it was such an insanely difficult decision because it goes against my individual values...but I needed cash, so they won. Hate capitalism..."* (Dagens Media, 2016; Resume, 2016d; Resume, 2016e; Göteborgs-Posten, 2016).

In another comment she stated: *"...I get bad taste in my mouth by myself...when the corporate shit companies take the easy way out and force you to stand for something... which in my case gets ironic because I'm privileged girl who actually doesn't stand for H&M's ideals...H&M*

*can happily pay my rent but one can't ignore the fact that I become a part of the problem plus losing apart of my credibility. It's bad"* (Dagens Media, 2016; Resume, 2016d; Resume, 2016e; Göteborgs-Posten, 2016).

An event presumably related to why Little Jinder canceled her collaboration with H&M was the former investigation of newspaper Aftonbladet on the work conditions in H&M's textile fabrics, which was revived again when Liv Strömquist published content from the report on her Instagram. In addition, only eight days after the its launch, the Swedish author Gunilla Anders published "The little black one - the fashion industry's dark downside", in which she scrutinizes the fast-fashion industry's poor supply chain management and puts it in contrast to slogans such as as "fashion without guilt" and "clean fashion"(Bokus, n.d). Although H&M declined to comment and presumably hoped that the discussion would fade away, consumers who were part of focus group sessions clearly recalled the incident:

*"...It it's essential that they internally fulfill the requirements they communicate, and that is where it clashes. They convey all this, but still have shitty work conditions within their own supply chain"* (P10, focus group, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017)

*"I don't think you should pretend that you are a company that cares about feminism when you obviously don't do a shit for women's rights!"* (P1, focus group, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017)

*"There are little girls who sit and sew clothing in Bangladesh without any sensible work conditions. The Ladylike campaign just feel so fake, ... , H&M doesn't do a shit for feminism on the other side of their own supply chain".* (P4, focus group, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017)

On October 11th, only seven days after the incident, Little Jinder declared that she decided to end her collaboration with H&M, an incident that gained attention in the media (Dagens Media, 2016; Expressen, 2016; Göteborgs Posten, 2016; Omni, 2016; Resume, 2016d). The incident was also recalled by consumers within focus group sessions.

*"To me Little Jinder represents someone who dares to stand up for an opinion, so if she drops out I definitely see it as a warning signal."* (P7, focus group, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017)

*"I don't believe that she would do it just because somebody told her, but rather that she doesn't believe in it, since she has such a strong integrity"* (P12, focus group, May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017)

Soon after, H&M commented on the incident in an official press release: *"The profiles we collaborate with of course have the right to express their personal opinions.... it is unfortunate when somebody doesn't feel that they can stand behind a collaboration. We always keep a dialogue with our collaboration partners, and this has also been the case with Little Jinder"* (Dagens Media, 2016). Finally, the local activation campaign came to an abrupt

ending considering how Little Jinder was the last official endorser of the ‘Ladylike’ campaign in Sweden. Furthermore, by drawing on how H&M did not publish any more campaign-related material on their social media platforms, we can presume that the campaign officially ended on that day (Instagram, Facebook and Twitter).

### **5.3.3 Epilogue**

In absence of comments by H&M on ‘Ladylike’, our evaluation of the campaign is based upon the media’s reaction as well as consumer’s views. As previously highlighted, the campaign became heavily scrutinized in Swedish media (DN Kultur, 2016; Resume, 2016c, Aftonbladet, 2016; Mahdawi, 2016; Dagens Media, 2016; Resume, 2016d; Resume, 2016e; Göteborgs-Posten, 2016).

About five months after the campaign, H&M announced its new Spring 2017 collaboration with Swedish popstar and outspoken feminist Zara Larsson (H&M, 2016e). A few days after the announcement, Zara Larsson called to an emergency meeting with H&M after receiving negative comments by her fans on her Instagram account, that again were based on the poor work conditions within H&M’s supply chain (Dagens Media, 2017). Despite the heavy critique, H&M and Zara Larsson decided to continue their collaboration, and on May 18th 2017 Zara Larsson’s collection was released in selected stores and online (Elle, 2017).

## **5.4 Analysis of ‘Ladylike’**

In this section we will elaborate upon H&M’s attempt to co-opt the feminist movement in which we will assess the campaign on the three subsequent levels; that is, the ‘fit’ between the brand and the feminist movement, aspects related to its character and ultimately its ability to build brand identity attractiveness among consumers. Similar to the analysis of Libresse, we will draw upon critical events and other campaign-related aspects when considering the views of focus group participants. Lastly, we will apply the semiotic approach on the official campaign video to uncover the underlying feminist myths. Findings within this section this will later serve as a benchmark when assessing the outcome of the campaign in relation to the case of Libresse.

### **5.4.1 The fit between H&M and feminism**

Similar to the case of Libresse, a key aspect on the first level that showed to be evident while assessing the outcome of the ‘Ladylike’ campaign was the alignment between the brand and the feminist movement. In other words, the extent to which we can consider H&M as compatible with feminism or not largely depends on its assessments of its shared values with the feminist movement, which was assessed based on the congruity between image and functional fit between the two, as well as how they assessed the representability of the spokespersons chosen for the campaign. Similar to the previous case, we can based on the views of focus group participants consider its historical link to feminism a critical factor, which they used to make attributions about the brand’s overall credibility. An initial factor of

high consideration was its level of trustworthiness, which was assessed both in terms from a long- and short term perspective among focus group participants.

### **Functional and image fit**

The first aspect of relevance linked to the basis of fit was emphasized in the suggested compatibility in terms of functional and image attributes between H&M and feminism. The functional fit has in previous research (Olson & Thjømmøe 2011) also shown to be a constituent for fit perceptions between two entities.

*“H&M already targets women, it would have been interesting if a brand such as Volvo had started to associate itself with feminism..”* (P6, focus group, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017)

Since one can argue that H&M and the feminist movement both to a large extent are directed towards young women, we can on a superficial level recognize how the functional fit of H&M is linked to the feminist movement. Nevertheless, although the majority of the participants considered themselves H&M customers, many of them suggested the brand to possess a low overall attitude similarity with feminism. As suggested by Menon and Kahn (2003), a poor image fit has been suggested to cause a higher resistance towards the sponsoring message that can imply harmful effects on brand equity.

*“If I watch this ad (campaign video) and go into an H&M store afterwards I’m still only going to see posters of women who weighs like 20 kgs, that doesn’t match up!”* (P17, focus group, May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017)

*“They have to fully integrate this into their communication, and displaying their feminist values within stores by for example using larger mannequin models...then I will truly know that they take responsibility and try to act as a role model for young girls.”* (P3, focus group, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017)

*“It’s insane that the collection did not have XL sizes, I don’t think they have the right to marketing in this way if I can’t even buy clothes in those sizes!”* (P10, focus group, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017)

In other words, the inconsistency in the actions of H&M suggests a fragmentation of consumers’ perceptions of the brand that made it difficult for them to trust its feminist messages. According to Grayson and Martinec (2004), consumers draw links based on both physical and psychological cues to make judgments about brands indexical authenticity. In this case, participants used certain cues that they had derived from H&M stores to assess the brand’s indexical authenticity. As implied by the perceived misalignment in values between the two, the overall perceptions of H&M as an authentic feminist brand was considered low. In that sense, these findings points towards the brand’s its inability to explore the relatedness of ‘key meanings’ associated with the brand and feminism respectively; by for example emphasizing feminist notions of physical diversity while not offering sizes that appeal to

different types. The brand's alignment with feminism was also assessed based on perceptions of its internal values.

*“ I think it's important they use the power they possess when such a big company as H&M, but it's essential that they internally fulfill the requirements they communicate, and that is where it clashes. They convey all these messages, but still maintain shitty work conditions for women within their own supply chain.”* (P4, focus group, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017)

*“I don't think you should pretend that you are a company that cares about feminism when you obviously don't do a shit for women's rights!”* (P1, focus group, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017)

Overall, empirical findings show upon the notion that the feminist messages of H&M had no clear alignment with how consumers perceived the positioning between the two. Hence, the formation of fit perceptions in terms of brand image, showed upon a misalignment with the feminist movement. Although we could suggest a functional fit between the two due to a match between target group and the feminist audience (young women), findings imply that there is a low affinity in terms of shared values between them.

### **Feminist spokesperson**

Another aspect that mediated focus group participants' views on the fit between H&M and feminism was related to the particular endorsers employed for the campaign. As previously outlined, the conception of *match-up* between a celebrity endorser and the brand has shown to be another critical factor in the fit between the spokesperson and the brand (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Holt, 2007; McCracken, 1989). Given this notion, numerous focus groups participants considered Kakan Hermansson and Little Jinder as authentic representative for the feminist campaign.

*“They (Kakan Hermansson & Little Jinder) are not trying to be somebody else, they wouldn't stand there just to promote H&M, they would stand their to drive the topic, but not just for the sake of H&M”* (P9, focus group, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017)

*“If H&M has Little Jinder I agree much more with the agenda than I would have otherwise.”* (P12, focus group, May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017)

Based on the arguments by Aaker and Brown (1972), the construct of source trustworthiness; which relates to the confidence in the intentions of the communicator, is considered a significant aspect in the formation of fit perceptions. With regard to the views of focus group participants, the credibility of the adopted spokespersons of the 'Ladylike' campaign can thus be perceived as high, which indicates congruence between the brand and the feminist campaign. However, as mentioned in section 5.3.2, the story, soon after its launch Little Jinder canceled her collaboration with H&M with the argument that it conflicted with her personal values (Dagens Media, 2016; Expressen, 2016; Göteborgs Posten, 2016; Omni,

2016; Resume, 2016d). As findings suggest, it heavily influenced consumers' assessments of the credibility of the campaign.

*"It undermined the whole campaign when to she dropped out. It evoked extremely many questions..."* (P17, focus group, May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017)

*"To me Little Jinder represents someone who dares to stand up for her own opinion and if she drops out I definitely see it as a warning signal, because I don't believe that she would do it just because somebody told her, but rather if she didn't believe in it, since she has such a strong integrity".* (P7, focus group, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017)

Considering that Little Jinder is an outspoken feminist, we can suggest that her decision to pull out of the campaign implied negative consequences for the brand's credibility. Drawing on the ideas of Holt (2004), brands can derive authenticity from legitimate sources that do not possess any commercial interest linked to its aim. This might imply such a situation, in which the motives of spokesperson Little Jinder, who is considered an authentic feminist persona conflicted with the suggested commercial interests of H&M. Thus, although fit perception from an initial point of view can be considered high, these became eradicated as the campaign took critical turn.

#### **5.4.2 The character of the H&M**

On a second level, we examine the character of H&M by drawing on how consumers made judgments of H&M based on historical events, such as its display of altruistic and sincere values, and also on how the brand conveyed its character during the course of the campaign, for instance in its alignment of actions within other domains. As will be elaborated further below, judgments of brand character suggests to have great implications on how consumers assess its credibility when attempting to involve itself with the feminist movement.

##### **Brand credibility**

Results show upon that a major part of consumers' judgments of H&M's 'Ladylike' campaign were based on the historical brand behavior and reputation. These attributions showed to influence their perceptions of source credibility; which is explained by the extent to which consumers perceive the brand's own claims as trustworthy (Aaker & Brown, 1972). According to previous scholars (Chaudari & Holbrook (2001; Gotleib & Sarel,1991), a brand's overall reputation and its history often have significant importance of the degree of credibility among consumers. While some participants considered it to be part of the brand's responsibility to raise questions related to social issues, a majority suggested the source credibility of H&M as too low to even suggest an involvement in social issues. This became prominent in comments such as:

*"Although I love the ad, I don't trust it just because it comes from H&M"* (P4, focus group, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017)

*“I think it’s good that these question are raised, but simultaneously I think that H&M is definitely not the best feminist intermediary.”* (P9, focus group, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017)

*“Their reputation has reached the bottom...”* (P17, focus group, May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017)

*“Personally I don’t think a history in similar campaigns in the topic affects this, rather their (H&M) disastrous setback impact it. For example, have they had so much chaos in the brand, such as the sustainability initiative, ethical questions and so on...”* (P10, focus group, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017)

Participants thus made judgments about its credibility based on the brand’s overall ethical involvement; not just in terms of the brand’s link to feminism. As implied by previous research (Schroeder, 2008; Schroeder & Salzar-Mörling, 2006; Erden & Swait, 2004; Trimble & Rifon, 2006), consumers conceivably based judgments of source credibility mainly on how the brand had proven its degree of trustworthiness in the past, as well as how much experience it had gained in terms of its ethical involvement, which overall was suggested as low. In that sense, by recognizing how consumers make judgment of H&M based on its reputation, we can suggest that these aspects related to its character were assessed as poor. Another aspect that gained prominence within consumers’ assessment of brand credibility is related to *transparency*, which was assessed in terms of how consumers perceived the brand’s historical degree of honesty as well as its ability to display evidence of its ethical contributions.

*“One thing that makes me believe much more in a firm’s sustainability work, is that the follow up with numbers and concrete results...Coca Cola for example, clearly shows how it saves and gives back water to communities...”*(P11, focus group, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017)

*“...that’s the problem with H&M, they never demonstrate any concrete result”.* (P17, focus group, May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017)

How consumers perceived H&M to possess a high degree of confidentiality within other domains, such as its sustainability efforts, hence predominated their views of the trustworthiness of the feminist initiative. In accordance with previous research, (Hovland et. al, 1953; Aaker & Brown,1972),an ability for the brand to display trustworthiness can easily mediate how consumers perceive the intentions of the brand. As we shall see in the next section, findings related to the suggested lack in transparency of H&M arguably influenced consumers’ subsequent judgments of its overall motives.

### **Altruistic attribution**

Similar to the case of Libresse, within the assessments of brand character it was found that consumers’ views of a credible brand co-optation of feminism was further linked to the altruistic intentions of the brand. Their assessments of its altruistic motives were dominated



by the fact that the brand did not demonstrate any real commitments or contributions to the feminist movement, such as support of a women's organization.

*“To me it was rather that I didn't see the point behind”* (P14, focus group, May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017)

*“It feels very out of place to just latch onto feminism all of a sudden”* (P1, focus group, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017)

*“If they instead had communicated it like this is our vision and core values, then it would have felt more credible and not just in a commercial intent.”* (P15, focus group, May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017)

*“They (H&M) shouldn't just think about that it's something that they can communicate, but that actually do some real initiative that is more substantive. Then I would believe in their campaign much more...but the bottom-line is that they need to show that they are driving a positive real change.”* (P7, focus group, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017)

*“Shouldn't the company (H&M) be examined to see if it has many women in top management positions for instance?! That's something that would have had to be proven with a sustainability approach, but the risk with a feminist marketing strategy is that you may not consider those things...”* (P11, focus group, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017)

Hence, much of the feedback given convey that consumers do not perceive H&M to show any real signs of contribution to social movement, thus erasing the sense of genuine intentions which are necessary if wanting to become perceived as *morally authentic* (Grayson & Martinec 2004). In other words, the motives of H&M were predominantly seen as egoistic, in which the majority of consumers linked its motives to commercial interests. As became prominent, its motives were also judged by participants in relation to how the campaign was executed.

*“For me it is not about the brand itself, but rather the way they did it. It is the fact that they're doing it in conjunction with a collection launch, and then there will be a whole new theme for the next collection, and then a third alongside which focuses on sustainability...I don't buy the way they execute it.”* (P1, focus group, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017)

*“They shouldn't try at all. And if they do, they should not do it in conjunction with a collection by producing these feminist shirts... it's like 'now all girls should want this and they have to purchase this shirt'. Do it without any collection, and I would have bought into the message more!...Then they could have built on that the next time.”* (P17, focus group, May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017)

In that sense, it thus showed that numerous participants exposed its commercial interest due to its strong link to H&M products; and consequently, they perceived the brand to solely be driven by egoistic motives. Drawing on the ideas provided by Holt and Cameron (2012), a reason for the strong critique it received might be due to its inability of cultural innovation (Holt & Cameron, 2012); that is, to act as a cultural leader and show that they are an integrated part of feminism by driving the question forward. Instead, it can be argued that H&M's 'Ladylike' campaign was trying to capitalize on a trend in a way that encourages women towards new forms of consumption, a concept that has been referred to as *commodity feminism* (Johnston & Taylor, 2008; McRobbie, 2009). In that sense, the negative perception of H&M's overall character can be derived by its superficial messages with a lacking substance, in which its commercial interest became too obvious.

### 5.4.3 Identity attractiveness of H&M

On a third level, we assess the brand's involvement with the feminist movement in terms of aspects that specifically relates to its ability to elicit identity attractiveness. Similar to the case of Libresse, we will treat the concept of identity attractiveness with respect to consumer's ability to identify with the brand in its attempt to support feminism.

#### Identity coherence

Findings related to identity coherence suggest that there exists incongruence within H&M's brand identity. Specifically, although aspects related to self-expression arguably becomes more prominent in the case of H&M in which consumers for example may use shirts containing feminist prints as a way to express their social identity, numerous focus groups participants were not able to identify with the brand's feminist stance, despite identifying themselves as feminists. One aspect that could explain this is the suggested fragmentation of the brand's identity.

*"It feels so obvious that they use this social issue just because it's a trend."* (P13, focus group, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017)

*"If H&M does this in one collection, and then there's another theme on the next one, followed by a third one talking about sustainability. I simply don't buy they way H&M carry it out".* (P17, focus group, May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017)

*"They (H&M) always have a 'turncoat' behaviour, which make me think 'ah now it's feminism, of course they will latch onto this trend.'"* (P5, focus group, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017)

According to Bhattacharya and Sen (2003), a shift in brand identity can cause confusion and loss of resonance with consumers in which they might lose the ability to express it in an authentic way. Nevertheless, one should consider that H&M operates within the fast-fashion industry where new trends circulate each season. Hence, the brand's ability to maintain

congruence in its identity may be limited. Furthermore, a high number of brand communicators with different interests increases the risk of disrupting brand identity coherence (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2015), which today becomes more apparent within the realm of social media, where people often use brands as mediating devices to gain publicity. Thus, considering the wide variety of expressions that the brand is exposed to online, one can suggest that its ability to maintain a stable identity is further restricted. Also, by drawing upon the ideas of Thompson, Rindfleisch and Arsel (2006) of ‘doppelgänger brands’, we recognize how contradictions within H&M’s branding strategies can disrupt the identity value of the brand among consumers, hence perceiving its identity as less authentic. Furthermore, within the findings presented above it becomes prominent that H&M does not express any historical link to feminism, which is important for a brand to be perceived as a legitimate true speaker by consumers (Erden & Swait, 2004; Trimble & Rifon, 2006). In other words, we can suggest that the ability for consumers to resonate with H&M on an identification level becomes difficult due to the brand’s inconsistency of behavior and meanings over time. Consequently, the perceived unstable brand personality of H&M resulted in a rather low ability for consumers to resonate with its newfound suggested feminist identity.

### **Identity distinctiveness and prestige**

Building upon the arguments presented above, the low identity coherence of H&M showed implications upon its ability to enhance identity distinctiveness and prestige. Identity distinctiveness has previously shown to be a valuable trait that consumers consider in terms of how the brand enables them to stand out from others (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Findings suggest that the way in which participants viewed H&M as a facilitator for identity distinctiveness often was limited.

*“H&M succeeds in conveying that there is something for everyone, even feminism in all different forms” (P16, focus group, May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017)*

*“...H&M stands for something mainstream and that can appeal to everybody” (P8, focus group, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017)*

As implied by both Holt (1998) and Bourdieu (1984), as soon as brands are adopted by the public mainstream they become commoditized, hence losing their symbolic uniqueness. Consequently, they will be understood as distasteful objects that possess a contagious power to intrude the public space, and thus lose their distinctive mark within culture. Drawing upon the empirical findings, we can suggest that the feminist identity of H&M can be perceived as a form of ‘mainstream feminism’ that does not demonstrate upon a high identity distinctiveness.

Furthermore, the extent to which consumers chose to openly show their support for the brand’s feminist initiative was heavily mediated by the brand’s ability to convey a prestigious identity; that is, how it enabled consumers to present and perceive themselves in a positive way to others (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). Accordingly, findings suggest how consumers considered the views of others when assessing the brand prestige of H&M, showing that focus

group participants who *did* resonate with H&M's feminist messages were mainly those who *did not* consider themselves as 'real' feminists; that is, embodying true feminist values.

*"I feels more accepted to wear these things (feminist print shirts) now...I think it's cool."* (P2, focus group, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017)

*"To show off that kind of (feminist) message on your shirt I guess is linked to status...it's about expressing a type of belonging to that particular group"*(P16, focus group, May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017)

*"I'm not that 'extreme' feminist, but in my opinion this (i.e. feminist fashion) is pretty cool and stylish."* (P8, focus group, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017)

It becomes prominent that some participant assessed the newfound feminist identity of H&M as something that enabled them to present themselves in a positive way to others. Simultaneously, drawing on social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1985), consumers use brands in a way that can satisfy their opposing needs for fitting into a group while simultaneously enabling them to maintain a sense of uniqueness. Findings thus show upon tendencies of consumers' willingness to use H&M feminist expressions as a way to gain a particular social belonging. However, it also became prominent that participants who considered themselves to be 'real' feminists chose to distance themselves from H&M's feminist initiative due to their unwillingness to be associated with a type of commercialized or 'fake' feminism. As suggested by our empirical findings, capitalizing on the feminist trend in this way without understanding its nuances could have negative consequences for the movement itself.

*"I'm afraid that people will latch onto this trend without knowing what it actually stands for. Then it (feminism) will lose its power, and it could also lead to new meanings and redefinitions of feminism"*(P9, focus group, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017)

*"This trend runs the risk of becoming just a temporary girl-power hype. It results in a clash, since feminists who truly advocate this can see through it all. Soon H&M will jump onto the next collection and replace this with something else."* (P12, focus group, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017)

In other words, we can suggest that the central element that separates what is considered 'real' versus 'fake' feminism is closely linked to the brand's ability to convey a sense of *approximate authenticity*; that is, how the changed approach reflects a connection between the past and present and how the historic traditions have evolved to meet the modern standards in a continuous way (Beverland, 2008). H&M shows upon a behavior that does not reflect a particular value of its brand essence and historical traditions, and consequently, the suggested low levels of authenticity expressed by H&M caused a divide between consumers who identify themselves as 'real' feminists and those who did not. Thus, while it might suggest a

certain level of identity attractiveness among consumers who did not demonstrate a strong feminist stance, it resulted in overall low identity attractiveness among consumers who considered themselves true supporters of the feminist movement.

### 5.5 Semiotic analysis of H&M's 'Ladylike' campaign video

In this section will conduct a semiotic analysis of the official campaign video that H&M promoted during the course of the campaign. Similar to the semiotic structure of Libresse, we will rely on Barthes (2009), notions of mythologies to identify which feminist myths are constructed in the video. Again, we will involve views of focus group participants to further evolve the depiction of feminism in the video and how it resonates with consumers.

On the 22nd September 2016, H&M released the campaign Ladylike in collaboration with the ad agency Forsman & Bodenfors. On their website, the ad agency describe the campaign as follows:

*“Since basically forever, girls and women have been told to look and behave ‘like a lady’.  
Well isn’t it about time we — everyone together — redefined what it means to be a lady today? This campaign aims to do just that — featuring some seriously bad-ass women who are all equally ladylike in their own right” (Forsman & Bodenfors, n.d)*

In that sense, the purpose of the campaign was to redefine what it means to ‘be a lady’ by featuring women who challenge traditional gender stereotypes and representations about what is considered feminine, which H&M describe as entertaining, fearless and independent in the description of the video on their Youtube channel (Youtube, 2017). The video is built around different sequences accompanied to Lion Babe’s cover of Tom Jones’ *She’s a Lady*, which are set within different urban environments such as restaurants, bars and other types of social gatherings. The video displays women of different shapes, sizes, ethnicity, ages, women with hairy armpits, shaved heads and muscles; women who do not fit into the normative representation of what is considered ‘Ladylike’.

#### **Being a ‘lady’**

In the ad, H&M challenges the conventional view of what is considered feminine in many different ways. In the Oxford Dictionaries (2017a) a ladylike is defined as: *“Ladylike: Appropriate for or typical of a well-bred, decorous woman or a girl”*. The song ‘She’s a lady’ originally performed by Tom Jones is a central element that provokes tension in the video’s confrontation with this definition due to prominent contradictions between the different messages between the song and the video. This becomes prominent as the song represents the normative definition of what is considered ‘ladylike’, which then becomes challenged both in terms of the appearance and behaviour of women in the video. In the lyrics, one can hear certain parts saying “she always knows her place”, “she’s never in the way” and “that lady is mine, hence signifying the woman as inferior and a property of the man. In one of the opening sequences the video features a group of women at a fine dining restaurant, in which one of the women is picking food from her teeth using a knife as a mirror, accompanied to the lyrics “she’s the kind you like to flaunt and take to dinner”; hence her gesture is used as signifier to

challenge the meaning of the lyrics with what would be considered improper manners for a woman. A forthcoming sequence features a woman *manspreading*; “*the practice whereby a man, especially one travelling on public transport, adopts a sitting position with his legs wide apart, in such a way as to encroach on an adjacent seat or seats*” (Oxford Dictionary, 2017b), a phenomenon that has been widely debated on social media (Buzzfeed 2016; The Telegraph; 2015b). In that sense, using this gesture by a woman signifies reversed gender roles, in which she displays assertiveness and dominance. The scene is accompanied to the lyrics “she’s never in the way”; which meaning is then again contradicted by the woman’s gestures. A forthcoming scene depicts the actress Lauren Hutton at an exclusive event while seemingly uninterested standing in between two men engaged in a conversation, while the lyrics “always something nice to say” are played in the background; again challenging the conventional views of the woman as constantly present and responsive to the needs of the man. By wearing a suit, she signifies a power dressing code, which conveys masculinity and authority. Overall, the contrast between the vocal and visual messages in the video signifies how feminine ideals traditionally have come to be represented within the media (Bartky, 1990).

A central theme of the video is related to the disruption of the traditional objectification of women in the media; not seeking for men’s attention and acceptance but who instead are able to affirm themselves and their bodies. The story goes on into a sequence that recurs a number of times, which portrays a woman who falls outside the “thin ideal” normally promoted in the media (Bartky, 1990), giving herself desirable glances in the mirror. This recurring sequence could be used to signify sexuality and narcissism, hence reflecting the paradigm shift within the media in accordance with Gill (2007:89) in which women are increasingly constructing themselves as sexual objects without the need to seek desire or attention from men, but instead are able to desire themselves. In that way, women are depicted as being in control, without any reliance upon the views of others. This suggestively confirms neoliberalist rhetoric of individual independence and self-transformation (Gill, 2008b) by depicting how the female identity can be redesigned and empowered by consuming H&M products. Thus, there are several aspects within the video that can be linked to both postfeminist and neo-liberalist views, since According to Gill (2007), this type of construction can lead to a higher form of female exploitation in which the traditional male objectification becomes internalized that instead can become a new form of self-objectification controlled by the woman. Specifically, what is portrayed as self-love and empowerment rather becomes a new form of control since the ad suggests that this can only be reached through consumption. In fact, the majority of the scenes are built upon themes related to beauty and fashion. In offering alternative views of femininity by featuring women who both look and behave in whatever way they want while simultaneously being successful and independent, H&M attempts to subvert these stereotypes.

However, drawing on the views of focus group participants, the representation and behavior of women in the video does in fact not stretch far beyond the normative depictions of women in advertising.

*“80 % of the women featured in the campaign video are models, and one is “curvy” and not even particularly big” (P10, focus group, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017)*

*“It feels a bit fake, I appreciate them trying but it feels like they think more of themselves than they actually are. They could have tried more, considering the power they (H&M) already have in society...”* (P17, focus group, May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017)

It thus becomes apparent that although the ‘Ladylike’ video features representations of women who traditionally fall outside the normative beauty “ideals”; such as a transgender woman, a muscular woman and a woman with a shaved head, there appears to be a limit on how far these boundaries can be pushed. In fact, it is arguable that there is an existing balance between their physical attributes. For example, the woman who falls outside the thin “ideal” has a conventionally beautiful face. Another woman eating French fries, which could signify indulgence and liberation from societal pressure of what a woman should eat to fall within Western body “ideal” Yet, she is white and very thin. In the end, what is arguably an attempt to reverse stereotypes still suggests a strong proximity to the feminine norm within advertising.

*“Who eats fries that graciously?!...They should have skipped that ‘fixed’ female side to symbolize that we are not always perfect!”* (P6, focus group, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017)

*“Obviously, you look good when you’re at parties, but they could have shown how we look before putting on all the makeup. It’s clear what type of message the video is trying to convey, and it’s not genuine...”* (P12, focus group, May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017)

In that sense, despite H&M’s attempt to break stereotypical boundaries of gender roles, this video still suggests a sense of feminism in which women still fall within the traditional beauty “ideals” represented within the media (Johnston & Taylor, 2008; McRobbie, 2009). Ultimately, the way ‘non-stereotypes’ of femininity is depicted suggests that the campaign promotes a neo-liberalist rhetoric of diversity and the ‘free choice’ for women to look a certain way; yet, the range in which women with different physical traits are presented within is narrow, restricted and based on notions of sexuality. These views have strong connections to the notions of governmentality provided by Foucault (1977,1980); suggesting how these discursive practices ultimately leads to a reconstruction of the same ideological power relations. Drawing on how feminist myths is depicted in the video we can ultimately derive the signs identified in the ‘Ladylike’ campaign to notions of both postfeminist and neoliberalist ideologies, in which representations of femininity ultimately becomes reconstructions of the objectified and consumption-related forms traditionally depicted within the media.

## **5.6 Additional findings and summary**

In this section will provide an overview of the findings for each case respectively. In addition, we will present one central finding that have emerged in the examination of empirical data that was not necessarily case-specific but permeated focus group discussions and the overall research process, which relates to the *integrity* of a brand. Although this build upon certain

aspects related to authenticity, this finding accounts for an inductive part of this study as it did not directly originate from any applied theories or literature used within this research. In other words, it emerged within the overall case context as a significant strategic factor that brands must consider in their attempt to co-opt a social movement.

### 5.6.1 Integrity

The theoretical use of the conceptions treated within this study has traditionally been used within studies related to a brand's support for a social cause. This research suggests that compared with a social cause, applying the same assumptions on a different context; that is; a brand's support for a social movement, ultimately gives rise to an additional theme that is rooted within the *integrity* of a brand. The concept of integrity can be viewed as an evolved part of the term *authenticity*, which relates to brand heritage, essence and continuity of meanings (Keller, 2003; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Brown, Kozinets & Sherry, 2003). However, within the context of this research we extend our view of authenticity as we have chosen to refer to integrity as a sense of 'grit', strength of character or 'fearlessness' that brands should seek to embody to be perceived as reliable in their support of a social movement. Naturally, integrity also involves persistence in the brand's feminist stance despite negative public reactions and critique.

*"It becomes trustworthy if you're able to stand your ground and show that you're serious."*  
(P9, focus group, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2017)

*"I think it's important that you dare to defend your feminist position without backing down...If the brand gives in to public criticism it shows upon a weakness!"* (P1, focus group, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017)

*"If the brand can't stand up for it, why should I support the campaign?"* (P4, focus group, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2017)

We can identify notions linked to Holt's (2004) of *fidelity*; that is, the ability for the brand to understand and defend the ethos of the populist world. The reason why this aspect becomes more prominent within the context of a social movement compared with other aspects treated within this study previously applied on a brand's support for a social cause might be that a brand's support for a social cause can generally be considered positive and does not involve as high risk in terms of how it will affect brand image. In contrast, when brands enter into the political sphere it can imply a certain risk in how the political meanings will be received by consumers. It thus puts more pressure on brands to demonstrate their political character in a way that is reliable to them. Thus, this newfound aspect can be considered a crucial part of a successful co-option of a social movement.

### 5.6.2 Summary of 'Redfit'

Drawing upon the narrative of the 'Redfit' campaign, its success of Libresse can suggestively be linked to the brand's ability to disrupt the mainstream dialogue by de-stigmatizing the



discussion around menstruation. By addressing these silences, Libresse opened up to a conversation that invited consumers to participate, both within and outside the sphere of social media. In accordance with postfeminist views (Chen, 2013; Gill & Scharff, 2011; Kauppinen, 2013), Libresse thus challenged the normative discourses around female identities (especially during their periods) by specifically addressing the stigmatized discussions of periods and their impact on women. In their campaign, they also used health advocacy as an approach as a large focus was on the educational aspects of menstrual health. The brand's main social media focus in elevating both brand and educational messages around the campaign enabled a wide reach and thus allowed the brand to connect with a global audience by allowing anyone to participate in the movement. Ultimately, its ability to co-opt the feminist movement can be explained by a high level of 'fit' between the brand and feminism, its strong historical character as well as its ability to create a high level of identity attractiveness among consumers.

### **5.6.3 Summary of 'Ladylike'**

By considering all different perspectives on H&M's feminist initiative 'Ladylike', we can ultimately link its perceived 'failure' to co-opt feminism to a number of aspects linked to its relation to feminism, brand values and its ability to yield identity attractiveness among consumers. The employed spokespersons Little Jinder and Kakan Hermansson suggested strong representations of authentic feminism, which initially implied a sense of credibility towards the campaign. However, the sudden decision of Little Jinder to end her collaboration with the brand showed to have detrimental effects on the brand's perceived integrity. Overall, H&M incorporated feminism into its branding strategy by employing inauthentic feminist messages that evidently showed no clear alignment with how consumers perceived the inherent values of the brand. Ultimately, we can assess its perceived failure as a result of a relatively low fit between the brand and the feminist movement as well as an overall poor judgment of character. Moreover, although findings suggest that different types of consumers have distinct views of its identity attractiveness in terms of identity prestige, its overall identity distinctiveness and coherence was interpreted as low.

## **6. Discussion - comparison of both cases**

In this chapter we will use our narrative analysis to compare both cases to distinguish the different elements that led to such different outcomes for the chosen cases. The discussion thus revolves around a comparison of the multi-faceted views gathered from both cases and is built around four central parts. First, this section explores the factors of what constitutes a successful brand co-optation of a social movement; specifically, the feminist movement, from a strategic point of view and examines the basis for fit perceptions in terms of both cases. The second part relates to more profound aspects of these types of strategies; that is, the values and symbolic meanings that a brand needs to embody to express a trustworthy representation of feminism, in which we will explore elements related to altruism, authenticity and integrity. Drawing on the semiotic analysis, this section will also include the comparison in how both brands convey particular feminist myths in their campaign videos. In the third section, we will examine how consumers portray their feminist identity within the marketplace in which we will compare the ability for both brands to express feminism in a way that can resonate with consumers. Lastly, we will build upon preceding sections to explore how we, based on the brand's interpreted motives and ultimate contribution to the feminist movement can portray them either as a 'feminist driver' or 'feminist appropriator'.

### **6.1 The feminist consumer identity**

How feminist identities are constructed within the marketplace relies upon how the feminist identity is communicated by the brand. In this study we have highlighted how the ability for brands to convey a feminist identity ultimately can determine the extent of support that the brand receives from consumers. In terms of how consumers construct their feminist identities within the marketplace suggests a certain tension between what is perceived as either 'real' or 'fake' feminist consumer expressions. Specifically, Libresse was able to construct a feminist representation that consumers could easily relate to; using symbolic notions of 'girl-power' through physical agency, hence shifting focus away from the objectified forms that traditionally have come to dominate feminist advertising. In other words, it used feminist notions in a way that resonated with both consumers' and feminist values. The ability for Libresse to find the balance between different degrees of feminist expressions thus led the brand to gain high identity attractiveness among consumers. In contrast, the findings of H&M suggests that a majority of consumers drew upon its incoherence in brand meanings over time to recognize how H&M in fact not represents a 'true' feminist brand. Its incorporation of feminist messages rather resonated with some consumers on a superficial level, which conceivably enabled them to construct a 'fake' feminist identity. Specifically, we argue that while this type of marketplace feminism can enable a fashionable and accessible identity for consumers, it can ultimately run the risk of becoming depoliticized. In other words, this type of commoditized movement may suggest a form of 'feel-good' feminism that allows consumers to demonstrate a prestigious and distinctive identity that can bring them closer towards a sense of self-actualization, but which in the end risks to become misleading due to

its lack of substantive meanings. We suggest that the commoditized form of feminist branding, such as in the case of H&M becomes an opportunity for some consumers to “try out new identities” in a process in which their own identity becomes negotiated in relation to the new identity adopted by the brand. However, the ability for consumers to build upon their feminist identity by consuming H&M products might not be optimal since H&M is heavily influenced by seasonal trends. In other words, it is arguably a matter of time before the brand will give up on its feminist agenda and pursue another trend. On the other hand, while some consumers might lose their faith of the brand when employing this type of branding strategy, the high identity attractiveness of Libresse implies that the defensive position taken by loyal consumers suggests that their relationship with the brand grows even stronger, since the brand gives this group of committed consumers a chance to stand up for something that is meaningful to them. In that sense, the brand, especially in the case of Libresse whose products generally belong to a low-involvement category, is no longer seen as mundane, but rather enables the brand to create a high level of engagement among consumers and add more value to their lives.

## **6.2 The constituents of co-opting a social movement**

Drawing upon the elements of branding a social movement explored within this study, we will in the forthcoming section outline the cornerstones of what constitutes a successful feminist branding strategy. These have been identified by taking into account the multimodal views collected in our research; especially in terms of how consumers assessed the strategies executed by both brands.

### **Feminist attribution**

The credibility of the two illustrative cases varied due to their different ability to convey feminist attributions and act as a legitimate intermediary of the feminist movement. The success of Libresse’ ‘Redfit’ can partly be explained by the functional and image fit between the brand and the feminist movement. In contrast, the outcome of H&M’s ‘Ladylike’ campaign can partly be seen as a result of the misalignment between the brand’s image fit and the feminist movement. It should be considered that fast-fashion brands such as H&M, which operate within an industry where companies must maintain a high degree of adaptability to seasonal trends, face more challenging conditions when attempting this type of feminist branding strategy. Another prominent factor that can explain the mismatch between H&M and feminism is arguably related to how the representation of feminism was absent within other domains of the brand, such as H&M stores. As consumers rely on these cues to make judgments of ‘fit’, the perceived misalignment conceivably leads to confusion of brand meanings, which ultimately might distort brand image. In contrast, Libresse’s ‘RedFit’ campaign could only be judged by its communicated content, since it does not operate within its own controlled brand stores. Hence, one can conclude that Libresse had to take ‘less’ aspects into account in terms of how these cues were received by consumers within other brand-related domains. In that sense, the business model of brands should be a central consideration when pursuing this type of strategy to ensure that all elements that consumers are in touch with when engaging with the brand are aligned with the meanings that the brand is seeking to convey.

### **Timing**

A central aspect for brands to consider is the impact of *timing* when pursuing this type of strategy. It was closely related to certain actions executed by the brands, and thus had great implications on how it was received by consumers. For example, the success of Libresse derived from a number of external events taking place that enabled the brand to capitalize on a feminist subject in a way that had suggested a certain time relevance to society. For example, the discussion surrounding the stigmatization of periods had during the previous year grown as a topic within the media with regard to the occurrence of numerous events, such as the London marathon runner, the Instagram censorship as well as the public statement made by the Chinese Olympic swimmer Fu Yuanhui. In contrast, the timing for H&M became unfortunate due to certain events occurring days before the launch of the campaign, such as the book released by Gunilla Anders that specifically addressed the dark side of the fast-fashion industry. Nevertheless, although timing can be considered an important element of a successful strategy it should not undermine the efforts executed by the brand. Ultimately, results show upon that a majority of the success can be derived to the character of the brand; that is, characteristics and values that have been developed and preserved during a longer period of time.

### **6.3 Embodiment of feminist values**

The second component that suggests the basis for a successful co-optation of a social movement is found rooted within the internal values of the brand. It stretches beyond ‘fit’ perceptions as it relates to the deeper elements of a brand’s character. As will be outlined below, these crucial traits emphasize altruism and authenticity, in which we extend the conception of authenticity to accentuate the significance of *integrity* found within this research.

#### **Altruism**

As suggested within this research, a central aspect perceived to be linked to the outcome of the feminist brand campaign was found as related to the altruistic behavior of respective brand. In other words, we suggest that consumers’ evaluations of the brand’s motives and contribution to the feminist movement is arguably one of the most central traits that influences consumers’ judgments when a brand attempts to co-opt a political movement. In contrast to a brand’s support of a social cause, it is conceivable that the altruistic aspect might in fact be better described as a sense of social *solidarity* that a brand should seek to obtain in its attempt to co-opt a political movement. It involves the process in which the brand becomes realized as an integrative part of the movement by demonstrating upon its moral acts of defending the feminist movement rather than merely acting as an outside supporter.

In the case of Libresse, ‘Redfit’ became an extension of the brand’s previous campaigns under its long-term slogan ‘Fearless’, in which the brand showed upon its solidary efforts that stretched beyond its commercial areas. The multiple touch points in which the the brand could demonstrate its mobilizing efforts and contributions to feminism not only during the course of the campaign, but also in the past as though it was a part of the movement, suggests a sense of

sincerity that consumers can rely on when making judgments of the brand. In contrast, the commercial motives of the ‘Ladylike’ campaign became prominent due to its coincidence with the ‘Fall-Fashion Collection’ release, in which H&M did not demonstrate any other solidary efforts. We can suggest that pushing feminist issues to the forefront of culture is unarguably a positive effort; it may open up to discussions among consumer groups and increase public awareness surrounding the issue. However, when certain hypocritical elements of the brand are revealed, such as contradicting actions within other domains that are not aligned with what the social movement stands for, it becomes easy for consumers to uncover its egoistic and non-solidary motives. However, the way how aspects linked to brand altruism and solidarity were assessed by consumers suggests a close link to specific elements that build brand character. As we will outline in the next section, a brand’s support for the social movement can arguably only be perceived as positive if the brand also embodies values that are closely related to authenticity.

### **Authenticity & Integrity**

As became evident within our findings, aspects linked to brand authenticity are closely related to the assessment of the brand’s ability to express legitimacy and genuine expressions of the social movement without sacrificing its brand essence. In terms of the multilayered concept of *authenticity*, we have in accordance with previous research treated it around the conception of something that appears ‘real’, ‘genuine’, or ‘true’. Drawing upon the empirical outcomes of both cases, elements of authenticity are thus important aspects for brands to embody in order to persuade consumers that their political stance embody these authentic elements. Both Libresse and H&M operate within a product category that stretches to the mass-market, which in turn might undermine the value of authenticity for consumers, and more so if consumers discover that the brand’s standards for authenticity become compromised for the sake of profit. It thus implies that brands that operate within niche markets or carry a deep sense of brand heritage carry a higher potential to convey authenticity to consumers.

As previously argued, the newfound aspect *integrity* stretches beyond aspects of authenticity linked to brand heritage, essence and continuity of meanings; rather suggesting a sense of ‘grit’, strength of character or ‘fearlessness’ that brands should seek to adopt to be perceived as reliable in their support of a social movement. The additional aspect of *integrity* that emerges within this research becomes distinct from the findings on how the theoretical conceptions ‘fit’ traditionally have been applied; that is, within the context of a brand’s support for a social cause. In other words, the aspect linked to integrity shows to become particularly important when a brand is taking a political stance. As previously outlined, when brands enter into the political sphere it can imply a certain risk in terms of how the political meanings will be received by consumers. It thus puts more pressure on brands to demonstrate their political character in a way that is reliable to them, which arguably only can be displayed if the brand embodies certain ‘boldness’ in its solidary actions.

In that sense, it appears that a part of the outcome of a feminist branding strategy can be linked to the brand’s ability to demonstrate perseverance for its feminist goals, and working purposefully towards these while communicating its efforts in a way that is perceived as trustworthy by consumers. This involves a particular ‘code of ethics’ that a brand should live by through its history that carries coherent values of feminism. This also became evident

within the findings suggesting that Libresse has built its brand identity around its feminist stance for a long time while H&M has not. In particular, findings suggest that the inability for H&M to respond to certain critique in the media, such as the interrupted collaboration with Little Jinder can have harmful effects on brand image among consumers, in which their reliability of the brand as a feminist supporter becomes questioned and in worst case calls out the brand for hypocrisy. In other words, the concept of integrity arguably involves the process of making consumers believe that the brand will stand up for the ethos that represents the feminist movement, regardless of the public setbacks it may receive; it is thus how the brand can prove to consumers its loyalty towards feminism and in that way become recognized as an integrative part of the social movement. A lack of integrity does not only suggest having harmful effects on brand image, but may also imply disadvantages for the social movement. In fact, a weak support for feminism may ‘cheapen’ the idea of women’s equality and thus risks depoliticizing feminism, by ultimately turning female power into a commodity. In the forthcoming section we will elaborate upon this aspect in relation to both brands.

#### **6.4 Feminist myths**

In this section we will elaborate on how feminist myths are portrayed within both campaign videos. As discussed in section 1.2.2, the increased reflexivity among contemporary consumers has created a link between identity construction and consumption that brands today seek to capitalize on. Drawing upon the campaign videos of Libresse and H&M, both brands are utilizing this suggested link in their reconstruction of the modern female consumer identity through the use of feminist myths of women as active, liberated, and independent.

Drawing upon our findings, we can relate the campaigns of both brands to a form of marketplace feminism by suggesting how the videos seek to reconstruct the ‘new’ feminine identity. The depictions of women as empowered, liberated and fearless protagonists could conceivably be linked to an ideological view aimed to satisfy the need of a more advanced capitalist society. By using signifiers that traditionally have been absent within female ads, both Libresse and H&M attempt to remove the tension between the conventional views of femininity. Both videos display many similarities in how they seek to reconstruct the feminine identity by challenging gender stereotypes. Specifically, the women in both ads are conducting themselves in ways that would from a normative view be considered ‘masculine’.

However, despite many prominent similarities between the videos, they suggest a number of distinctions in how different aspects of feminist notions are conveyed. One central difference is how they convey feminist notions linked to brand image. While H&M’s video has a strong connection to their products (due to its release in conjunction with H&M’s new collection), the focus within the ‘Redfit’ video is solely linked to brand image without any displayed products in the ad. By avoiding to convey myths of female empowerment that only can be realized through various forms of consumption, its message of physical and emotional agency becomes more credible by suggesting that women can achieve these forms of empowerment with or without Libresse products. Furthermore, by shifting away from notions of objectification and sexualization the brand is able to depict postfeminist myths in a way not

necessarily linked to the traditional neoliberalist reflections of capitalistic interests. Also, by using blood not as a signifier of weakness, but rather as a signifier of strength, Libresse ultimately manages to tap into the cultural tension that the campaign initially was built upon.

In contrast, the way in which certain self-transformative notions are depicted in ‘Ladylike’ suggests a strong link between the feminist identity and consumption. This is especially emphasized by how H&M in the video manages to internalize the traditional forms of male objectification commonly found within advertising into self-objectification; by legitimizing self-love and self-acceptance it paradoxically suggests a new form of control since this can only be realized through consumption. In other words, we may suggest that the brand is in fact referring to itself as a supporter for feminism not by perpetuating and embracing physical diversity in its campaign video, but rather through a reconstruction of feminist stereotypes. Overall, the way in which feminist myths are depicted in ‘Ladylike’ ultimately becomes a disguised message linked to its commercial interests. In that sense, it is thus considerable that ‘Ladylike’ could in fact be a reflection of traditional gender structures aimed to reconstruct the patriarchal values within capitalist society.

As a final note, distinguishing how feminist myths are used within the videos of both ‘Redfit’ and ‘Ladylike’ hence emphasizes the importance of myths to be credible depictions of the particular ideology the brand is trying to sustain. As we have demonstrated, postfeminist myths should not be explored without considering the power that neoliberalist ideologies have on those, and the way in which brands use these myths can ultimately uncover their underlying motives and reveal reflections of their own ideological interests. Finally, we may suspect that the neoliberalist interplay with postfeminism has ultimately transformed feminism into a modern neoliberal form of femininity repackaged and sold to female consumers through messages of empowerment and liberation. Thus, it is crucial not only for the sake of the brand, but also for sake of the social movement to be represented in a way in which it avoids becoming depoliticized and lose its meanings.

## **6.5 Leading versus appropriating feminism**

What does it imply to create ‘real’ change for the social movement that a brand attempts to co-opt? We suggest that in the case of Libresse, its ability to identify a relevant and discussed topic within feminist discourse and use that to drive the debate forward ultimately led the brand to become closely linked to the topic itself. Its feminist strategy did not just revolve around a simple message, but rather an agenda that added substance and meaning to its feminist messages. In that sense, in its efforts to disrupt the stigmatization around menstruation, Libresse acted as a concrete driver of change for feminism, and in that sense the brand employed a role of a feminist leadership. The campaign itself was not perceived as carrying any direct resonance to its commercial interest; instead, the focus was rather on mobilizing the movement through efforts within different domains that could have an impact on the question. It was thus able to sustain its cultural relevance in which it could dominate the media discourse around the feminist issue and lead the ideology into the mass market. In contrast, H&M capitalized on feminism in a way that carried little resonance to true feminist values; as the brand did not ensure that the empowered expressions of feminism was ensured

internally within their own supply chain as well as within other domains of the organization. Furthermore, 'Ladylike' mainly revolved around messages without the innermost substance required to resonate with feminism from an authentic point of view.

In that sense, by adopting an aspect of the social movement that had no original relationship with the brand, the 'Ladylike' campaign suggests a form of feminism 'appropriation'. In other words, it 'borrows' elements from the feminist movement without recognizing the significance behind it. Not understanding the nuances behind these issue arguably leads to a trivialization of the movement's political project; an attempt to embed itself into progressivism in which the social movement ultimately risks becoming depoliticized. In the case of H&M, the depiction of feminism suggests how H&M has used its power within mainstream culture by employing themes of female liberation and empowerment, and by capitalizing on a trend considered 'fashionable' in which it may become closely associated with feminism without making any contributive efforts to the movement itself. In other words, by referring to feminist discourses in their branding strategy, H&M is using messages of self-acceptance and independence by promoting feminism as a certain look or style. Paradoxically, it might end up reaffirming the same power dynamics that the brand conceivably opposes with its feminist campaign; which ultimately represents a facade of capitalism and a reconstruction of the commoditized forms of feminism previously explored within this study.

Drawing upon the discussion in this chapter, we can ultimately derive the outcomes of both cases with regard to how they chose to approach the feminist movement. Overall, this suggest that brands should no longer seek to capitalize on trends to stay relevant within culture, but instead seek to target novel ideas rooted within a political movement and mobilize the brand around the issue in a way that can drive the social movement forward. By tapping into the power of these elements, we argue that brands are able to stay at the center of cultural discourse and reach new levels of value in consumers' lives.



## **7. Conclusion**

In this last chapter of our study, we will draw upon the process of our conducted research and summarize our main findings in relation to our research question. First, we will outline the main findings of this study with regard to our initial aim as presented in chapter one and how our findings relate to previous research. Then, we will elaborate upon our contribution with this research, both in relation to existing research within the field as well as practical implications on how brands should seek to apply this type of branding strategy. Finally, we will use our newfound knowledge to reflect upon the implications of this phenomenon from a wider cultural and political perspective.

### **7.1 Main findings**

The aim of this study was to examine the phenomenon of how brands can attempt to co-opt social movements as part of their brand-building strategies. What inherently made this an area of high relevance within academia lies within its ability to illustrate certain shifts within contemporary branding practices that reflect companies increasing attempts to apply political ideologies as part of their brands' value propositions (Holt, 2012). By drawing upon research that had previously treated particular aspects of the issue; such as theories of cultural branding (Holt, 2004; Holt & Cameron, 2012; Godson, 2012; Farlow, 2013), meaning transfer effects by McCracken (1989) as well as research on the changing consumer behavior (Klein, 1999; Cova & Pace, 2006) allowed us to use this as a point of departure in our research. We specifically used the cases of the feminine hygiene brand Libresse and fast-fashion retailer H&M as illustrative examples in which we compared their executions of the feminist campaigns 'Redfit' and 'Ladylike' which both ran during the fall in 2016.

A number of our findings relate to previous theoretical knowledge in terms of what constitutes a credible fit between two entities; specifically, a brand and a social movement. Drawing upon a multi-perspective view of both brand executives, consumers and the media to make assessments of 'fit, assessments was based on a first level; which relates to how the functional and image of a brand relates to the social movement, and also included evaluations of other incorporated aspects of the feminist campaign, such as the degree of match-up between the spokesperson and the social movement, as well as the alignment between feminist values and the actions of the company within all of its different domains. From a second level, the brand's involvement with the social movement was assessed in terms of numerous aspects related to its character; that is, perceived brand values such as altruism, transparency and authenticity. These elements were identified based on the brand's historical link that stretched beyond the realm of the plot in which the execution of the campaign was narrated. Here, findings suggest that critical aspects included how the brand has showed upon these traits in the past. From a third level, we assessed a brand's attempt to co-opt social movement in relation to its ability to convey identity attractiveness; that is, certain characteristics that makes it easy for consumers to identify with the brand. Here, we applied

aspects related to the brand's ability to express identity coherence, identity distinctiveness and identity prestige in relation to the social movement, in which the first aspect; that is, identity coherence, became most prominent. The consideration of these aspects allowed us to ultimately answer our research question:

*How can brands successfully co-opt a social movement as part of their brand building strategy?*

Drawing on the main findings presented above, it is arguably a balancing act for brands to co-opt a social movement in a way that suggests benefits for the movement while avoiding the brand to become dominated by its commercial interests. By referring to the developed framework for this context, our study has shown validity that a brand can successfully co-opt a social movement based on two aspects; first, if it is able to demonstrate *trustworthiness, altruism and integrity*; and second, by resonating with consumers on an identification level by showing upon identity coherence, identity prestige and identity distinctiveness. Having described the key theoretical constituents of this branding approach, we will in the next section present our main theoretical contributions of this research.

## **7.2 Theoretical contributions to current research**

When applying the conceptual lens of 'fit' and C-C identification theory this research has allowed us to build upon the criteria previously suggested as important within the context of a brand's support for a social cause as well as provide an understanding for how the ability for consumers to resonate with the brand relates to its ability to build identity attractiveness. What this research has demonstrated is how the conceptions of 'fit' previously applied to a cause-brand-related context and theories of brand identity attractiveness can combined function as valuable tools when assessing the credibility and derived value a brand can receive in its attempts to become an integrative part of a social movement. Compared to a brand's support for a social cause, which generally is perceived as positive by consumers (Till & Nowak, 2000; Lafferty & Goldsmith, 2005), we suggest that there are additional aspects that consumers consider when a brand takes a political stance that is related to the different nature of a social movement, such as the degree of identity distinctiveness it yields for consumers as well as how sensitive they perceive the political stance to be whilst expressed within a social context. In that sense, since there is no current framework existing that considers all critical aspects of the phenomenon, we can consider that the preliminary framework developed for this study, which merges two significant theoretical lenses is a useful tool for future research. The logic is that it takes into account not only how aligned aspects related to the brand are with the movement itself, but also in terms of how the brand in its co-option of the movement is able to enhance consumer's ability to identify with the brand and their willingness to express their support for it.

In our application of the framework on this specific context, an additional aspect suggested to have crucial importance on this type of branding strategy emerged, which was related to a brand's *integrity*, which emerged within the case-specific context as a significant strategic

factor that brands must consider when pursuing this type of political branding strategy. We can suggest integrity to build upon the concept of authenticity in terms of how it relates to the overall character to the brand and its ability to be perceived as ‘real’ or ‘genuine’ by consumers. Nevertheless, unlike authenticity which notions by previous scholars often has had close links to brand heritage, essence and DNA (Keller, 2003; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Brown, Kozinets & Sherry, 2003), we view integrity as a characteristic that suggests a sense of ‘grit’ or ‘boldness’ that brands should seek to adopt to be perceived as reliable in their support of a social movement. In other words, it involves a sense of persistence in the brand’s feminist stance despite negative public reactions and critique. A reason why this aspect might be important is that it persuades consumers to believe that the brand will stand up for the ethos that represents the feminist movement regardless of the public setbacks it may receive. Drawing upon our findings, we were able to extend knowledge within the cultural branding field (Holt, 2004; Holt & Cameron 2012; Goodson, 2012; Farlow, 2013) by specifically identifying how the phenomenon is realized within the context of a social movement. As the political and societal climate changes, this type of branding implies that there are major opportunities for brands to reach a new level of meaningfulness in consumers’ lives. Drawing upon the theoretical aspect related to *integrity*, we similarly to Holt (2004) emphasize the obsolete nature of traditional mindshare marketing techniques by suggesting that rather than to build personality, brands that operate within today’s highly commoditized marketplace should seek to build character.

### **7.3 Practical implications**

Drawing upon both the opportunities and risks that this type of branding strategy implies, this research suggests a number of practical implications that brands should take into account in their attempt to co-opt a social movement. In other words, within this study the difference between the brand’s ability to represent a driving force for the social movement or an appropriating ‘free-rider’ rests upon a number of critical aspects. Beyond the significance of ensuring both a functional and image fit between the brand and the social movement, it must be considered how elements linked to other domains of the brand can influence consumers’ perceptions of the degree of congruence between the two, such as the employment of a spokesperson seen as an authentic representative of the social movement. The relationship between the brand and the spokesperson should also be an aspect of high consideration so that he or she is able to endorse the brand to an optimal extent.

This research has also identified that a prominent aspect that consumers consider when making judgments about a brand’s overall trustworthiness is related to *transparency*. We suggest that not only is an ability to demonstrate transparency in terms of the brand’s contributive efforts to the social movement important, but also to show upon transparency historically as well as in terms of other domains of the brand, such as its CSR initiatives and supply chain. This will arguably mediate consumers’ assessment of the brand as trustworthy, in which they become more likely to perceive its intentions as sincere.

Lastly, the co-optation of a social movement should be executed in a way that can demonstrate upon the brand's altruistic motives, and should thus involve substantive efforts to contribute to the social movement in a way that can make the brand be perceived as a solidary part of the social movement itself, rather than an outside supporter. By demonstrating a sense of 'fearlessness' in its actions despite possible criticism it might receive will arguably enhance consumers' views of the brand as a strong driver for the movement that they can rely on.

#### **7.4 Implications from a societal and political perspective**

In the end, who gains the most from the new feminist representations within the media that are brought about by this type of branding strategy? In this research, we suggest that brands which use feminist rhetoric as means to advance consumerist spending while avoiding any substantive efforts that can benefit the feminist movement can ultimately do more damage than good since their trivialization of female power suggests that it can become harder for the feminist movement to move forward politically. Drawing upon how the feminist discourse is increasingly used within the media in which new representations of gender are brought to the forefront, we can assume that this is a positive thing for the feminist movement. However, as has become evident within this study, the new depictions of women within the media should not be explored without considering the impact that neoliberalist ideologies have on those. In fact, we may suggest that its interplay with postfeminism has ultimately transformed feminism into a modern neoliberal form of femininity. Thus, recognizing the influence of neoliberal ideas on postfeminism, it is considerable that feminism itself becomes a means to reproduce the hegemonic system. From a critical perspective, we are thus able to reveal the paradoxes that are brought about by neoliberalism in the modern construction of the female consumer. Nevertheless, as this research has suggested, there are illustrations in which positive changes can be made for vulnerable groups, such as women. Thus, in the era of postmodernism, brands should seek to act as citizen-activists, in which they stand up for their internal values while driving both its civic and social responsibility to the forefront of consumer culture. That way, they will be able to employ more profound meanings in consumers' lives while balancing their commercial interests. Ultimately, this suggests a way of how brands not only can remain culturally relevant for the sake of companies, but also culturally valuable for the sake of society.

#### **7.5 Limitations and suggestions for future research**

In this part we will outline the limitations for this study as well provide suggestions for future research. These are based on the need for validity for the theoretical contributions of this study as well as areas of interest that have emerged throughout this research. In terms of limitations, there are a number of aspects that need to be taken into account within this study. First, in order to enhance transferability and comprehensiveness it is necessary to give our empirical data further examination. Second, although the aim within this case study has not

been to seek generalizable findings, but rather to illustrate the elusive phenomenon in a descriptive and representable way, the phenomenon should further be applied on other illustrative cases with a larger sample size to increase its generalizability. One should consider that findings might differ depending on certain characteristics of the social cause, such as its degree of public support and controversiality. Third, one should take into account how the lack of executive interviews within the case of H&M reduces the comparability between the two cases. In other words, in order for the cases to be directly comparable, equal amount of data is needed and thus the lack of information creates a slight imbalance between the two cases. This should also be considered in terms of differences between the illustrative brands.

First, as H&M falls within a product category that consumers to a further extent utilize in construction of their social-identity projects and thus suggest a difference in terms of how identity attractiveness is achieved by brands. Second, the different brand categories also have implications on their overall behavior; for example, the fast-fashion industry that H&M operates within makes the brand more susceptible to marketplace trends. Third, as previously mentioned, the nature of these brands also differ in terms of their distinct touch points that consumers rely on when making judgments about their relation to feminism as well as their overall character, such as how feminism is conveyed within H&M stores. Acknowledging the imbalances between both cases, one should keep in mind how these might have implications on the different outcomes of the feminist campaigns. Drawing on these differences, future research should hence seek to apply the phenomenon on homogenous cases to increase the validity of conclusions made within this study.

A fourth limitation of this study relates to its ontological implications; in terms of the identified aspects brands should seek to adopt in their attempt to co-opt a political movement, it must also be considered that this study cannot acknowledge any type of cause-and-effect relationship between these factors and consumers' responses in which fit and discrepancies are measured, but rather the focus remains on how these aspects function as assessment tools that can mediate consumers' perceptions. The newfound theme of *integrity* related to the issue should also be further investigated within other types of case study research to increase their validation. Furthermore, since the focus of this study has been on the relationship between the phenomenon and the cultural context, future research should also be applied within different cultural contexts to account for other views of what is considered credible or authentic in terms of this type of political branding. As implied by the findings, what consumers consider as authentic or credible was often found to rely on factors such as their long-term experiences with the brand. In that sense, these views might also differ depending on different types of consumer-brand relationships.

Furthermore, an extensive approach on this study would be to apply the ideas developed by McCracken (1986, 1989) to study how meaning transfer is realized between the brand and social movement; that is, the process in which the brand is becoming realized as an integrative part or even synonymous with the social movement itself. Within the thought of marketplace feminism, we can presume that constructing an authentic feminist identity has become even more difficult. Thus, an elusive but highly relevant aspect would be to investigate how consumers deal with the tension between commoditized and 'real' feminism to advance their feminist identity. Finally, future research should from a wider perspective seek to include

views that go beyond the specific target groups of both brands. A consideration that would suggest an alternative viewpoint on the issue is to integrate the views of male focus group participants, which presumably would uncover hidden aspects on how feminism branding is understood between genders and its implications on gender structures within society.

## References:

- A. Fuat, F, Nikhilesh, D, & Alladi, V 1995, 'Marketing in a postmodern world', *European Journal Of Marketing*, 1, p. 40, Emerald Insight,
- Aaker, D, & Brown, P 1972, 'Evaluating Vehicle Source Effects', *Journal Of Advertising Research*, 12, 4, pp. 11-16,
- Aaker, D, & Brown, P 1972, 'Evaluating Vehicle Source Effects', *Journal Of Advertising Research*, 12, 4, pp. 11-16.
- ABC News (2016). "A history of the Donald Trump- Megyn Kelly Feud". Available via:<http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/history-donald-trump-megyn-kelly-feud/story?id=36526503> [Accessed: April 13th]
- Aftonbladet (2016). "Story" Available via: <http://www.aftonbladet.se/story/11dfd764-d445-484a-8b8d-0ab2faea8572> [Accessed: April 23rd]
- Agency Spy (2016). "AMV BBDO, Bodyform think the last taboo or female athletes is menstrual blood". Available via: <http://www.adweek.com/agencyspy/amv-bbdo-bodyform-think-the-last-taboo-for-female-athletes-is-menstrual-blood/110338> [Accessed: April 23rd]
- Alvesson, M, & Sköldbberg, K 2008, *Tolkning Och Reflektion : Vetenskapsfilosofi Och Kvalitativ Metod*, n.p.: Lund : Studentlitteratur, 2008 (Danmark),
- Alvesson, M. (2003). Beyond Neopositivists, Romantics, and Localists: A Reflexive Approach to Interviews in Organizational Research., *Academy Of Management Review*, 28, 1, pp. 13-33
- Arnould, E, & Price, L 1993, 'River Magic: Extraordinary Experience and the Extended Service Encounter', *Journal Of Consumer Research*, 20, 1, pp. 24-45,
- Arnould, E, J. and L, L. Price (2000), "Authenticating Acts and Authoritative Performances: Questing for Self and Community," in *The Why of Consumption: Contemporary Perspectives on Consumer Motives*, ed. Cynthia Huffman, S. Ratneswar, and David Glen Mick, New York: Routledge, 140–6
- ARVIDSSON, A, & CALIANDRO, A 2016, 'Brand Public', *Journal Of Consumer Research*, 42, 5, pp. 727-748,
- Arwa Mahdawi (2016). The Guardian."H&M diverse advert mirrors the real world. Shame the ad industry doesn't". Available via: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/sep/28/hm-advert-diversity-ad-women> [Accessed: April 18th]
- BANET-WEISER, S, & LAPSANSKY, C 2008, 'RED is the New Black: Brand Culture, Consumer Citizenship and Political Possibility', *International Journal Of Communication (19328036)*, 2, p. 1248, Publisher Provided Full Text Searching File,

- Barthes, R 2009, *Mythologies*, n.p.: London: Vintage Classics, 2009.,.
- Bartky, SL 1990, *Femininity And Domination : Studies In The Phenomenology Of Oppression*, n.p.: New York : Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 1990,
- Becker-Olsen, K, Cudmore, B, & Hill, R 2006, 'The impact of perceived corporate social responsibility on consumer behavior', *Journal Of Business Research*, 59, pp. 46-53, ScienceDirect.,
- Bergami, M, & Bagozzi, R 2000, 'Self-categorization, affective commitment and group self-esteem as distinct aspects of social identity in the organization', *British Journal Of Social Psychology*, 39, 4, pp. 555-577, CINAHL Complete,
- Beverland, M 2009, *Building Brand Authenticity. [Elektronisk Resurs] : 7 Habits Of Iconic Brands*, n.p.: Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, cop. 2009,
- BEVERLAND, M, & FARRELLY, F 2010, 'The Quest for Authenticity in Consumption: Consumers' Purposive Choice of Authentic Cues to Shape Experienced Outcomes', *Journal Of Consumer Research*, 36, 5, pp. 838-856,
- Beverland, M, Lindgreen, A, & Vink, M 2008, 'Projecting Authenticity through Advertising: Consumer Judgments of Advertisers' Claims', *Journal of Advertising*, 1, p. 5, JSTOR Journals,
- Bhattacharya, C, & Sen, S 2003, 'Consumer-Company Identification: A Framework for Understanding Consumers' Relationships with Companies', *Journal Of Marketing*, 67, 2, pp. 76-88,
- Bobel, C 2008, 'From Convenience to Hazard: A Short History of the Emergence of the Menstrual Activism Movement, 1971-1992', *Health Care For Women International*, 29, 7, pp. 738-754
- Bokus (n.d).”Den lilla svarta: modeindustrins mörka baksida” Available via: <http://www.bokus.com/bok/9789170379185/den-lilla-svarta-modeindustrins-morka-baksida/> [Accessed: April 5th]
- Bourdieu, P n.d., *Distinction: A Social Critique Of The Judgement Of Taste*, n.p.: Routledge & Kegan Paul, ePublications,
- Bredberg, M. (2016). Nope, there’s no such thing as femvertising”. Medium. Available via: <https://medium.com/@majabredberg/nope-theres-no-such-thing-as-femvertising-240d0ced0848> [Accessed: April 15th]
- Brewer, MB 1991, 'The Social Self: On Being the Same and Different at the Same Time', *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, 17, 5, p. 475, Complementary Index,
- Brian D., T, & Linda I., N 2000, 'Toward effective use of cause-related marketing alliances', *Journal Of Product & Brand Management*, 7, p. 472, Emerald Insight,
- Brian D., T, & Linda I., N 2000, 'Toward effective use of cause-related marketing alliances', *Journal Of Product & Brand Management*, 7, p. 472, Emerald Insight,



Brockes, E.(2012). “The stilettos are not made for walking, nor is the thong”. New York Times. Available via:<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/27/books/how-to-be-a-woman-by-caitlin-moran.html> [Accessed: May 17th]

Brown, S, Sherry Jr., J, & Kozinets, R 2003, 'Teaching Old Brands New Tricks: Retro Branding and the Revival of Brand Meaning', *Journal Of Marketing*, 67, 3, pp. 19-33,

Bruner, EM 1994, 'Abraham Lincoln as Authentic Reproduction: A Critique of Postmodernism', *American Anthropologist*, 2, p. 397, JSTOR Journals,

Bryman, A, & Bell, E 2015, *Business Research Methods*, n.p.: Oxford : Oxford Univ. Press, cop. 2015, Library catalogue (Lovisa), EBSCOhost, viewed 1 May 2017.

Burkett, M, & Hamilton, K n.d., 'Postfeminist sexual agency: Young women's negotiations of sexual consent', *Sexualities*, 15, 7, pp. 815-833, Social Sciences Citation Index,

Business of fashion (2013). ”are H&M’s High-End Marketing Tactics Paying off? ”. Available via: <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/intelligence/are-hms-high-end-marketing-tactics-paying-off> [Accessed: May 10th]

Butler, J 1999, *Gender Trouble. [Elektronisk Resurs] : Feminism And The Subversion Of Identity*, n.p.: New York : Routledge, 1999.

Buzzfeed (2016).”Women try manspreading for a week”. Available via:[https://www.buzzfeed.com/melissaboyajian/women-try-manspreading-for-a-week?utm\\_term=.ex2oB3YbGX#.vf48vEjV2d](https://www.buzzfeed.com/melissaboyajian/women-try-manspreading-for-a-week?utm_term=.ex2oB3YbGX#.vf48vEjV2d) [Accessed: May 15th]

Chandler, D 2007, *Semiotics : The Basics*, n.p.: London ; New York : Routledge, 2007,

Chaudhuri, A, & Holbrook, M 2001, 'The Chain of Effects from Brand Trust and Brand Affect to Brand Performance: The Role of Brand Loyalty', *Journal Of Marketing*, 65, 2, pp. 81-93,

Chen, E 2013, 'Neoliberalism and popular women’s culture: Rethinking choice, freedom and agency', *European Journal Of Cultural Studies*, 16, 4, pp. 440-452, Academic Search Complete

Chic (2016). ”Därför tar H&M bort plus size storlekar i flera butiker”. Available via: <http://www.chic.se/hm-tar-bort-plus-size-storlekar-i-butiker/> [Accessed: April 22nd]

CNN Money (2016). “Report slams Walmart for exploitative conditions in Asia factories”. Available via:<http://money.cnn.com/2016/05/31/news/companies/walmart-gap-hm-garment-workers-asia/> [Accessed: April 3rd]

Cornwell, T, Weeks, C, & Roy, D 2005, 'SPONSORSHIP-LINKED MARKETING: OPENING THE BLACK BOX', *Journal Of Advertising*, 34, 2, pp. 21-42,

Corrigan, P 1997, *The Sociology Of Consumption : An Introduction*, n.p.: London : Sage, 1997,

Cova, B, & Pace, S. (2006). 'Brand community of convenience products: New forms of customer empowerment - The case "my Nutella The Community"', *European Journal Of Marketing*, 40, 9-10, p. 1087-1105

Craig J. Thompson, Aric Rindfleisch and Zeynep Arsel. (2006) Emotional Branding and the Strategic Value of the Doppelgänger Brand Image. *Journal of Marketing* 70:1, 50-64.

Crimson Hexagon (n.d). "Balmain x H&M –The Impact of Influencer Marketing". Available via: <https://www.crimsonhexagon.com/blog/balmain-x-hm-the-impact-of-influencer-marketing/> [Accessed: May 10th]

Dagens Media (2016). "H&M: Våldigt tråkigt att Little Jinder känner så här" Available via: <http://www.dagensmedia.se/marknadsforing/kampanjer/h-m-valdigt-trakigt-att-little-jinder-kanner-sa-har-6793773> [Accessed: April 9th]

Dagens Media (2017). "Zara Larsson i krismöte med H&M efter kritiken" Available via: <http://www.dagensmedia.se/medier/digitalt/zara-larsson-i-krismote-med-h-m-efter-kritiken-6829387> [Accessed: April 9th]

Danesi, M. The quest for meaning: a guide to semiotic theory and practice. Publisher: Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007.

Dean, DH 2003, 'CONSUMER PERCEPTION OF CORPORATE DONATIONS', *Journal Of Advertising*, 32, 4, pp. 91-102, Communication Source,

DN.Sport (2016). "Schelin vill bryta mens tabun". Available via: <http://www.dn.se/sport/fotboll/schelin-vill-bryta-mens-tabu/> [Accessed: April 22<sup>nd</sup>]

Easterby-Smith, M, Thorpe, R, & Jackson, P 2015, *Management And Business Research*, n.p.: London : SAGE, 2015,

Eco, U 1976, *A Theory Of Semiotics*, n.p.: Bloomington : Indiana U.P., cop. 1976

Edelman (n.d). "Global results". Available via: <http://www.edelman.com/insights/intellectual-property/2016-edelman-trust-barometer/global-results/> [Accessed: May 19th]

EISENHARDT, K, & GRAEBNER, M 2007, 'THEORY BUILDING FROM CASES: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES', *Academy Of Management Journal*, 50, 1, pp. 25-32,

Elle (2017). "Se alla bilder på Zara Larsson kollektion för H&M: Feminin, stark och passar alla" Available via: <http://www.elle.se/zara-larsson-kollektion-hm/> [Accessed: May 20th]

Encyclopedia Britannica (n.d). "Feminism". Available via: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism> [Accessed: April 5th]

Enrique Bigné-Alcañiz, Rafael Currás-Pérez, Isabel Sánchez-García, (2009) "Brand credibility in cause-related marketing: the moderating role of consumer values", *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, Vol. 18 Issue: 6, pp.437-447,

Erdem, T, & Swait, J 2004, 'Brand Credibility, Brand Consideration, and Choice', *Journal Of Consumer Research*, 31, 1, pp. 191-198,

Erdem, T, & Swait, J 2004, 'Brand Credibility, Brand Consideration, and Choice', *Journal Of Consumer Research*, 31, 1, pp. 191-198, Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost, viewed 1 May 2017.

Euroactive (2013). "Record 60% of Europeans tend not to trust EU". Available via:<http://www.euractiv.com/section/elections/news/record-60-of-europeans-tend-not-to-trust-eu/> [Accessed: may 19th]

Evans-Pritchard, D 1987, 'The Portal Case: Authenticity, Tourism, Traditions, and the Law', *The Journal of American Folklore*, 397, p. 287, JSTOR

Fallaize, E 1998, *Simone De Beauvoir : A Critical Reader*, n.p.: London : Routledge, 1998,

Femvertising Awards (n.d.). SheKnows Media The 2016 Femvertising Awards. Retrieved from: <http://femvertisingawards.com>

Forbes (2016). "How Politics became the biggest trend at New York Fashion Week 2017". Available via:<https://www.forbes.com/sites/barrysamaha/2017/02/25/how-politics-became-the-biggest-trend-at-new-york-fashion-week-fall-2017/#40f4fd5377c3> [Accessed: April 16th]

Forehand, M, & Grier, S 2003, 'When Is Honesty the Best Policy? The Effect of Stated Company Intent on Consumer Skepticism', *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 3, p. 349, JSTOR Journals,

Forsman & Bodenfors(n.d). "H&M". Available via: <http://www.fb.se/work/hm> [Accessed: April 21st]

Fotbollskanalen (2016). "TV: Schelin: Viktigt att prata om mens inom idrotten". Available via: <https://www.fotbollskanalen.se/damallsvenskan/tv-schelin-viktigt-att-prata-om-mens-inom-idrotten/> [Accessed: April 22<sup>nd</sup>]

Foucault, M 1979, *Discipline And Punish : The Birth Of The Prison*, n.p.: Harmondsworth Penguin, 1979

Franklin, C 2004, *Mary Wollstonecraft. [Elektronisk Resurs] : A Literary Life*, n.p.: Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Foucault, M, & Gordon, C 1980, *Power/knowledge : selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*, New York : Pantheon Books, c1980.

French, David (2017). "Can America's divides be healed". National review. Available via:<http://www.nationalreview.com/article/444064/donald-trump-political-polarization-problem-too-big-one-man-fix> [Accessed: May 20th]

Friedman, V.. The New York Times. (2016). "When Politics became a fashion statement". Available via: [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/13/fashion/the-year-in-style-politics-dressing.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/13/fashion/the-year-in-style-politics-dressing.html?_r=0) [Accessed: April 20th]

Giddens, A 1979, *Central Problems In Social Theory : Action, Structure And Contradiction In Social Analysis*, n.p.: London : Macmillan, 1979,

Gill, R 2007, 'Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility', *European Journal Of Cultural Studies*, 10, 2, pp. 147-166, Communication Source

Gill, R 2008, 'Culture and Subjectivity in Neoliberal and Postfeminist Times', *Subjectivity: International Journal Of Critical Psychology*, 25, 1, pp. 432-445, Academic Search Complete,

Gill, R, & Scharff, C 2011, *New Femininities : Postfeminism, Neoliberalism, And Subjectivity*, n.p.: Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2011,

GOLDMAN, R. (1992) *Reading ads socially*. London & New York: Routledge

Goodson, S.(2012). *How to Build A Brand And Change The World By Sparking Cultural Movements*. McGraw Hil Publications

Gotlieb, J, & Sarel, D 1991, 'Comparative Advertising Effectiveness: The Role of Involvement and Source Credibility', *Journal Of Advertising*, 20, 1, pp. 38-45,

GP (2016). "Little Jinder självkritisk efter H&M kampanjen". Available via: <http://www.gp.se/nöje/little-jinder-självkritisk-efter-h-m-kampanjen-1.3845394> [Accessed: April 15th]

Grayson K. and Martinec R. (2004), Consumer Perceptions of Iconicity and Indexicality and Their Influence on Assessments of Authentic Market Offerings, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31, 2, Sept., 296-312.

Grayson, K, & Shulman, D 2000, 'Indexicality and the Verification Function of Irreplaceable Possessions: A Semiotic Analysis', *Journal Of Consumer Research*, 27, 1, pp. 17-30,

Gwinner, K, & Eaton, J 1999, 'Building Brand Image Through Event Sponsorship: The Role of Image Transfer', *Journal Of Advertising*, 28, 4, pp. 47-57,

H&M(2016a) Available via: <http://www.hm.com/se/product/63610?article=63610-K> [Accessed: April 20th]

H&M(2016b) Available via: <http://www.hm.com/se/product/42771?article=42771-B> [Accessed: April 20th]

H&M. (2016c). "What it means to be #Ladylike". Available via: [http://www2.hm.com/en\\_gb/life/culture/inside-h-m/what-it-means-to-be--ladylike.html](http://www2.hm.com/en_gb/life/culture/inside-h-m/what-it-means-to-be--ladylike.html) [Accessed: April 20th]

H&M (2016d). "H&M New Autumn collection". [online video]. Available via:<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-RY6fWVrQ0> [Accessed: April 21st]

H&M (2016d). "Gör dig redo för World Recycle Week". Available via: <http://www.hm.com/se/magazine/culture/h-m-inside/2016/04/this-is-world-recycle-week> [Accessed: April 21st]

H&M(2016e). "H&M och popsensationen Zara Larsson samarbetar inför releasen av hennes första fullängdsalbum" Available via: <https://about.hm.com/sv/media/news/general-2017/ZARA-LARSSON-HM.html>. [Accessed: April 8th]

H&M Group (2017). *H&M Group Annual Report 2016*. Available via:<https://about.hm.com/content/dam/hmgroup/groupsite/documents/masterlanguage/Annual%20Report/Annual%20Report%202016.pdf> [Accessed: May 10]

Hebdige, D n.d., *Subculture: The Meaning Of Style (New Accent Series)*, n.p.: Washington, DC : Routledge, ePublications,

Holt, D, & Cameron, D 2012, *Cultural Strategy : Using Innovative Ideologies To Build Breakthrough Brands*, n.p.: Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2012,

Holt, DB 1998, 'Does Cultural Capital Structure American Consumption?', *Journal Of Consumer Research*, 25, 1, pp. 1-25,

Holt, DB 2004, *How Brands Become Icons : The Principles Of Cultural Branding*, n.p.: Boston, MA : Harvard Business School Press, cop. 2004,

Holt, Douglas B. (2005) 'How Societies Desire Brands: Using Cultural Theory to Explain Brand Symbolism', in S. Ratneshwar and David Glen Mick (eds) *Inside Consumption*. London: Routledge.

Huffpost (2016). "How feminism became trendy (and why se should care)). Available via:[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/how-feminism-became-trendy-and-why-we-should-care\\_us\\_5727b5fde4b0b49df6ac0ce4](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/how-feminism-became-trendy-and-why-we-should-care_us_5727b5fde4b0b49df6ac0ce4) [Accessed: May 16th]

Independent (2016). "Beyoncé explains why she performed in front of the word feminist". Available via:<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/beyonce-explains-performed-in-front-of-the-word-feminist-flawless-formation-a6970256.html> [Accessed: May 18th]

Independent (2016b). "New Balance is supporting Donald Trump so everyone is trashing their shoes". Available via: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/new-balance-supports-donald-trump-so-everyone-is-trashing-their-shoes-a7409916.html> [Accessed: May 17th]

Independent (2016c). "Menstruation-themed photo sereies artist, censored by Instagram, says images are to demystify taboos around periods". Avalialble via: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/menstruation-themed-photo-series-artist-censored-by-instagram-says-images-are-to-demystify-taboos-10144331.html> [Accessed: April 14th]

Independent (2016d). "Woman runs whole London Marathon without tampon to fight the stigma of periods". Available via:<http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/kiran-gandhi-woman-runs-london-marathon-without-tampon-to-fight-the-stigma-of-a-womans-period-10447363.html> [Accessed: April 14th]

Independent (2016e). "Rio 2016: Chiense swimmer Fu Yuanhui smashes taboos by admitting her period hampered Olymic performance". Available via: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/rio-2016-olympics-swimmer-competes-on-period-fu-yuanhui-taboos-a7193151.html> [Accessed: April 19th]

Jerry B., G, & Sarel, D 1991, 'Comparative Advertising Effectiveness: The Role of Involvement and Source Credibility', *Journal of Advertising*, 1, p. 38, JSTOR Journals,

Jewitt, C. (2012). An introduction to using video for research, National Centre for Research Methods, working paper, Institute of Education, London. Available online: [http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2259/4/NCRM\\_workingpaper\\_0312.pdf](http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2259/4/NCRM_workingpaper_0312.pdf) [Accessed: May 11th]

Johnston, J, & Taylor, J 2008, 'Feminist Consumerism and Fat Activists: A Comparative Study of Grassroots Activism and the Dove Real Beauty Campaign', *Signs*, 4, p. 941, JSTOR Journals,

Jones, A. (2016). "The fight to end period shaming is going mainstream". Newsweek. Available via: <http://www.newsweek.com/2016/04/29/womens-periods-menstruation-tampons-pads-449833.html> [Accessed: April 22th]

Kauppinen, K 2013, 'Full power despite stress': A discourse analytical examination of the interconnectedness of postfeminism and neoliberalism in the domain of work in an international women's magazine', *Discourse & Communication*, 7, 2, p. 133, Complementary Index,

Keller, KL 2003, 'Brand Synthesis: The Multidimensionality of Brand Knowledge', *Journal Of Consumer Research*, 29, 4, pp. 595-600

Kim, W, & Mauborgne, R 2015, *Blue Ocean Strategy : How To Create Uncontested Market Space And Make The Competition Irrelevant*, n.p.: Boston, Massachusetts : Harvard Business Review Press, [2015]

Kissling, E., A. (2006) *Capitalizing on the Curse: The Business of Menstruation*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Klein, N 2010, *No Logo : No Space, No Choice, No Jobs*, n.p.: New York : Picador, 2010, c2009.

Kozinets, R, Sherry, J, DeBerry-Spence, B, Duhachek, A, Nuttavuthisit, K, & Storm, D 2002, 'Article: Themed flagship brand stores in the new millennium. theory, practice, prospects', *Journal Of Retailing*, 78, pp. 17-29, ScienceDirect,

Kvale, S 1992, 'Ten Standard Responses to Qualitative Research Interviews', ERIC,

Lafferty, B, & Goldsmith, R 2005, 'Cause-brand alliances: does the cause help the brand or does the brand help the cause?', *Journal Of Business Research*, 58, Special Section: Attitude and Affect, pp. 423-429, ScienceDirect,

Libresse (2014). "Vinn biljetter till Göteborg Horse Show". Available via: <https://www.libresse.se/tavlingar/goteborg-horse-show-2014/> [Accessed: April 15<sup>th</sup>]

Libresse Sverige (2016). "No blodd should hold us back". [online video]. Available via: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6WYh407oas&t=2s> [Accessed: April 15th]

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage

Linnea Gustafsson. 2015. *Dn Kultur*. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.dn.se/kultur-noje/det-har-med-mens-ar-jattepolitiskt/>. [Accessed 12 May 2017].

MacCannell, D 2013, *The Tourist : A New Theory Of The Leisure Class*, n.p.: Berkeley : University of California Press, 2013,

Martin, G. 2013. Subcultures and Social Movements. *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*.

Mccracken, G 1989, 'Who Is the Celebrity Endorser? Cultural Foundations of the Endorsement Process', *Journal Of Consumer Research*, 16, 3, pp. 310-321,

McRobbie, A. (2004). Post feminism and popular culture. *Feminist Media Studies*, 4(3), 255-264. Doi: 10.1080/1468077042000309937

Menon, S. and Kahn, B.E. (2003), "Corporate sponsorships of philanthropic activities: when do they impact perception of sponsor brand?", *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 316-27

Michael, B, & Sandra, L 2005, 'Managing Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) through Strategic Decoupling: How Luxury Wine Firms Retain Brand Leadership while Appearing to Be Wedded to the Past', *Journal of Advertising*, 4, p. 103, JSTOR Journals,

Nancy, F 2013, 'Uprising: How to Build a Brand — and Change the World — By Sparking Cultural Movements', *Journal Of Product & Brand Management*, 3, p. 267, Emerald Insight,

New York Times (1982). "Dispelling menstrual myths". Available via: <http://www.nytimes.com/1982/03/07/magazine/dispelling-menstrual-myths.html?pagewanted=all> [Accessed: April 10th]

Nora J., R, Sejung Marina, C, Carrie S., T, & Li, H 2004, 'Congruence Effects in Sponsorship: The Mediating Role of Sponsor Credibility and Consumer Attributions of Sponsor Motive', *Journal of Advertising*, 1, p. 29, JSTOR Journals,

Nyhetsmorgon (2016). "Lotta Schelin: Viktigt våga prata om mens inom idrotten!- Nyhetsmorgon (TV4)". [online video]. Available via: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6vCcF4tJQk> [Accessed: April 21<sup>st</sup>]

Olson, E, & Thjømmøe, H 2011, 'EXPLAINING AND ARTICULATING THE FIT CONSTRUCT IN SPONSORSHIP', *Journal Of Advertising*, 40, 1, pp. 57-70,

Omni (2016). "Schelin vill att det ska pratas mer om mens". Available via: <http://omni.se/schelin-vill-att-det-ska-pratas-mer-om-mens/a/WWz2a> [Accessed: April 22nd]

Oxford dictionary. (2017). Available via: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/ladylike> [Accessed: April 20<sup>th</sup>]

Oxford dictionary. (2017). Available via: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/manspreading> [Accessed: April 20<sup>th</sup>]

Peterson, R, A. (1997), *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Pettigrew, AM 1990, 'Longitudinal Field Research on Change: Theory and Practice', *Organization Science*, 3, p. 267, JSTOR Journals,

Pinto Santos, F 2013, 'Brands as semiotic molecular entities', *Social Semiotics*, 23, 4, pp. 507-516, SocINDEX with Full Text,

Quartz (2016). "No blood should hold us back: A feminine-hygiene ad finally gets women's empowerment right". Available via: <https://qz.com/698819/no-blood-should-hold-us-back-a-feminine-hygiene-ad-finally-gets-womens-empowerment-right/> [Accessed: April 19<sup>th</sup>] Ashley Rodriguez

Resume(2016a). "Näringslivet backar upp Åhlens normkritisk kampanj" Available via: <https://www.resume.se/nyheter/artiklar/2016/09/27/naringslivet-backar-upp--ahlens-normkritiska-kampanj/> [Assessed: April 25th]

Resume (2016b). "Forsman & Bodenfors byrån som vill förändra världen". Available via: <https://www.resume.se/nyheter/artiklar/2016/12/07/forsman--bodenfors--byran-som-vill-forandra-varlden/> [Accessed: April 21<sup>st</sup>]

Resume (2016c). "Kvinnor, sportmode och kontinuitet ger vinst till H&M". Available via: <https://www.resume.se/nyheter/artiklar/2016/10/20/kvinnor-sportmode-och-kontinuitet-ger-vinst-till-hm/> [Accessed: May 10th]

Resume(2016d). "Little Jinder självkritisk efter H&M-kampanjen: Behövde deg". Available via: <https://www.resume.se/nyheter/artiklar/2016/10/05/little-jinders-sjalvkritik-efter-hm-kampanjen-behovde-deg/> [Assessed: April 25th]

Resume(2016e). "Little Jinder ångrar H&M kampanjen". Available via:<https://www.resume.se/nyheter/artiklar/2016/10/12/little-jinder-angrar-hm-kampanjen/> [Assessed: April 25th]

Revelist (2016). "H&M quietly pulled plus sizes from all o fits NYC stores for an infuriating reason". Available via: <http://www.revelist.com/style-news/hm-quietly-pulled-plus-sizes/4811> [Accessed: April 21st]

Riessman, CK 2008, *Narrative Methods For The Human Sciences*, n.p.: London : SAGE, 2008,

Roth, W.M, (2009) Epistemic mediation: Video data as filters for the objectification of teaching by teachers, in Goldman, R., Pea,R, Barron and Derry (2006) *Video Research in the learning sciences* Routledge: New York: 367-382.

Ryan, G, & Bernard, H 2003, 'Techniques to Identify Themes', *Field Methods*, 15, 1, p. 85, Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost, viewed 21 May 2017.

Rågsjö, Thorell, A. (2016d). "Reklamsveriges skapaste kritker".Resume. Available via: <https://www.resume.se/nyheter/artiklar/2016/11/05/reklamsveriges-skarpaste-kritiker/> [Assessed: April 25th]

Sassatelli, R 2007, *Consumer Culture : History, Theory And Politics*, n.p.: London : SAGE, 2007,

SCA (2016a). "SCA and AMV BBDO win prestigious advertising award for taboo-breaking campaign". Available via:<http://www.sca.com/en/Media/News-features/2016/SCA-and-AMV-BBDO-win-prestigious-advertising-award-for-taboo-breaking-campaign/> [Accessed: May 21st]

SCA Group (2014). "All feminine care brands". Available via: [http://www.sca.com/en/Products/Feminine\\_hygiene\\_products/Brands/Libresse/](http://www.sca.com/en/Products/Feminine_hygiene_products/Brands/Libresse/) [Accessed: April 15<sup>th</sup>]

SCA Group (2015).Press backgrounder (pdf). Available via:<http://www.sca.com/Documents/en/PressBackgrounders/SCA-PB-Team-SCA-in-Volvo-Ocean-Race.pdf> [Accessed: April 15th]

SCA Group (2017). SCA Annual Report 2016. Available via: [http://www.sca.com/Documents/en/Annual\\_Reports/SCA\\_Hygiene\\_AR16\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.sca.com/Documents/en/Annual_Reports/SCA_Hygiene_AR16_ENG.pdf) [Accessed: April 15th]



- Schubert (2006) Video analysis as practice and the practice of video analysis in Knoblauch, H.,
- Seiter, E. (1992). "Semiotics, Structuralism and Television." In Robert C. Allen (ed.), *Channels of Discourse: Television and Contemporary Criticism* (pp. 31-66). London: Routledge
- Schroeder, JE 2009, 'The cultural codes of branding', *Marketing Theory*, 9, 1, pp. 123-126,
- Schroeder, J, Salzer-Mörling, M, & Askegaard, S 2006, *Brand Culture. [Elektronisk Resurs]*, n.p.: London ; New York : Routledge, 2006
- Siegfried, D 2005, 'Brand Hijack: Marketing without Marketing (Book)', *Booklist*, 101, 9/10, p. 794, Literary Reference Center,
- Spiggle, S, Nguyen, H, & Caravella, M 2012, 'More Than Fit: Brand Extension Authenticity', *Journal Of Marketing Research (JMR)*, 49, 6, pp. 967-983,
- Stake, RE 2006, *Multiple Case Study Analysis*, n.p.: New York: The Guilford Press, cop. 2006.
- Stockholm Media Week (2017). "Alla vinnarna i kategorin årets kampanj". Available via: <http://www.stockholmmediaweek.com/nyheter/alla-vinnarna-i-kategorin-arets-kampanj-3/> [Accessed: May 21st]
- Svt Sport (2016). "Här manar idrottarna till att våga prata om mens". Available via: <https://www.svt.se/sport/fotboll/har-manar-idrottarna-till-att-vaga-prata-om-mens/> [Accessed: April 22<sup>nd</sup>]
- Sundqvist, L. & Hillborg, S. C.A. (2012). "Hur kan företag med lågengagemangsprodukter gå tillväga för att uppnå emotionell och sann lojalitet gentemot kunderna?" BSc thesis. Institutionen för ekonomi och företagande, Södertörn Högskola. Available online: <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:540286/FULLTEXT01.pdf> [Accessed: April 10th]
- SydSvenskan (2016). "Schelin vill bryta mens-tabu". Available via: <http://www.sydsvenskan.se/2016-09-08/schelin-vill-bryta-mens-tabu> [Accessed: April 22nd]
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1985). The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior. In S. Worchel & W. G. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (pp. 6-24). Chicago: Nelson-Hall.
- The Atlantic (2016). "Trust in government is collapsing around the world". Available via: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/07/trust-institutions-trump-brexit/489554> [Accessed: May 19th]
- The Daily Record (2016). "Why feminist love H&M's new Ladylike campaign featuring badass women". Available via: <http://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/lifestyle/fashion-beauty/feminists-love-hms-new-ladylike-891799> [Accessed: April 11th]
- The Guardian (2016a). "Emma Watson on Vanity Fair cover: Feminism is about giving women choice". Available via: <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/mar/05/emma-watson-vanity-fair-cover-feminism> [Accessed: May 15th]

The Guardian (2016b). "It's because I had my period : swimmer Fu Yuanhui praised for breaking taboo". Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2016/aug/16/chinese-swimmer-fu-yuanhui-praised-for-breaking-periods-taboo>. [Accessed 12 May 2017].

The New York Times (2016a). "In Airbnb's super bowl ad, implied criticism of Trump's travel ban". Available via: [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/05/technology/airbnb-super-bowl-ad-trump-travel-ban.html?\\_r=1](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/05/technology/airbnb-super-bowl-ad-trump-travel-ban.html?_r=1) [Accessed: May 20th]

The New York Times (2016). "Statement on Trump puts new balance shoe company in cross hairs". Available via: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/16/business/statement-on-trump-puts-new-balance-shoe-company-in-cross-hairs.html> [Accessed: May 10th]

The New York Times (2017). "Trump assails Nordstrom for "unfairly" dropping his daughters Ivanka's line". Available via: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/08/business/ivanka-trump-nordstrom-tj-maxx.html> [Accessed: May 20th]

The Sun (2016). "Fashion Victims: H&M in factory horror as workers endure outrageous sweatshop conditions making clothes which Beyoncé own line". Available via: <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/1851851/hm-in-factory-horror-as-workers-endure-outrageous-sweatshop-conditions-making-clothes-which-include-beyonces-own-line/> [Accessed: April 4th]

The Telegraph (2015a). "How advertising hijacked feminism. Big time". Available via: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11727478/How-advertising-hijacked-feminism.-Big-time.html> [Accessed: May 20th]

The Telegraph (2015b). "Manspreading arrests: the long arm of the law just invaded our personal space". Available via: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/thinking-man/11643052/Manspreading-arrests-the-long-arm-of-the-law-just-invaded-our-personal-space.html>[Accessed: May 20th]

Trimblet, C, & Rifon, N 2006, 'Consumer perceptions of compatibility in cause-related marketing messages', *International Journal Of Nonprofit & Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 11, 1, pp. 29-47,

Trimblet, C, & Rifon, N 2006, 'Consumer perceptions of compatibility in cause-related marketing messages', *International Journal Of Nonprofit & Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 11, 1, pp. 29-47,

Rose, G. (2012). *Visual Methodologies. An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*, 3rd ed., London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Veckorevyn (2016). "H&M butiker i New York tog i hemlighet bort sina plus size kläder-och anledningen är sjuk". Available via: <http://veckorevyn.com/livsstil/hm-butiker-i-new-york-tog-i-hemlighet-bort-sina-plus-size-klader-och-anledningen-ar-sjuk/> [Accessed: April 23rd]

Vogue (2016). "Every H&M Fashion Collaboration, Ranked". Available via: <http://www.vogue.com/article/hm-designer-collaborations-ranked> [Accessed: May 10th]

Wall Street Journal (2016). "Divided America: Where Donald Trump benefited from an polarized electorate". Available via: <http://www.wsj.com/graphics/elections/2016/divided-america/> [Accessed: May 19th]

Webb, D, & Mohr, L 1998, 'A Typology of Consumer Responses to Cause-Related Marketing: From Skeptics to Socially Concerned', *Journal Of Public Policy & Marketing*, 17, 2, pp. 226-238,

Weedon, C 1999, *Feminism, Theory And The Politics Of Difference*, n.p.: Malden, Mass. : Blackwell Publishers, 1999.

Williams, D. (n.d) "The rise of the brand as social movement". Campaign. Available via:<http://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/rise-brand-social-movement/1352991>[Accessed: May 20<sup>th</sup>]

Williamson, J 1978, *Decoding Advertisements : Ideology And Meaning In Advertising*, n.p.: London : Boyars, 1978

Wittwear, D.(2014). The phenomena of cult brands", Books On Demand

Yin, RK 2003, *Case Study Research : Design And Methods*, n.p.: Thousand Oaks : Sage Publications, cop. 2003

## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Topic guides executives interviews

#### Introduction:

Purpose of the study

Ok to record

#### Libresse

- 1) What does your role as a project leader for Libresses include? Tasks, management-level?
- 2) Tell us freely about the campaign RedFit (purpose, reach, success or failure, why?)
- 3) Which response do you consider it received? Traditional media? Social media? From your loyal customers? Target group?
- 4) Why do you think this theme became so attractive for you to communicate?
- 5) What was the objectives with the campaign? How does it differ from previous campaigns/projects?
- 6) When did you identify the issue in the society (referring to the stigmatization surrounding menstruation) which created the idea for the campaign?
  - -Period?
  - Channels?
  - What made you act and drive this question forward?
  - Which region and department identified the seed to this campaign?
- 7) How did you launch the campaign, referring to:
  - Channels?
  - Volume?
  - Target group?
- 8) You used Lotta Schelin as a spokesperson for the campaign, what impact do you consider it had on the campaign (credibility)?

- 9) What were the key factors and critical events to why it became so successful?
- 10) What do you consider is the biggest risk when addressing such a stigmatized subject?
- 11) Are you going to extend the campaign, in that case how?

## **Topic guide till H&M**

### **Introduction:**

Purpose of the study

Ok to record

- 1 What does your role as a X include? Tasks, management-level?
- 2 Tell us freely about the campaign RedFit (purpose, reach, success or failure, why?)
- 3 Which response do you consider it received? Traditional media? Social media? From your loyal customers? Target group?
- 4 Why do you think this theme became so attractive for you to communicate?
- 5 What were the objectives with the campaign? How does it differ from previous campaigns/projects?
- 6 When did you identify this theme as a relevant topic for the brand H&M, which in turn created the idea for the campaign?
  - -Period?
  - Channels?
  - What made you act and drive this question forward?
  - Which region and department identified the seed to this campaign?
- 7 How did you launch the campaign, referring to:
  - Channels?
  - Volume?
  - Target group?
- 8 You used many famous feminist profiles, for instance Little Jinder and Kakan Hermansson as spokesperson during the campaign, what impact do you consider it had on the campaign (credibility)?
- 9 The campaign received some counteractions in the media, why did you think the campaign got this critique?
- 10 What were the key factors and critical events for this campaign?
- 11 Are you going to extend the campaign, in that case how?

## **Appendix 2: Topic guide: focus groups**

### **Criteria to participate:**

Women

Swedish

Customer to both H&M and Libresse

### **Libresse, RedFit campaign**

- 1 What are your perceptions about Libresse' RedFit campaign?
- 2 How do you think Libresse has driven this topic forward? Do you recognize the topic in previous campaigns?
- 3 Is it credible? Why/ why not?

- 4 Does your perception about Libresse campaign change due to their utilization of Lotta Schelin as a spokesperson for the campaign?
- 5 Does this campaign change your perception about the brand as such? In that case in which way?
- 6 Do you associate the target group of the brand as they actually care for these social questions?
- 7 What do you think are the reasons people purchase items from brands that supports feminism? (share values? take a political stance? Trendy?)
- 8 Do you believe people and yourself buy Libresse's products if you share the communicated values of this campaign? In that case why?

### **H&M, Ladylike campaign**

- 1 What are your perceptions about H&M's Ladylike campaign?
- 2 How do you think H&M has driven this topic forward? Do you recognize the topic in previous campaigns?
- 3 Is it credible? Why/ why not?
- 4 H&M used feministic profiles such as Little Jinder, Fanny Lyckman and Kakan Hermansson as spokesperson for the Ladylike campaign. Do you consider it enhanced the campaign? Why? /Why not?
- 5 Has this campaign change your perception about the brand as such? In that case in which way?
- 6 Do you think H&M should interfere in sensitive political questions?
- 7 What do you think are the reasons people purchase items from brands that supports feminism? (share values? take a political stance? Trendy?)
- 8 Do you believe people and yourself buy Libresse's products if you share the communicated values of this campaign? In that case why?

### **Others:**

- 1 How did your perception about the brand identity change when the brand started to support feminism? (does it conceive as more alternative or an "attempt" to jump on the a trend?)
- 2 What do you think about the new feministic trend that has grown in the last couple of years?
- 3 Why do you think it has become a consumption practice? (Aim to be different? Drive change? Make a stance?)
- 4 What makes it trustworthy that a brand really take a stance for feminism? What are the key factors that makes is authentic and not enforced?

### **Appendix 3: Video-elicitation utilized**

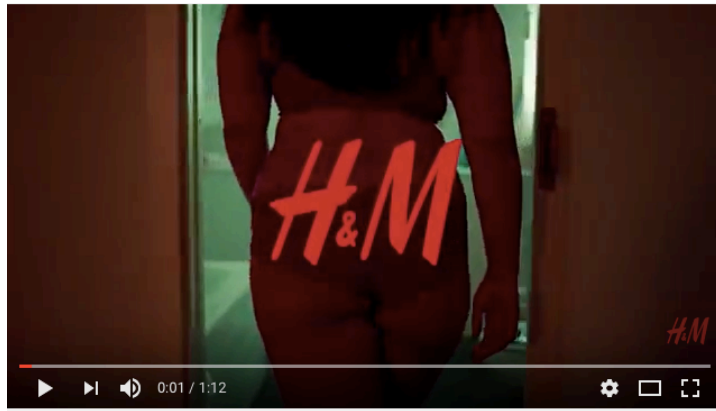
H&M (2016d). "H&M New Autumn collection". [online video]. Available via: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-RY6fWVrQ0> [Accessed: April 15<sup>th</sup>]

Libresse Sverige (2016). "No blodd should hold us back". [online video]. Available via: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6WYh407oas&t=2s> [Accessed: April 15<sup>th</sup>]

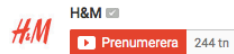
Power point created as video-elicitation: link:  
[https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1fz0II5VpKrf\\_ar5hxC2ld7gI-AceDovJGPvpFc1zGvc/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1fz0II5VpKrf_ar5hxC2ld7gI-AceDovJGPvpFc1zGvc/edit?usp=sharing)

## Appendix 4: H&M's Ladylike marketing material

Youtube:



H&M New Autumn Collection



4 205 731 visningar

+ Lägg till i Dela ... Mer

27 919 2 638

Twitter:

 H&M Sverige  @hmsverige · 24 sep. 2016  
Lauren Hutton berättar för #HMMagazine om seger, skönhet och hopp  
[hm.info/15p6m](https://hm.info/15p6m) #Ladylike



← ↻ ❤

 H&M Sverige  @hmsverige · 26 sep. 2016  
Tack @neelamkg & @palomija för att ni tillför mångfald och utmanar stereotyper  
[hm.info/15pze](https://hm.info/15pze) #HM #Ladylike

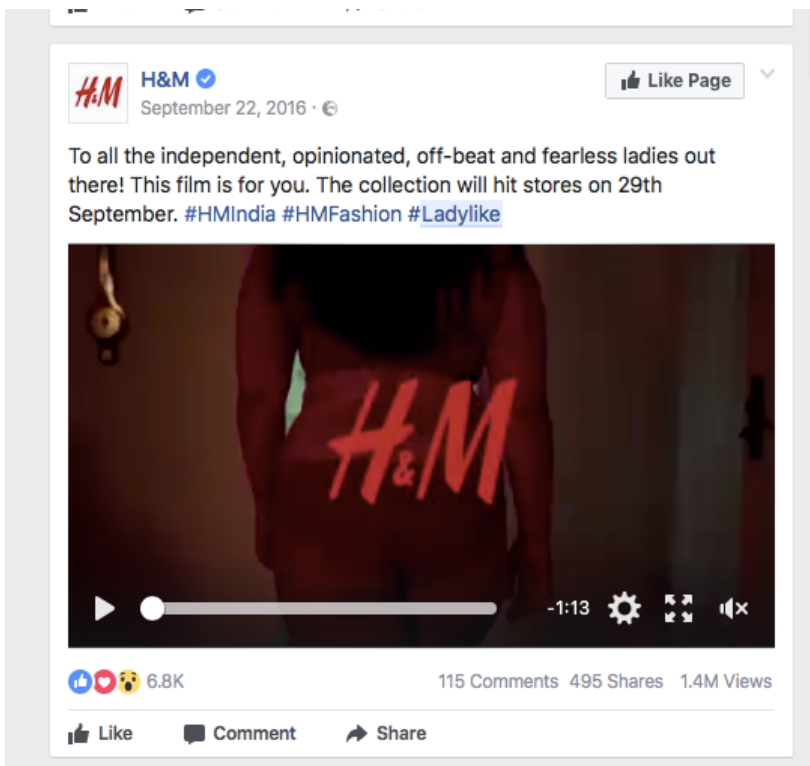


← ↻ ❤ 1





**Facebook:**



**Appendix 4: Critique about the Ladylike campaign**





leifstromquist

Follow



## "Gravida sparkades från H&M-fabriker"

Gravida uppges sparkas.

Fackmedlemmar ska ha förlorat jobbet.

Och arbetare ska ha hotats och förödmjukats.

♥ 2,722 likes ● 65 comments

Om h&m nu ska "omdefiniera" vad det är att vara "ladylike" eller vad fan det är de håller på med, tycker dessa kvinnor är ett bra exempel på några som "omdefinierar kvinnorollen" när de arbetar fackligt MOT H&M för att få rättigheter under tiden som de GER SINA LIV åt att stå i fabriker och sy fula linnen vi ska köpa tusen i veckan för 50 spänn styck. #ladylike #hm

OCTOBER 4, 2016

