



LUND UNIVERSITY

School of Economics and Management

# Caught in a Bad Romance

– The Contradiction of Woke Brands in Consumers' Lives

by

Ellinor Beckman and Miriam Dalsjö

May 2019

Master's Programme in International Marketing and Brand  
Management

## Abstract

- Title:** Caught in a Bad Romance – The Contradiction of Woke Brands in Consumers’ Lives
- Seminar date:** 05-06-2019
- Course:** BUSN39, Degree project in Global Marketing
- Authors:** Ellinor Beckman and Miriam Dalsjö
- Advisor:** Veronika Tarnovskaya
- Key words:** CBR, Branding, Woke, Postmodernity
- Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to discover the characteristics of consumer brand relationships between consumers and woke brands and thus contribute to the research field of consumer brand relations. This will be achieved by looking to the relationship in the context of postmodern consumers and specifically three purposively selected cases; Pepsi, Always and Gillette.
- Methodology:** The study is based on three cases, making it a multiple case study with a qualitative approach, where the main empirical collection consists of life history cases which was used to describe behaviors, attitudes, drivers and barriers in relation to the brands. The gathered data has been analyzed by idiographic and cross-case analysis, but also by identifying life themes and projects based on the theoretical framework.
- Theoretical perspectives:** Within the context of the postmodern era, the relationship between consumers and brands are of interest. Consequently, the report takes its stand from Susan Fournier’s research, a pioneer within the field of consumer brand relationship theory. Within the context of consumers’ life histories and life-worlds a framework is created, consisting of postmodern consumers, woke as branding and marketing strategy, and consumer brand relationship theory.
- Empirical foundation:** The empirical data has been obtained through a multiple case study of three international brands. Three consumers, one of each brand, have participated in the study. All respondents are purposely selected and screened, to create a condition for rich empirical collection, and interviewed through semi-structured in-depth interviews.
- Conclusions:** The empirical material combined with the theoretical framework provide factors which characterize woke consumer brand relationships which illustrates that Fournier's framework is not enough the explain the fragmented

consumers of today. The final framework creates a holistic view and describes key characteristics, where a woke consumer brand relationship can be metaphorically understood as an umbrella under which all the contradictions are gathered. The umbrella shelters them from the rain and keeps them close together – despite their differences.

# Acknowledgments

This thesis has been written during the spring semester of 2019 at the Department of Business Economics at Lund University School of Economics and Management. During the year at the Master of International Marketing and Brand Management, the thesis developed through lessons, discussions, conversations and feedback from people in our surroundings. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the people who helped us on the way, contributing to our thesis in one way or another.

First, we would like to thank our supervisor Veronika Tarnovskaya, for strong commitment, good advice and great feedback. Thanks to you, our research skills have improved.

Furthermore, we would like to thank our respondents we have had the privilege of interviewing, for opening up to us and for telling their life story. Thank you for the time you took and the memories you shared.

Finally, we would like to thank our classmates of the Master's Programme in International Marketing and Brand Management 2018-2019, for making this year unforgettable.

*Thank you,*

Lund - 2019-05-27

\_\_\_\_\_ Ellinor Beckman

\_\_\_\_\_ Miriam Dalsjö

# Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>7</b>
1.1 Empirical Background .....	7
1.2 Theoretical Background.....	8
1.3 Problematization .....	9
1.4 Research Purpose and Limitations.....	10
1.5 Research Aim and Contributions .....	11
1.6 Outline of the Thesis .....	11
<b>2. Literature Review</b> .....	<b>12</b>
2.1 The Postmodern Consumer.....	12
2.1.1 Liquid Society and Fragmented Marketplace.....	12
2.1.2 Fragmented and Liquid Consumers.....	14
2.2 The Rise of Woke Branding .....	16
2.3 Relationship Marketing and Consumer Brand Relationship .....	19
2.3.1 Fournier and the Framework of Consumer Brand Relationships .....	20
2.3.2 Context of Consumer Brand Relationships .....	24
2.4 Summary Literature Review .....	25
2.4.1 Theoretical Framework.....	26
<b>3. Methodology</b> .....	<b>28</b>
3.1 Research Approach .....	28
3.1.1 Research Philosophy.....	28
3.1.2 Research Strategy .....	29
3.1.3 Research Design .....	29
3.2 Life History Cases.....	30
3.3 Selection.....	31
3.3.1 Brands .....	31
<i>Gillette</i> .....	32
<i>Always</i> .....	33
<i>Pepsi</i> .....	34
3.3.2 Respondents.....	36
3.4 Data Collection .....	37
3.4.1 Theoretical Sampling.....	37
3.4.2 Empirical Sampling .....	37

<i>Preparation</i> .....	38
<i>Setup</i> .....	38
<i>Structure</i> .....	39
<i>Conversation Aids</i> .....	39
3.5 Data Analysis .....	40
3.5.1 Coding .....	40
3.5.2 Analysis .....	41
3.6 Quality of the study .....	42
3.6.1 Authenticity .....	42
3.6.2 Reliability .....	42
3.6.3 Validity .....	42
3.6.4 Objectivity .....	43
3.6.5 Limitation and Reflection .....	44
<b>4. Empirical Findings and Analysis</b> .....	<b>45</b>
4.1 Ideographic Analysis .....	45
4.1.1 Case 1: Eric .....	45
<i>Eric's Life Story</i> .....	45
<i>Eric's Life Theme and Life Projects</i> .....	48
<i>Eric's Woke CBR with Pepsi</i> .....	49
4.1.2 Case 2: Sarah .....	52
<i>Sarah's Life Story</i> .....	52
<i>Sarah's Life Theme and Life Projects</i> .....	55
<i>Sarah's Woke CBR with Always</i> .....	56
4.1.3 Case 3: Rebecka .....	59
<i>Rebecka's Life Story</i> .....	59
<i>Rebecka's Life Theme and Life Projects</i> .....	62
<i>Rebecka's Woke CBR with Gillette</i> .....	63
4.1.4 Summary of Ideographic Analysis .....	65
4.2 Cross-Case Analysis .....	65
4.2.1 Contradictions .....	66
4.2.2 Wokeness .....	68
4.2.3 Snapshots of the Woke CBRs .....	69
4.3 Characteristics of Woke Consumer Brand Relationships .....	70
4.3.1 Bad Romance as New Relationship .....	71
<i>Private and Public</i> .....	71
<i>Local versus Global Tension</i> .....	72

<i>System Error</i> .....	72
<i>Walk the Talk</i> .....	72
<i>Brand as Equaliser</i> .....	73
4.4 A Framework of Woke CBR .....	73
<b>5. Discussion</b> .....	<b>75</b>
<b>6. Conclusion</b> .....	<b>77</b>
6.1 Empirical Contributions.....	77
6.2 Theoretical Contributions .....	78
6.3 Managerial Implications .....	78
6.4 Future Research .....	78
<b>References</b> .....	<b>80</b>
Digital Sources.....	80
Printed Sources .....	84
Figures.....	93
Tables.....	94
Images .....	94
<b>Appendix</b> .....	<b>95</b>
Appendix 1.....	95
Appendix 2.....	97
Appendix 3.....	100
Appendix 4.....	101
Appendix 5.....	103
Appendix 6.....	104

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Empirical Background

“Put simply, consumers do not choose brands, they choose lives” – Susan Fournier (1998, p. 367)

Insightfully, marketing researcher Fournier (1998) with these words pinpoints the way brands are more than they appear to be at first sight, implicitly shedding light on the crucial role of branding. Historically, brands have been marketed on behalf of their product’s performance characteristics (Kotler, & Sarker, 2017; King, 1991; Roper & Fill, 2012), usually referred to as product branding (Roper & Fill, 2012). Due to increased materialism, Aaker (1996) describes how it has been increasingly difficult to distinguish different products or services from each other. A possible solution for companies to tackle this problem is to put focus on brand identity as an entity, rather than the product itself. Consequently, corporate branding has been increasingly practiced and a paradigm shift within the field of marketing could be distinguished (Roper & Fill, 2012). Aaker (1996) describes corporate branding as “particular set of values, culture, people, programs and assets/skills that helps to provide the differentiation that goes into producing the unique product or service” (p.115). Accordingly, the corporate brand becomes the new differentiator and with an increased discussion in academia as a result (Balmer, 1995; 2001a; Aaker, 1996; Ind, 1997, 1998; de Chernatony, 1999; Gray & Balmer, 2001; Hatch & Schultz, 2001; McDonald, de Chernatony & Harris, 2001; Balmer & Gray, 2003; Knox & Bickerton, 2003). The rise of the corporate brand presents a shift in the field of marketing facing new issues and challenges for brands, as well as stakeholders and consumers. Instead of competing only with products, companies are now more pressured to stand out in terms of “clearly articulated and communicated values”, which Ind (1998, p.323) argues will result in successful corporate brands. This is further developed by Askgaard (2006) who describes the idea of a global ideoscape and the impact of market-based institutions and their effect on consumers’ lives, arguing that brands have become a fundamental part of social construction and self-interest. Consequently, brands have advanced past the phase where they are purely and simply products or services, but a fundamental part of people’s lives. Making brands a metaphor for consumer identity, brands have formed part of the stories which help explain postmodern life.

The rise of corporate brands is in line with the expectations of millennials, one of today’s largest demographic consumer groups (Kotler & Sarker, 2017). The information society and the technological development have made consumers increasingly socially aware and informed, creating a desire and requirement for brands to engage in moral and ethical social issues (Bernard, 2019; Roper & Fill, 2012). A study by Edelman (2018) found 69% of all millennials



worldwide to be driven by values and beliefs during purchase, meaning that products and principles are equally crucial for the buying decision (Bernard, 2019). This is reflected in the market offerings by the growth of brands taking political stands, taking what is today known as a “woke” approach and practicing “woke as business strategy” (Green, 2018). Woke is defined by Merriam Webster (2019, n.p.) as “aware of and actively attentive to important facts and issues (especially issues of racial and social justice)”. Thus, being a woke brand implies showing awareness and raising attention to certain issues experienced by different groups in society. Many large, global companies have adapted wokeness into their branding strategies. Nike aired a campaign starring the former NFL player Colin Kaepernick with the tagline “Believe in something, even if it means sacrificing everything.” (McCarthy, 2018). This was launched after Kaepernick knelt during the national anthem to protest against racial injustice which led the NFL to controversially strain him to leave the NFL in 2017 (McCarthy, 2018). Ben & Jerry’s have taken stands on racial issues (Ben & Jerry’s, 2019a), climate change (Ben & Jerry’s, 2018) and a wide range of other issues (Ben & Jerry’s, 2019b). PUMA have taken a woke stand regarding racial injustice, civil rights and universal equality in their campaign *#REFORM* (PUMA, 2018). Procter & Gamble shed light on racial bias with their campaign *The Talk*, celebrating the beauty of black women (Procter & Gamble, 2018). Evidently, this type of branding and campaigns are seen as necessary and useful to these brands. However, they often result in various reactions and are seen as controversial in different ways. For example, Nike’s campaign resulted in criticism and boycotts with consumers posting pictures of their burning shoes, while it at the same time received praising messages and won the hearts of other consumers. Even though the campaign might have been offensive for some, it was without doubt spot on for the target customer since Nike’s stock went all-time high (Reints, 2018). The case of Nike shows how it is increasingly difficult for brands to position themselves and to convince consumers that the brands’ efforts to generate substantial campaigns and brand identities are trustworthy or even desired. Still, as with Nike, many do succeed. Following Fournier’s (1998) thought of how consumers are actually not choosing brands, woke branding seems like a way for *brands* to choose consumers. By taking a stand and matching the values and beliefs of certain consumers, brands can become part of those consumers’ lives.

## 1.2 Theoretical Background

While the trend of taking stands through woke branding is prominent, research in the field of consumer culture and society suggests a seemingly opposite contemporary reality. Firat and Venkatesh (1995) constructed the idea of liberatory postmodernism in which consumers are freed from modernist restraints and dichotomies. In the postmodern era, consumers are liberated and free not commit to any certain product or lifestyle or to make logic purchase decisions (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). This is characterized by fluidity and liberation, upon which Bauman (2000) has developed the concept of liquid modernity. Social structures are no longer solid, but rather liquified, implying that life and identity have become fragmented. In the fast-changing liquid modernity it is difficult to plan far ahead or keep things permanent and stable in one’s life. As a result, consumers need to be flexible, mobile and open to change (Bauman, 2000; Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017). Based on Bauman’s theorizing, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017)

construct a new theory of consumption – liquid consumption. Although this type of consumption in part focuses on access-based, immaterial consumption, it well explains behavior in the marketplace today when contrasted to traditional solid consumption. Value lies in flexibility and freedom from attachment and values, consequently, it could be seen as a lack of brand loyalty. Consumers are not inclined to emotionally engage with or identify themselves with the marketplace which further makes involvement and relationships ephemeral (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017).

Within the context of the postmodern era, and its fragmented nature, the relationship between consumers and brands are of interest. A pioneer in this field and a great contributor to the consumer brand relationship theory is Susan Fournier. Fournier (1998) states that brands should be seen as living entities possessing a personality which grows and develops over time. To this personality, consumers create and establish a relationship. While examining the nature of relationships, she found several dimensions for which she suggested fifteen different metaphors representing the consumer brand relationship. Moreover, Fournier (1998) conceptualized the consumer brand relationship quality with the aim to contract, capture and harvest the strength of the connection between consumer and brand. This to be able to predict the relationship over time. Another perspective is that of Bengtsson (2003), which is that consumers in practice might have a relationship with brands, however, their recognition of it, or willingness to recognize it is unclear. This perspective is further reflected in Fournier's (1998) study when confronting consumers with the found discourse of the consumer brand relationship. Here, consumers seemed somewhat unwilling to accept the discourse. Consequently, Fournier (1998) and her contribution did not only result in knowledge but also further questions, which is argued for both by Bengtsson (2003) and Fournier (1998). Even though the consumer brand relationship has earned increased acceptance and relevance, it still needs development of its significance in the context of consumers.

Since many companies have shifted focus from product brands to corporate brands, there is no hesitation that companies seek to personify themselves with a human and relatable dimension by portraying similarities with humans. This reflects the rise of woke brands. Companies aim to create a more tangible corporate identity and a humanized personality since it could be seen as a managerial goal to seek, maintain and develop long term relationships rather than short-term relationships since long-term ones are usually more valuable. What comes to mind though, is what a consumer brand relationship of a consumer and a woke brand resembles. Perhaps its characteristics can be traced in any of Fournier's (1998) fifteen relationship forms, perhaps not. A woke brand's strong commitment to a statement coupled with an ambivalent, fragmented consumer inevitably raises questions about consumer brand relationship dimensions, forms and qualities.

### 1.3 Problematization

With fragmented and unattached consumers in the liquid postmodern world, consumers are less prone to identify with products or brands and thus form fleeting relationships with them.

Marketers need to understand how to approach fragmented identities and how to keep them loyal in a changing, uncertain reality. At the same time, consumers are to a higher degree expecting companies and brands to have a purpose and an opinion, which has given rise to a new form of competitive positioning (Valor & Carrero, 2014; Rodríguez Vilá & Bharadwaj, 2017) – which seems contradictory to the postmodern state of consumers today. This becomes problematic for brands, they need to react to the demands as well as behaviors of consumers and act right in this new type of “politicized communication landscape” (Trayner, 2017). As a consequence, the woke brand strategies described above have emerged, giving consumers a straightforwardness enabling them to make purchase decisions in accordance with their own values. However, a question arises of whether woke brands’ relationships with consumers are at risk if, or when, unattached consumers change their minds. As fragmented, unattached consumers move on to the next value, opinion or moral stand, it will seem inauthentic and problematic if brands with strongly communicated opinions do the same.

Despite a paradigm shift in marketing to the field of relationship marketing practice (Webster 1992; Peppers & Rogers, 1993), it can be debated that the relationship perspective has been scarce in today’s marketing literature. Little knowledge has especially been provided of relationship phenomena in the consumer product sphere and whether, why and in which way consumers request, obtain and value relationships with brands (Webster, 1992). Since the trend and phenomenon of woke brands have emerged recently, academic research has been lacking. Thus, there is a need for more research and empirical contribution regarding the relationship between woke brands and consumers in order for marketers to achieve more effective marketing. If postmodern consumers are not keen on committing, it seems improbable they would be ready to commit to the stands taken by woke brands. Still, global, woke, brands are successful and profitable. To understand this contradicting reality, a closer exploration of the relationship between these brands and their consumers is necessary. Therefore, the study strives to answer the question of *what characterizes the relationship between consumers and woke brands?*

## 1.4 Research Purpose and Limitations

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the nature of consumer brand relationships between consumers and woke brands. This will be achieved by employing consumer brand relationship theory in the context of woke brands and conditions of postmodern consumers and markets. The purpose is further to gather insights to form a more general understanding of the characteristics of these relationships and what they could further imply. Discovering components of consumer brand relationships of three purposively selected cases of woke brands and consumers and comparing them with each other serve to fulfill this objective. By exploring the characteristics of woke consumer brand relationships, the purpose is essentially to explain what puzzles the authors – the contradictory coupling of postmodern consumers and woke brands.

The study does not intend to investigate or measure brand relationship phenomena such as brand loyalty, brand trust or brand community. It solely focuses on what constitutes the

relationships consumers have with woke brands and although trust, loyalty or community could be a part of that, it is not central to the research question. The study neither seeks to research the nature of woke brands or to measure the effects of their branding strategies. Lastly, the study is limited to exploration within the context of postmodern consumption and the life of consumers. The purpose is not to study how consumers and brands are coping with postmodern conditions but builds upon the preconception that they find themselves within it. It is a circumstance from which the authors wish to explore the research question.

## 1.5 Research Aim and Contributions

The aim of the study is to contribute to the research field of brand relationships with empirical findings of real consumer brand relationships of woke brands. This will help future researchers and scholars wishing to further explore this field. The theoretical contribution of the study will be to discover insights that will develop the consumer brand relationship theory. It will also widen the perspective of postmodern consumption in relation to consumer brand relationships. Lastly, managerial implications are increased understanding of key success factors behind consumption of woke brands which possibly could result in valuable knowledge to improve the organizations performance in today’s marketing practices. Consequently, the aim is to contribute with information helpful to marketers and brand managers seeking more effective marketing and managing of woke brands. The aim is to provide findings that will grant professionals with a better insight into the lives consumers lead with woke brands.

## 1.6 Outline of the Thesis

To provide the reader with clarity and an overview of the thesis, the chapter outline is shown in Figure 1.

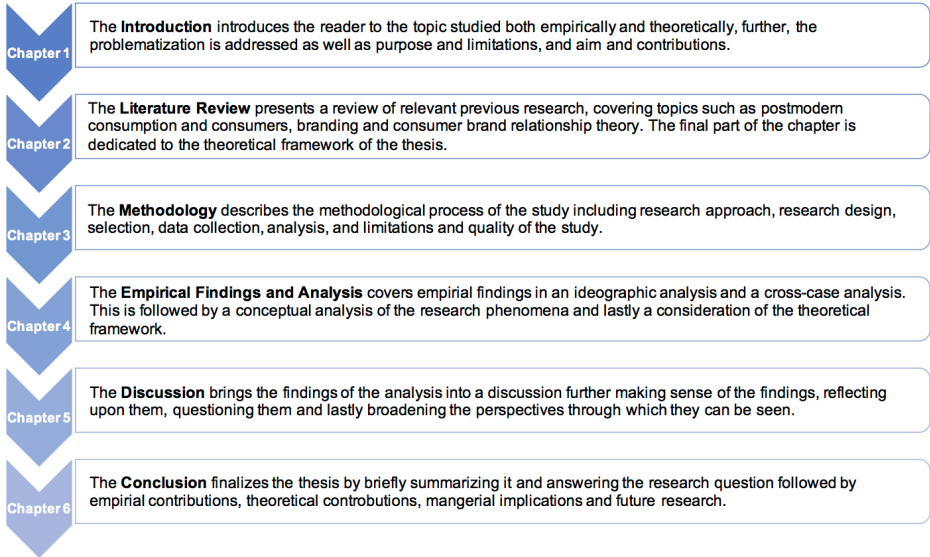


Figure 1: Outline of thesis.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 The Postmodern Consumer

#### 2.1.1 Liquid Society and Fragmented Marketplace

To understand the consumers of today, one must consider the market and society consumers exist within as well as the philosophical foundations upon which it rests. This further puts the research phenomenon into context and provide a lens from which consumers will be studied. Postmodernity evolved as a counter reaction to modernity and has rendered both the market and consumers in a fragmented state (Brown, 1995). To this notion Firat and Venkatesh (1995) have contributed with their view of postmodernism as liberatory. This implies that consumers are liberated from the rigid structures and order of modernity, but in another sense trapped in a state of never ending fluidity. Connecting to this idea, Bauman (2000) constructs the view of contemporary society as liquid, increasingly absent of solid, limiting, structures and traditions. Playing with the imagery of liquids and solids, how solids are melted into fluid shape-shifting liquids, Bauman (2000) explains the world of today. Bauman (2000) further explains how fluids are associated with lightness and weightlessness which in turn correspond to mobility and inconstancy sets the foundation for the postmodernity in history. As the rigid structures and institutions of society – class and family for example – are dissolving and becoming less determined, a greater freedom of the individual emerges. The greater endless amount of possible selves and life projects liquifies and frees human life as well as the society, but also demands constant work on the self and additionally the representations of the self. Since the liquid society in the postmodernity do not offer rules and guidance in the same way as earlier, the individual is left to guide him/herself in a complex sphere of constant comparison with everyone else. Patterns and configurations of life are not given or obvious but clash, overlap and contradict each other as the individual wanders through life (Bauman, 2000). Further, Bauman (2000) explains how the liquid phase of modernity is an age of disposability and rapidness. The pace with which everything can be consumed and disposed has increased, and nothing is truly irreplaceable anymore (Bauman, 2007). The non-resident nomad wins over settlement, evasion over engagement and lightness over heaviness (Bauman, 2000). Consequently, the fragmentation of postmodernity and liquidity of contemporary society could be seen result in an unattached consumer never committed to anything.

The development of the postmodernist thought has its roots in critique of modernism, essentially pointing to modernism's shortcomings for creating an understanding of consumption of today (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). Firat and Venkatesh (1995) describe how contemporary life and further the consumers in the postmodern society cannot only be described in terms of science and technology. The cultural aspects needed to be considered to make sense of the lack of order and dichotomies that are now conquering out modernism, with the development of the

postmodern society as a consequence. Accordingly, institutionalized boundaries defined in modernity are falling apart and there is not one order nor one set of right and wrong. Society does no longer have to be divided into feminine/male, private/public or consumption/production but a disordered, incoherent and more chaotic marketplace thus emerges (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Brown, 1995). The unstructured market, seeking difference and diversity, is positive since it liberates consumers to act however, they want which makes consumption in postmodernity liberatory. Since the market can be fluid, so can the consumers as they are free from commitment (Firat & Schultz, 1997).

Furthermore, the postmodern values of the contemporary society have implications for marketing as such. Firat and Venkatesh (1993;1995) conclude the conditions of postmodern consumption to be *hyperreality, fragmentation, decentering of the subject, reversal of production and consumption and juxtaposition of the opposites*. Among these *fragmentation, decentering* and *juxtaposition of the opposites* are of special interest to explain contemporary markets and marketing. A *fragmented* market calls for fragmented marketing, where bricolage form markets where consumers can pick, choose and mix for themselves to present multiple parts of oneself as there is no single way of being and further no demand for commitment (Firat & Schultz, 1997). Postmodern marketing sells images in which consumers are enabled to extract the ones they like and switch freely between them (Gabriel & Lang, 2006).

Consequently, the fragmented market is therefore free of boredom and monotony. In similarity, marketing extracts whichever images desirable from their original context, therefore decontextualizing them and setting them free for consumers to pick up. Accordingly, no linkages and connections can be made which further fragments the market. Even products are decoupled from their contexts in order to replace it with images as the unique selling point (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993). In the fragmented market, consumers are *decentralized*, and they no longer hold a central position as the market itself has no central unified agenda. All interactions and relationships between consumers and market offerings are momentary and characterized by a lack of commitment (Firat & Schultz, 1997). Since images of marketing are fragmented and decontextualized it often results in, and encourages, *juxtapositions of the opposites* which means that any image or meaning can be placed next to any other image or meaning, even if they straight out contradict each other. This highlights similarities and differences. With the signifier disconnected from the signified, the object does not have to be connected to the function, neither does the product to the need. Therefore, marketers can re-signify brands and products whenever the market calls for it, inserting new meanings from other contexts or even completely remote from the currently adapted meaning of the brand. Thus, the market is full of free-floating signifiers free for anyone to use (Firat & Schultz, 1997; Gabriel & Lang, 2006). The possibility, or perhaps need, to rely on symbolism over function explain that brands can incorporate ideas, meanings and values however they like in their communication and marketing. Social ideas and movements have become artifacts that can position brands, however, these social ideas and movements in a paradoxical way circle around the communication and idea of non-commitment, thus showing different ways of living and being without being committed to any certain normality. In a way, brands can take a stand by rebelling against modernism's rigid traditional values, but at the same time remain fragmented. This since postmodernity argue the importance of releasing society from the bipolar lens it is

seen through. The value of non-commitment is a stand fighting for the freedom to be fragmented rather than to be something specific (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993).

### 2.1.2 Fragmented and Liquid Consumers

In a liquid postmodern society with a fragmented marketplace, consumers, as well as the market, are finding themselves in a fluid, unattached state. Consequently, fragmented consumers can behave in ambivalent and paradoxical way, contradicting their words and action and vice versa. This is supported by Firat and Venkatesh (1995) who argue that a fragmented consumer is an emancipated one, free from modernist structures while at the same time stuck in a dilemma of choice. The non-commitment which describes the postmodern consumers opens up a sea of opportunities but requires constant decision-making and a limbo of never being committed. The freedom of fragmentation instead lies in the great tolerance for difference and diversity. By not committing or conforming to any unified, consistent, centered field, idea, system, or narrative consumers can continuously flow between different selves and lifestyles (Firat & Schultz, 1997; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Gabriel & Lang, 2006). Consumers with multilayered selves become given in the consumption of images that contemporary consumption is. Consumption enables consumers to present different images of themselves through the images that products and brands provide. Fragmented consumers are thus engaging in image-switching and the modernist idea of a consistent character, fully committed to *an* identity, *a* lifestyle has been conquered by the postmodernist, never committed, multidimensional personality (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993; Firat & Schultz, 1997; Gabriel & Lang, 2006).

Fragmentation entails a decentered consumer subject where consumers lose their privileged position as active agents in the market and instead have products acting *upon* them. Consumers see themselves as marketable items (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; 1993) which is why they are no longer striving towards a unified, centered self. The fragmented market requires consumers to create different marketable selves in different contexts. The freedom from boredom and conformity has won and the price is a self which is *not* authentic, centered or consistent (Firat & Schultz, 1997; Gabriel & Lang, 2006). The decentered, image-switching subject juxtapose things, images, ideas that are random and opposite. There is no privilege of any one perspective. Products have been detached from the need and function and are instead paired with meanings. It is with these meanings, these images, that consumers experiment (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Firat & Schultz, 1997). This happens because there is no single, correct way of being in postmodernity. The liberation from modernism causes this chaos of images which consumers can play around with, they are never attached to them but move through them. Consumers are accepting the disorder and chaotic flow of images which ensure freedom from only conforming to one image and one agenda (Firat & Schultz, 1997; Brown, 1995). Juxtaposing of contradicting items explains why consumers can have opposing emotions at the same time and act paradoxical. There is an inconsistency due to the lack of commitment, making consumers demonstrate an inconsistency in brand attitude and purchase behavior in a conscious and aware way (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; 1993).

The ambivalent and fragmented nature of contemporary consumers should in Bauman's (2000) view be treated as a consequence of the liquified society. To further explore this, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017) construct the concept of liquid consumption which has three characterizing traits. First, consumers' relationships with objects is in the postmodern society more ephemeral with a disinterest in forming strong bonds and lasting relationships. The user-value is what has become crucial, and consequently, consumers become instrumentally oriented in their consumption. Ephemerality implies liquid possession forms with nomads who only ought to own commodities for a certain time and place and not for longer (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017). Second, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017) describe how consumers are favoring access over ownership. As owning an object can be inconvenient, access-based consumption such as renting, sharing or borrowing liberate consumers from that burden (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). Successfully avoiding the economic, physical, emotional and social obligations of ownership enables a fluidity of consumer lifestyles. Thus, consumers are emancipated to assay every desired commodity or service with no strings attached. However, this decreases the possibility of a relationship between the accessed product or service, as consumers do not feel like it is truly theirs (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017). Therefore, the accessed object or service does not serve to extend the self, to construct one's identity but instead consciously avoided (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). Third and lastly, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) describes how liquid consumption is characterized by dematerialization. Consumption no longer necessarily consists of physical materia, a development to which digitalization has provided greatly. This further implies less physical possessions which give the consumers the possibility to easily shift between different identities as they are allowed easy immaterial digital access (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017).

Liquefying consumption enables consumers to maintain personal interdependence and mobility which is both craved and required in the liquid society (Binkley, 2008). Liquid consumers chase the new while refraining from the old (Bauman, 2007). However, liquid and solid consumption should be seen on a continuum on which consumers move back and forth. Consumption and additionally brand relationships with high relevance and strong ties to the self, such as those in brand communities, will be more solid (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017). On the contrary, networks give individuals access to mobility which implies a more liquid pattern of consumption (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017). Solid consumption ensures security in economically insecure times while liquid consumption gives the flexibility needed when professional uncertainty faces the consumer (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017). This flexibility makes liquid consumers only temporally attach to the objects consumed, however, without seeking identification through them. At the same time, liquid consumers are favoring access and will thus be more attached to products providing access, while avoiding identification with objects they only access for shorter use (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017; 2012). What drives consumers to access-based consumption is the importance of use-value. Liquid consumers are more instrumental and less appreciative of identity. This results in use-value-based relationships free from reciprocity obligations (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017; 2012). Consumers form weak or either non-existing bonds with brands providing access-based services or products and even resist to form brand communities (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) further describe how access-based consumption also liberates consumers which gives them the possibility to move between lifestyles and



identities however they please. Consequently, liquid consumption ties up relationships between consumers and brands, making them ephemeral and disposable and instead of commitment and emotional attachment consumers seek practicality (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017). In addition, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017) describe how identity building is put aside due to the unattached, nonlinear liquid consumption. Clear to see is the connection to Firat and Venkatesh's (1995; 1993) fragmented consumers, unable and unwilling to form coherent, lasting identities. This development is endorsed by the digital landscape in which consumers find themselves today where identity is networked, mobile and flexible (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017).

Somewhat conflicting, Binkley (2008) suggests consumers are indeed seeking identification through liquid consumption practices. This since opposing demands are present in liquid society; consumers aim to be free and unattached, skillfully juggling multiple lifestyles and identities while fearing loss of security that solid bonds can provide. Liquidity implies repeated change which stirs both desire and fear, as well as anticipation and uncertainty in consumers (Bauman, 2007). Imbedded in the fear of conforming to norms and choices of others is losing one's freedom or autonomy (Binkley, 2008). Engaging in anti-consumerism provides a middle-way for consumers to be liquid while still maintain a solid identity (Binkley, 2008). Liquid consumers also seem at odds with concepts of relationship in a brand context. Best (2013) questions liquid consumption's removal of attachment in studying fans of football clubs, exploring and arguing for the fact that fan clubs are immune to the liquefaction of the marketplace and the consumers. This pinpoints the underlying contradiction of this study's research question; namely how liquid consumers could possibly become and further stay attached to woke brands. The notion of liquidity is prominent and well explains consumer behavior in the marketplace today. However, one can ask oneself if the concepts centered around consumer brand relationships such as brand loyalty, brand attachment, brand trust, brand identity, brand personality and brand culture irrelevant in liquid society? Surely there is a need to understand this perplexing reality and the consumer brand relationships within it.

## 2.2 The Rise of Woke Branding

In recent years, both academic research and execution of branding within management has intensified, mostly due to the growing insight of brands being one of the most precious intangible assets of companies (Keller & Lehmann, 2005; Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000; Kapferer, 2005). A brand is described by Roper and Fill (2012, p.108) as "a manufacturer's way of adding value and giving its product or service an individuality that sets it apart from the rest." Gardner & Levy (1955, p.35) adds to the conversation by describing a brand as "a complex symbol that represents a variety of ideas and attributes". Ideas or attributes which allows for identifications, repeated purchase and the development of a relationship – whether conscious or unconscious – between the brand and the consumer. In line with this is the definition of the American Marketing Association (AMA) which defines a brand as "a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers" (AMA, 2012, n.p.). According to Forbes World's Most Valuable Brands 2018, the top 100 brands is worth between 7 up to 183 billion dollars with Apple at the top (Forbes,

2018). This strengthens Keller and Lehmann's (2005) statement of the importance of brands as intangible assets. The globalization, technical development and fierce competition could all be seen as reasons for increased interest within the field of branding since the business environment increases the pressure on marketers to gain competitive advantages to survive. During the 21st century, the environment brands act within has fundamentally changed in how brands interact and communicate (Keller, 2009). Keller (2009) further describes marketing communication as the way companies try to advise, influence and recap consumers, either directly or indirectly, about their existence and the products they sell. For this, branding could be seen as an important tool offering long term impact (Kapferer, 2008) and thus, the effectiveness of branding becomes a crucial question. Marketers need consumer insights and an understanding of the consumer brand relationship to effectively manage branding. During the 1900s and earlier, marketing communication was a one way communication – from brand to consumer – today, thanks to technological development, marketing communication should be seen as a dialogue which take many different forms (Muñiz & Schau, 2011). Consequently, communication about brands could be, and is happening, without the brands' permission on the internet (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011) where the consumers can talk negatively about the brands. This is further explained by Fournier and Alvarez (2013) stating that negative brand relationships actually are more common than positive ones.

Hollenbek and Zinkhan (2006) describe how there is a growing resistance to corporate enterprises and commercial globalization, and how consumers are opposing global brands by expressing concerns about corporate practices related to environmental and human rights issues for example. This has resulted in anti-branding, activism and social movements (Hollenbek & Zinkhan, 2006). Consequently, and with the power seen somewhat shifting from brand to consumers, it is increasingly important to understand consumer brand relationships today. Capturing consumers with the appeals of lifestyles and emotional attributes is often successful in building these relationships (Salzer-Mörling, 2010; Hansen, 2010). Brands put a certain set of values at the center of the brand and let these values be the point of differentiation (Roper & Fill, 2012). Clearly defined core values let stakeholders know what the brand stands for (Greysier & Urde, 2019). An intensified version of this strategy has evolved and is practiced by brands referred to as; values-driven (Lai, 2018), responsible (Engels & Grubler, 2017), purpose-driven (Fromm, 2019; Henning, 2018; Rodríguez Vilá & Bharadwaj, 2017), sustainable (Lein, 2018; Sustainable Life Media, Inc., 2019; Engels & Grubler, 2017), ethical (Newman & Trump, 2017; Marion, 2018; Marketing Week, 1997), socially-minded (Lai, 2018), socially conscious (Peretz, 2017; Boland, 2018; Harrison, 2000). Values embedded in brands is nothing new, consumption of brands often stretch beyond functional gains to the expressive values that can be communicated (Salzer-Mörling, 2010). However, the development seen in the marketplace, and society at large, has created what Trayner (2017) calls a "politicized communication landscape" to which organizations and leaders must adhere to survive. Salzer-Mörling and Strannegård (2007) refer to it as a "moralized brandscape" in which brands are increasingly criticized and scrutinized. Stakeholders demand brands to be ethically and socially responsible. Brands find themselves in a moralized discourse and must brand in line with consumers' values and preferences (Salzer-Mörling & Strannegård, 2007). Consumers are to a higher degree expecting companies and brands to have a purpose and an opinion, which has given rise to a new form of competitive positioning (Valor & Carrero, 2014; Rodríguez Vilá & Bharadwaj, 2017). Brands

are taking a stand this way, which is argued to appeal to contemporary consumers (Rodríguez Vilá & Bharadwaj, 2017; Roshitsh, 2018). This seemingly taps into recent developments in consumer culture and research around concepts such as political consumerism (Micheletti & Isenhour, 2010), responsible consumption (Valor & Carrero, 2014) and consumer resistance (Holt, 2002; Sassatelli, 2007). Common for these consumption practices is the focus on certain opinions, morals, ideas or values in accordance to which consumption should be carried out. Brands driven by a strongly communicated value or opinion are simply harvesting the fruits of the idea that consumption should follow a foundational value of some sort.

Today, delivering a good product is no longer enough, companies need to be seen as having a good impact on society (Hertz, 2001), or else they are inherently viewed as evil (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004). To create a favorable reputation for the brand, many companies engage in corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities. CSR is a form of strategic philanthropy that moves corporate activities outside of the business and link them to society, it is a voluntary inclusion of societal and environmental concerns in the business activities and interactions with stakeholders (Roper & Fill, 2012). Out of the CSR concept, Willmott (2001) constructs the idea of the “citizen brand”. Instead of only focusing on supporting good causes, companies should look at their relationships with society in which the brands exist. A citizen brand has a paternalistic role, helping those less fortunate, and realizes its impact on society. A successful citizen brand considers branding, core values and corporate citizenship (Wilmott, 2001). The value-driven type of branding recently emerged can be understood as a natural consequence of the developments on CSR matters. From this evolution, Kotler and Sarkar (ActivistBrands.com, 2018) see a “brand activism” forming. It “consists of business efforts to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, and/or environmental reform or stasis with the desire to promote or impede improvements in society” (ActivistBrands.com, 2018, par 6). Whereas companies and their brands have moved from being marketing-driven to corporate-driven, they are now increasingly society-driven. Society-driven brands are driven by a foundational concern for vast societal issues that are urgent (ActivistBrands.com, 2018). Simultaneously, CEOs are becoming activists themselves. Through “CEO activism” corporate leaders are raising their voices on issues deemed important by their stakeholders. Social media has especially become an efficient tool for this (Chatterji & Toffel, 2018).

The recent evolution towards a more politicized discourse in marketing efforts and branding strategies have resulted in the woke branding. The different concepts and developments adduced here give an idea of what has brought about the woke brands of today, but not much more. Although this is a prominent aspect of the professional marketing field today, academic research on the matter is still lacking. There is little known about woke brands and consumers’ perception of them, or their effects. Previous research so far proves the importance of branding and reputation building with core values, and the increased demands consumers put on brands to be responsible in different ways. Consumers, especially millennials, are to a higher degree valuing wokeness, and it becomes a way to relate to the world around them, including brands (Edelman, 2018). As consumers have become woke, they have become attentive to racial or social discrimination and injustice (Turner & Horton, 2017). The term “woke” was broadly spread with the Black Lives Matter movement, urging people to “stay woke” to racial issues (Turner & Horton, 2017). Being woke further implies supporting activism starting at the

individual level, with each person questioning what is going on around them and engaging others in the matter at hand (Grant, 2018). Now that brands have “woken up” too, as a response to the demands and actions of consumers, research is needed to understand what the implications are and how contemporary consumers make sense of these brands.

## 2.3 Relationship Marketing and Consumer Brand Relationship

The shifted focus from brands to consumers, in combination with this new turbulent commercial environment, has led to a new marketing paradigm with relationship marketing in focus. The increased value of brands and interest of knowing how consumers relate to brands and what makes them consider one brand over another have become crucial components of branding (Raut & Brito, 2014; Fritz & Kempe, 2014; Patterson & O’Malley, 2006; Jüttner & Wehrli, 1994). However, it was already in 1983 when one of the pioneers of Relationship Marketing (RM) came up with the idea of “attracting, maintaining and – in multiservice organizations – enhancing customer relationships” (Berry, 1983 p.25). Hougaard and Bjerre (2003, p.40) has a newer definition of relationship marketing as “company behavior with the purpose of establishing, maintaining and developing competitive and profitable customer relationships to the benefit of both parties”.

From RM, the terminology of consumer brand relationship (CBR) developed in the late nineties of the 20th century creating a new paradigm shift (Loureiro, 2012). The relation between RM and CBR is explained by Blackston (1992a, 1992b) who describes how CBR overcomes the limitation of RM consequently should be seen as a logical extension where CBR is compared to a relationship between doctor and patient. Further, Blackston (1992a, 1992b) further implies how CBR is developed from the Social Exchange Theory (SET) and the idea of brands as a personality (Pattersson & O’Malley, 2006) since the relationship is closely related to trust. Pattersson and O’Malley (2006) explains how if brands have personalities, consumers should be able to treat them as people, and if they are people, consumers should be able to have relationships with them.

CBR is an interdisciplinary and complexed field with several related topics explored in the last decades (Fetscherin, Boulanger, Gonçalves Filho & Souki, 2014; Fetscherin & Heinrich, 2014) as for example business, management, psychology, communication, culture and leisure (Fetscherin & Heinrich, 2014). Consequently, different streams of academic research have emerged focusing on aspects of the CBR theory, such as brand loyalty (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978), brand trust (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001) brand personalities (Aaker, 1997), brand attachment (Thomson, MacInnis & Park, 2005) brand commitment (Sung & Choi, 2010) and brand culture (Fetscherin & Heinrich, 2014). These different aspects of CBR all contribute to the overall understanding of how consumer brand relationships have been created, evolved and further shaped.

Fetscherin and Heinrich (2014) considered Blackston (1993) as one of the first researches within the field of CBR. Ghani and Thulin (2016), however, rather considered Shimp and

Madden (1988) to first introduce the concept of CBR. Shimp and Madden defined consumer brand relationship as follows; “consumers form relations with consumption objects (products, brands, stores, etc.), which range from feelings of antipathy, to slight fondness, all the way up to what would, in person-person relations, amount to love” (Shimp & Madden, 1988 p. 951). Palmer (1996, pp. 253-4) argues that “individuals have an underlying need for an emotional bond with high-involvement products that they buy. Brand development and relationship development are complementary and substitutable strategies towards this bonding”. Aaker, Fournier and Brasel, (2004) conclude that truthful and genuine bonds have a positive effect on the relationship strength which further creates trustworthiness, loyalty, and growth.

### 2.3.1 Fournier and the Framework of Consumer Brand Relationships

Pioneering and contributing greatly to the CBR field of research, Fournier (1998) pointed out that a brand could possibly become a relationship partner for the consumer, provide meanings in the psycho-socio-cultural environment in which the brand and consumer are active. Ground-breaking to CBR is the recognition of treating brands as if they were partners of personal relationships. Fournier (1998) recognize that brands must be seen as living entities, because if they are, they possess a personality which grows and develops over time, and to which consumers form a relationship. Since brands cannot think, act or exist themselves, they evolve through the individual behind the brand and exist through a dyadic relationship managed by everyday activities. Together with Yao (1997), Fournier calls for the abandonment of brand loyalty in favor of the relation perspective and analyze the bond between consumers and brands. The study reveals consumers do not possess assumed characteristics of loyalty which consequently lead the two researchers to encourage abandoning and moving away from the metaphor of loyalty to instead focus on the relationship as such.

Later, in 1998, Fournier published “Consumers and Their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research” which set the foundation for a comprehensive idea of CBR. Here, Fournier expands and conceptualizes different types and levels at which CBRs exist by defining fifteen meaningful relationship forms. There are seven theoretical CBR dimensions:

CBR Dimensions	
Voluntary	/ Imposed
Intense	/ Superficial
Positive	/ Negative
Enduring	/ Short-term
Formal	/ Informal
Public	/ Private
Symmetric	/ Asymmetric

Figure 2: CBR dimensions (adapted from Fournier, 1998).

Based on these relationship dimensions, fifteen different relationships forms are found:

CBR Forms	Definition
<b>Arranged marriages</b>	Nonvoluntary union imposed by preferences of third party. Intended for long-term, exclusive commitment, although at low levels of affective attachment.
<b>Casual friends/buddies</b>	Friendship low in affect and intimacy, characterized by infrequent or sporadic engagement, and few expectations for reciprocity or reward.
<b>Marriages of convenience</b>	Long-term, committed relationship precipitated by environmental influence versus deliberate choice, and governed by satisfying rules.
<b>Committed partnerships</b>	Long-term, voluntarily imposed, socially supported union high in love, intimacy, trust, and a commitment to stay together despite adverse circumstances. Adherence to exclusivity rules expected.
<b>Best friendships</b>	Voluntary union based on reciprocity principle, the endurance of which is ensured through continued provision of positive rewards. Characterized by revelation of true self, honesty, and intimacy. Congruity in partner images and personal interests common.
<b>Compartmentalized friendships</b>	Highly specialized, situationally confined, enduring friendships characterized by lower intimacy than other friendship forms but higher socioemotional rewards and interdependence. Easy entry and exit attained.
<b>Kinships</b>	Nonvoluntary union with lineage ties.
<b>Rebounds/avoidance-driven</b>	Union precipitated by desire to move away from prior or available partner, as opposed to attraction to chosen partner per se.
<b>Childhood friendships</b>	Infrequently engaged, affectively laden relation reminiscent of earlier times. Yields comfort and security of past self.
<b>Courtships</b>	Interim relationship state on the road to committed partnership contract.
<b>Dependencies</b>	Obsessive, highly emotional, selfish attractions cemented by feeling that the other is irreplaceable. Separation from other yields anxiety. High tolerance of other's transgressions results.
<b>Flings</b>	Short-term, time-bounded engagements of high emotional reward, but devoid of commitment and reciprocity demands.
<b>Enmities</b>	Intensely involving relationship characterized by negative affect and desire to avoid or inflict pain on the other.
<b>Secret affairs</b>	Highly emotive, privately held relationship considered risky if exposed to others.
<b>Enslavements</b>	Nonvoluntary union governed entirely by desires of the relationship partner. Involves negative feelings but persists because of circumstances.

Table 1: CBR forms (adapted from Fournier, 1998).

Weiss (1974) further stresses the importance of the portfolio of brands and their different identified relationships since they determine different and specific benefits contributing to each individual personal development. Ego support could be seen as supported through best friendship which gives other benefits or fulfill other needs than for example arranged marriages, casual friendships or childhood friendships. Moreover, best friendship with high certainty requires high endure frequency of interaction to be sustained, meanwhile childhood friendships might not need as much (Fournier, 1998).

Important not to forget is the resolution of CBRs. The dissolution of a relationship can occur according to Fournier’s (1998) two models of relationship dissolution; the stress model and the entropy model. The stress model is characterized by a more dramatic expiration such as interruption of personal preferences, brands, dyadic or environmental factors. In the entropy model, relationships instead fall apart due to lack of activities to continue the relationship which gradually fades away.

<b>1. Stress model</b>	Environmental stresses	Situationally imposed stressors	Disturbance invoked by change in physical situation that renders relationship continuity impossible or highly unlikely
		Intrusion of alternatives	Disturbance precipitated by interference from imposing, attractive, or superior alternatives
	Partner-oriented stresses	Personally-induced stressors	Disorder motivated by change in personality, roles, needs, or values that renders consumer-product "fit" unacceptable
		Managerially imposed stressors	Disorder resulting from managerial decision to terminate the relationship or alter the brand partner role
	Dyadic/relational stresses	Trespass of unwritten relationship rules, breach of trust, failure to keep a promise, or perception of neglect on part of relationship partner	
<b>2. Entropy model</b>	Relationship deterioration and dissolution resulting from failure to consciously and actively maintain the relationship. Dissolution trajectory characterized by a subtle and gradual "fading away."		

Table 2: Dissolution models (adapted from Fournier, 1998).

In contrast, CBR can also be strengthened, stabilized and increase in durability over time. According to Fournier (1998) the quality of the relationship between the brand and the consumer evolves through actions made both by the brand and the consumer. A six-sided brand relationship quality model explains this; affective and socio-emotive attachments (*love/passion and self-connection*), behavioral ties (*interdependence and commitment*), and supportive cognitive beliefs (*intimacy and brand partner quality*) (Fournier, 1998). Relationships characterized by *love and passion* are stronger, deeper and more durable in relation to others. If consumers do not consume the brands of these relationship during a period, they will feel something is missing (Fournier, 1998). Consequently, the brand is seen as irreplaceable and

unique which manifests through separation anxiety (Berscheid, 1983). A relationship with *self-connection* shows the correspondence between the consumers and the brands' identity, thereby giving the consumers possible ways to express themselves, ranging from past to current and even future selves (Kleine, Kleine & Allen, 1995). Strong relationships are further illustrated by a great level of *interdependence and commitment*, expressing the frequency of interaction between the brand and the consumer with consumption rituals as a result. Rituals are a central relationship component showing consumers' commitment to and support of brands in both successful and less successful times (Fournier, 1998). The *intimacy* shows how consumers can have a sustainable relationship to brands, creating meaningfulness and rapport with the brands usually based on the utilitarian function. The brand partner quality describes the relation between the consumer and the overall relationship satisfaction and strength, directly linked to the brand's material quality, usually rooted in beliefs about superior product performance where the brands often have a personal association, for example, a memory linked to it (Fournier, 1998).

Even though the work of Fournier (1998) has been subject to much tribute and characterized as modern and classic (Ostergaard, 2002), critical voices have been raised too. Bengtsson (2003) posits that even though the idea of brand relationships has improved and further enriched the understanding of the role of brands, there are limitations regarding the relationship metaphor, interpersonal relationship and the context of consumer brand relationships. Fournier (1998) relies on the existence of a brand personality resulting from managers' activities creating a behavioral entity of the brand, which further translates to a trait language from which the brands' official personality is created. Since the brand consists of a personality, a relationship dyad is formed. Bengtsson (2003) argues that even though a personality is created, there is lack of evidence that the brand becomes an active partner since it can neither think or feel, and consequently not respond but only communicate in a rather mechanized and or standardized manner. Consequently, Bengtsson (2003) believe that the relationship between consumers and brands most differ in several ways from the relationship consumers or people have with each other since brands only can behave on the behalf of managers. Giddens (1991) argues for the importance of reciprocity and how a true relationship could not exist without it. As a result of the critique towards the relationship perspective, Bengtsson (2003) describes how the lack of sympathy for the brand relation further renders Fournier's BRQ model problematic. This is supported by Ahuvia (1993) suggesting that love for objects or brands and people could at its greatest reflect similar but not identical relationships.

Alvarez and Fournier (2016), however, answer to the critic in their article "Consumers' relationships with brands". In their article, Alvarez and Fournier explain that anthropomorphized brands cannot, and should not, be seen as entirely human. They further explain how anthropomorphized brands are more human-like than non-anthropomorphized brands, however, could not be seen exclusively or wholeheartedly as human. Nevertheless, they refer to existing, modern, research when they claim that some level of anthropomorphism is necessary for a relationship to exist. However, they further state that some brands are more likely to become relationship partners than others, something which could depend on cross-cultural differences. Collectivistic/non-collectivistic culture, developed/undeveloped economical society, severe access to knowledge/ limited access to knowledge etc. Alvarez and



Fournier (2016) conclude by stating that how the brand relationship theory still is in its early stage and that more knowledge is needed.

Overall, Fournier (1998) enlightens and agrees upon the importance to understand the relationships of brands and consumers because brand behaviors affect ordinary experiences and its given meaning in the trivial but also deep most central parts of life (Bourdieu, 1984; Fiske, 1992; Tennen, Suls, & Affleck, 1991). Furthermore, she makes a strong case for the deeper understanding of the context of consumers' lives, experiences, and constellations in which brands take part. Brands are not only a part of the lives in which they are consumed but give value – “consumers do not choose brands, they choose lives” (Fournier, 1998, p.367). The 15 relationship forms especially show the role brands play in those lives, which is why this framework is a useful tool to study and understand consumer brand relationships. It is because the relationships and the brands become human and way easier to grasp.

### 2.3.2 Context of Consumer Brand Relationships

Fournier (1998) is not unique in stressing the importance of acknowledging that relationships both affect and are affected by the context in which they are embedded. Berscheid and Peplau (1983) and Hinder (1995) underline the importance of relationships as they provide structured meaningfulness in a person's life, both psychological and sociocultural (Fournier, 1988). These relationships might be more or less important but may to some extent add significant meaning or value to the lives of the individuals who engage with them at different levels of depth (Fournier, 1998). Former research within the field of relationships and the sociocultural context has highlighted aspects such as age, lifecycle cycles, sexuality, family or lack of family, social context and culture (Dion & Dion 1996; Gilligan, Lyons, & Hanmer, 1990; Milardo & Wellman, 1992; Stueve & Gerson, 1977). These are aspects which most certainly influence the strength of relationship, barriers and drivers as well as emotional expressions, styles of interacting and degree of commitment (Fournier, 1998). Further, it is highlighted by (Parks & Eggert, 1991)

that relationships exist and are given their meaning within the context of other relationships, together they create a consumption constellation where the different relationships are given meaning in relation to the brandscape (McCracken, 1988; Solomon & Assael, 1988; Sherry, 1987).

Looking deeper into the psychological context, Mick and Buhl (1992), as well as Zirkel (1990), highlight that relationships might reconcile life themes, declaring everything from daily concerns or themes which might be deeply rooted and highlighted to one's life and concept of self (Csikszentmihalyi & Beattie, 1979). These life projects might involve construction, maintenance, dissolution of important key aspects or events all together creating the identity of the self, such as graduation, marriage, divorce, midlife crisis or retirement (Caspi, 1987; Erikson, 1950; Fournier, 1988). Mick and Buhl (1992) elaborate on the idea that context matters and argue for its inclusion in consumer research. In developing a meaning-based model of advertising experiences they study consumers from the social context they find themselves

within. Consumers perceive ads in relation to their social context and life story, it becomes a filter through which they read ads. Mick and Buhl (1992, p.320) assert that “consumers actualize many connotative ad meanings based on their salient life projects as conjoined by life themes”. Part of a person’s life story are life themes and life projects. Life themes represent conscious or unconscious existential goals of individuals and how they structure and understand their world and goals, however they are not the same as values (Mick & Buhl, 1992). Life themes create coherence of individuals’ lives and can be found within the socio-cultural context and life-world the individual is situated in. They further direct the managing of life projects (Mick & Buhl, 1992). These life projects can be seen as manifestations of an individual’s life theme and they involve four spheres. The national sphere concerns meanings associated with nationality and internationality. The community sphere concerns meanings associated residential areas, peer groups and careers. The family sphere concerns meanings associated with family members, and lastly, the private self sphere concerns meanings of being an individuated human being. Life projects can relate to one or span over several spheres (Mick & Buhl, 1992).

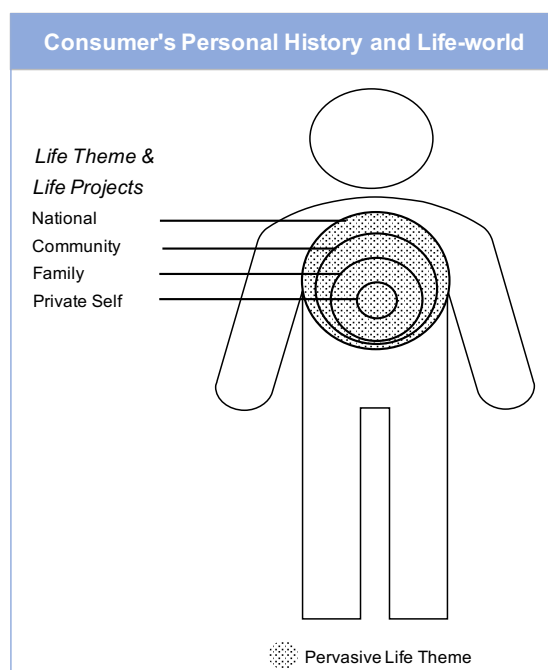


Figure 3: Life theme and life projects within an individual. Adapted from Mick & Buhl (1992).

## 2.4 Summary Literature Review

As stated above, one must understand the market and the society consumers exist within to understand the consumers of today as such. The contemporary society, described by Bauman (2000) explains our world of today as liquid, increasingly absent of solid, limiting, structures and tradition. Since the market is fluid, so are the consumers – free from commitment (Firat & Schultz, 1997). This fragmented market, free of boredom, further calls for fragmented marketing. Marketing in which subjects and objects are set free from context and linkages, with products decoupled from their contexts (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993). Since all communication and

connection between consumers and the market are short-lived and illustrated by an absence of commitment and promises (Firat & Schultz, 1997), consumers are fragmented and have the possibility to behave ambivalent and paradoxical way, contradicting their words and action and vice versa. This is described by Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017) as liquid consumption where renting, sharing or borrowing is favored over ownership. The access-based consumption liberates consumers to travel between different lifestyles and identities as they prefer (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012).

In parallel with this liquid society, characterized by liquid consumption and non-commitment, theoretical and practical implementation of branding has increased and intensified (Keller & Lehmann, 2005; Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000; Kapferer, 2005). Globalization, in combination with technical development and fierce competition, could be seen as reasons for the increased interest for branding, creating a new environment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century which fundamentally changed how brands interact and communicate (Keller, 2009). With branding as an important tool for creating long term impact (Kapferer, 2008), the effectiveness of branding and discussion around different branding strategies become fundamental. With brands shifting from product brands to corporate brands, seeking to personify themselves with a human relatable dimension, a complex situation occurs. A growth of brands taking political, social and environmental stands, a so-called woke strategy (Green, 2018), creates the question and contradiction of how liquid consumers could possibly have a relationship with this type of “woke” or “woke-washed” brands.

In tradition, Fournier’s framework described above is used to explain the relationship with the consumers and the brand. It enables identification of type of relationship and the dimensions of it as well as possible antecedents of ended relationships. Fournier’s work further enables an understanding of the life a consumer lives with a certain brand and how that brand connects to life theme and projects of the consumer. Mick and Buhl’s (1992) concept of life themes and life projects provide a clear framework with which to understand the context consumers’ brand relationships. However, as stated by Fournier herself, the brand relationship theory still is in its early stage and more knowledge is needed (Alvarez & Fournier, 2016). With a changing environment where brands take on a more woke marketing strategy, while on the contrary, consumers aim to be free and unattached, this creates contradictions in how consumers create and form relationships to this new brand strategy called “woke”.

### 2.4.1 Theoretical Framework

To further concretize what has been summarized above, a theoretical framework has been designed. It serves to visualize the theoretical lens through which the authors will explore woke CBRs, and it explains what can be concluded so far. First, there is the context of postmodern consumption and consumers, which creates a liquid and fragmented reality in which woke brands and CBRs exist. The authors discovered the contradiction of woke brands and CBRs within this context and believe it should be studied and understood within it as well. Second, there is Fournier’s (1998) CBR theory, a theoretical toolbox with which woke brands will be

explored. Third, Mick and Buhl (1992) apply the concept of life themes and projects in studying consumers' reading of ads. The authors, and Fournier (1998), believe it is also suitable to use for understanding consumers' CBRs. The CBRs should be studied with the life history and current life-world of the respondent's as a backdrop (Mick & Buhl, 1992). Fourth, there is the phenomenon of woke branding, which is scarcely researched and needs to be studied in relation to CBR theory. Thus, the theoretical framework is constructed upon what can currently be said about the research topic: postmodern consumers are liquid and fragmented, not inclined to be attached; CBRs *can* however exist and they vary in type and quality; these CBRs exist within the context of consumers' life-worlds; and lastly woke brands are willing to work on the relationship with consumers by meeting their demands, however they do it by attaching themselves to a woke stand, seemingly in conflict with unattached contemporary consumers. The theoretical framework below helps to illustrate and form a foundation from which the authors explore the characteristics of relationships between consumers and woke brands.

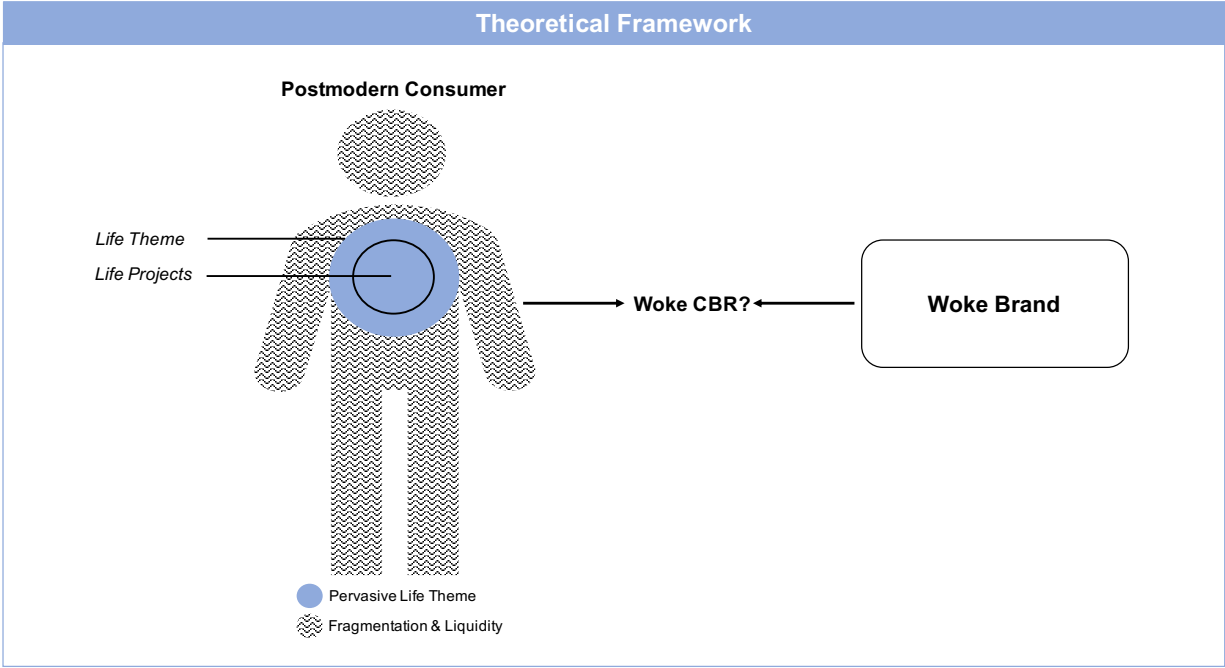


Figure 4: Theoretical framework of the thesis.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Approach

#### 3.1.1 Research Philosophy

The chosen research philosophy further guided the authors in choosing research design, with the aim of enhancing the implementation understanding and result of the study. Ontology, on the one hand, deals with questions regarding the nature of the study (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 20012). Epistemology, on the other hand, concerns the creation of knowledge (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012).

In terms of ontology, the study should be found somewhat between relativism and nominalism, leaning more towards relativism. This since relativism claims that there are many truths, meanwhile nominalism claims that there is no truth (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Jackson & Jaspersen, 2018). Relativism further assumes that different observers might have different viewpoints, which is cited by Collins (1983, p. 88) who states that “what counts for the truth can vary from place to place and from time to time”. When it comes to affecting the development of the relationship, the consumers, as well as the brands, places a significant role. This is in line with Fournier, (1998, p. 44) who explain the role of seeing through the eyes of the different consumers when assessing consumers-brand relationships. Easterby-Smith et al. (2018) further claims that different groups interact differently with different accumulations and approval of science (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018).

In terms of epistemology, the study should be placed somewhat between social constructionism and strong social constructionism. Constructionism claims that reality is socially constructed, given its purpose and perspective by people in their interaction with other human beings (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). This is agreed upon by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, (2012, p.110) who claim that “social phenomena are created from the perceptions and consequent actions of social actors”. In this study, relationships between consumers and brands are investigated, consequently, the social construction within the interaction is important. This since relationships are created through social reality, firmed not by items, facts or figures, but by people. Consequently, focus is put on individuals' different feelings and experiences, whether they are verbally or nonverbally. The social constructionism tries to understand people and their meanings while contributing to new theories (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). With the purpose of increasing the conversation and understanding, as well as improving and investigating the understanding of the consumer relationship with brands considered “woke” or practicing “woke-washing”, the epistemology chosen should be constructivist epistemology.

### 3.1.2 Research Strategy

A qualitative character is described by Bryman and Bell (2013) as a study where the collection of the empirical material often consists of some variant of interviews which result in knowledge and perspective which is to a large extent open for interpretation. Furthermore, qualitative research design is characterized as descriptive, analytical while building understanding of behaviors of groups and individuals being studied on the basis of its subjective surroundings (Lundahl & Skärvad, 2009). Since the authors have chosen to study what characterizes the relationship between consumers and woke brands, the authors consequently explore perceptions and behaviors based on respondents' individual and subjective lives as well as their earlier experiences which makes a qualitative perspective suitable (Lundahl & Skärvad, 2009). Furthermore, a qualitative approach is suitable when there is little knowledge within the research area and when the aim of the study is to gather deep understanding of the phenomena observed (Jacobsen, 2010; Yin, 2014). Since there is a lack of research and prior empirical research within the field of woke brands, the qualitative method was suitable to fit the aim of the study.

### 3.1.3 Research Design

There are various ways to derive conclusions from empirical phenomena in which Bryman and Bell (2013) portray two different approaches; deductive and inductive approach. Deductive approach is mainly based on earlier theory and academic research where hypotheses are formulated and tested (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Inductive approach, on the other hand, is based on observations and already collected empirical material on which new theory and more generalizable conclusions are being made (Bryman & Bell, 2013). In this case, the study will be concealed by an abductive approach which is a combination of the two above-mentioned approaches (Bryman & Bell, 2013). This means the theoretical framework served as an outlook from which the collected data was analyzed. The theoretical framework gave the terminology needed to explore woke CBRs. However, an abductive approach implies a less restricted stance towards theory. The authors therefore kept an open mind and went back and forth between empirical data and theory, making sense of the data with the theoretical framework while also constructing new theoretical concepts grounded in the data. The abductive approach was chosen to be able to contribute with empirical findings of real consumers and their relationship with woke brands to thus fulfill the aim of the study, to discover insights that will develop the consumer brand relationship theory. Consequently, the abductive approach helped the authors to answer the research question of what characterizes the relationship between consumers and woke brands.

To increase the understanding of the identified phenomenon of woke brands and to establish a theoretical framework, the authors took an exploratory and descriptive approach. The lack of research on the recently surfaced field of woke brands makes an exploratory study suitable to generate insights and theory (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The study is discovery-oriented because of its objective to explore characteristics of consumer brand relationships, not necessarily

explained by present theory on the topic (Wells, 1993). The authors strived to study real individuals in their real life, not restricted by theoretical boundaries (Wells, 1993). Thanks to its qualitative design, the authors also avoided favoring statistical significance over real significance, attention was thus paid to details in consumer behavior crucial for new discoveries (Wells, 1993). Further, in line with qualitative research character, the authors sought to provide a descriptive account of their findings. Details are of great importance to the subjects of this study as well as the context within which they act, why a description of those is useful (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Attention to detail allows for thick description (Bryman & Bell, 2011), also in line with discovery-orientation focusing on finding real ground-level findings and pursuing the depths of those instead of favoring high-level abstract representations (Wells, 1993).

To explore the relationship of consumers and woke brands, the authors deemed it beneficial to take inspiration from Fournier (1998) and Fournier and Yao's (1997) leading research in the field of woke CBR. Since CBR theory is the foundation of this thesis' theoretical approach and theoretical framework, it is suitable to employ a methodology similar to Fournier's, and Fournier and Yao's. Hence, the research design and chosen methods for data collection and analysis are to a large part guided by these researchers' works. The authors further see the chosen methods as appropriate to gain the data needed to answer the research question as will be explained in the following.

## 3.2 Life History Cases

Exploring the characteristics of woke brand CBRs required a deep understanding of the consumers to see which role the brands played in their lives. This was needed to explain consumers' behavior, attitudes, drivers and barriers, as well as personalities, in relation to the brands. In essence, insight into consumers' experiences of the world and the brands they use would help answer the research question. Therefore, life history cases of three individuals and their relationship with one woke brand each were produced, this would give the richness required for deep insights. During recent years, multiple case studies have become increasingly common, specifically in business and management research (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Multiple case studies could be seen as an extension of a case study with the aim to compare and find similarities as well as differences between different cases or brands. Consequently, this study could be seen similar to a multiple case study since the authors used the same method to study more than two cases and brands (Bryman & Bell, 2013). The study could further be discussed as having features of comparative design since it is undertaken to enable comparing of cases. The aim of this comparative, multiple case study is to seek description and clarification of the different woke CBRs with their similarities and differences (Bryman & Bell, 2013), as well as gaining an enhanced understanding of consumers' subjective reality.

The life history method is appropriate to meet the aim of this multiple case study. It builds on the idea that every human experiences the world differently, whereby the researcher needs to study these subjective realities in order to explain social phenomena (Denzin, 1978). Providing a foundational context enriches the interpretive insights that can be drawn, important for the

exploratory and descriptive approach of the study (Mick & Buhl, 1992). The experiences, definitions and behaviors of individual consumers can be explained by gathering information about their life. The life of a consumer, with its major events and experiences, will be subjectively defined by the consumer which is useful in studying individuals and their behavior. Objectivity is thus secondary, and subjectivity purposely aimed for (Denzin, 1978). The authors produced edited life histories of the respondents; their complete life told but guided by questions and comments of the authors (Denzin, 1978). To answer the research question, life history information including the respondent's consumption behavior and usage of his/her woke brand was also sought, thereby the authors edited the life history to some extent.

Due to limited time with the respondents, the authors cannot assure some parts of the respondents' lives were not left out or forgotten, but important is that the respondents told *their* life histories. The respondents selected which events to talk about and thereby gave insight into how they perceive themselves and the world, which secured the subjectivity aimed at (Denzin, 1978). However, the authors ensured crucial information was included, such as age, sex, education, employment, mobility patterns, religious and political preferences and perceived social status (Denzin, 1978). Consideration was also taken to the information needed for data analysis, in which Mick and Buhl's (1992) concepts of life theme and life projects were to be used. Therefore, the authors made sure to cover life history information regarding nationality, community, family and the private self (Mick & Buhl, 1992).

## 3.3 Selection

### 3.3.1 Brands

To fulfill the purpose of this study, it was important for the authors to create a fruitful discussion around woke brands, and consequently essential for the authors to include examples of such brands in the interviews. When choosing brands for the collection of empirical data, all existing brands somewhat considered to be woke could not be chosen. As in the case of most studies, a sampling strategy was further needed. When choosing appropriate woke brands for the study, one criterion was to focus on well-known brands with a strong brand presence globally. This since all of the respondents has an international background. Consequently, the authors scouted primarily strong brands with international careers. A second criterion was that the product should be fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG). The FMCG is a category with low commitment which creates a greater challenge to gain insights, something the authors found interesting since low engagement products seemingly rely more on rational than emotional features. This raised the question of why these brands are so serious about going woke and how, and if, it affected the relationship to the consumers. The FMCG category was further purposively selected for the range of brand alternatives it contains, firstly since there are not that many brands which are considered woke. Secondly, since this creates an environment which extends the latitude of different relationships. The FMCG category was not considered too



narrow, but not too wide to draw conclusions over several industries. The brands chosen could further be seen to represent a scale on the success rate of their wokeness or wokewashing. This with Pepsi in the bottom, mostly due to the fact that Pepsi actually withdrew their commercial (Wong, 2019). Gillette should be considered somewhere in the middle since their commercial has been given both tribute and criticism (Taylor, 2019), however, not as successful as Always who's is considered a success and remembered for its brilliant job (Jones, 2019). The different rates of success of the brands' wokeness or woke-washing creates an interesting angle from which to investigate consumer-brand relationships and how they were formed and developed. Consequently, a target-based selection of brands was performed, brands were chosen since they were relevant to the formulated research question (Bryman & Bell, 2013). A target-based selection was useful in this qualitative study, since the authors wished to reach conclusions with certain relevance and knowledge in a specific domain (Bryman & Bell, 2013). A target-based selection is often made in qualitative studies where the authors wish to reach individuals or brands with a specific relevance and knowledge within a specific field (Bryman & Bell, 2013).

The brands selected are chosen to answer the question of what characterizes the relationship between consumers and woke brands and the authors therefore consider the selection appropriate to be able to fulfill the purpose of the study. Following, an explanation of the brands and their commercial display for the respondents during the interview will be described. Further information about the brands can be found in Appendix 1.

### *Gillette*

In January 2019, razor brand Gillette released an exceedingly debated campaign called *We Believe* where Gillette, the old school brand with the iconic slogan "The Best A Man Can Get" raises its voice in the discussion of toxic masculinity (Topping, Lyons & Weaver, 2019). In Gillette's two minute commercial, men and boys are participating against stereotypic masculinity, such as bullying and sexual harassment. Consequently, Gillette participated in the debate around the #Metoo movement and the idea of "boys will be boys" by changing their slogan from "The Best A Man Can Get" to "The Best Men Can Be". The commercial has gained over 30 million views on Youtube, however, with twice as many downvotes as upvotes (Gillette, 2019).



Image 1: A sequence from the Gillette ad where a long row of men says, "boys will be boys", a typical excuse that Gillette connects to toxic masculinity (adapted from Gillette, 2019).



Image 2: Gillette questions its own slogan and refers to how “the boys watching today will be the men of tomorrow” (adapted from Gillette, 2019).

The discussion about the campaign has been widely spread with both tributes and critique (see Appendix 2). Since the slogan was closely related, but still clearly different from Gillette’s 30-year-old one, many felt that it was not in Gillette’s place to touch upon this subject (Bernard, 2019). Even if some feedback has been positive, the overall result of the campaign has been overwhelmingly negative since a much larger group disliked it, claiming that “the ad is insulting to men and full of stereotypes” (Taylor, 2019, n.p.). Taylor (2019) explains in his article in Forbes why this campaign is toxic, describing how many might find it rather arrogant for Gillette to portray themselves as a leader or somewhat role model within the field of masculinity, giving the customers space for skepticism. If the goals were to sell more razors, to gain brand awareness or to pander towards women or create debate, no one knows. Gillette themselves explain in their website that they want to acknowledge the fact that they play an important role in influencing the culture, and they state they want to promote “positive, attainable, inclusiveness and healthy versions of what it means to be a man” (Gillette.com, 2019, n.p.). To show their commitment, Gillette describes on their website how they donate \$1 million yearly during a period for three years to a non-profit organization with the same aim.

### *Always*

During super bowl 2014, feminine hygiene products brand Always launched their campaign *#LikeAGirl* creating a voice in the social and political debate (Iqbal, 2019). Made by Lauren Greenfield, the commercial portrays adults and young boys who are, among other things, asked to run like a girl, whereby the ad display them acting weak and embarrassed. When the young, pre-pubescent girls are asked to run like a girl, they instead run as fast as they can. Consequently, Always raised the question of what it means to do something “like a girl”. In comparison to both Pepsi and Gillette, Always’ commercial was considered a success and remembered for its brilliant job (Jones, 2019).



Image 3: A young boy running “like a girl” (adapted from Always, 2019).



Image 4: A young girl fighting “like a girl”, showing that the saying means a completely different thing to her (adapted from Always, 2019).

Creating the *#LikeAGirl* movement, Always explain on their website how they want to change the metaphor of “doing something like a girl” from an insult to something positive (Always, 2019a). Always further explain how girls’ self-esteem decreases during puberty, with avoidance of trying new things as a result. Always claim they would like to change this by breaking the stereotypes, creating “a sisterhood that stretches across the globe”. *#LikeAGirl* has also become a podcast and an education programme providing teachers and parents with the Puberty and Confidence Education Programme as well as partnering up with 60 organizations which serve girls around the globe (Always, 2019b).

### *Pepsi*

In 2007, soft drink brand Pepsi introduced ‘Performance with purpose’ making PepsiCo one of the first companies to highlight the importance of collaboration between corporations and society (PepsiCo, 2019). In 2017, Pepsi posted a nearly three minute commercial, displaying the famous Kardashian sister, Kendall Jenner in the middle of photoshoot and wandering off to participate in a demonstration. On her way to there, she throws her blonde wig at a black

woman, wipes of her lipstick and grabs a Pepsi. This Pepsi is later handed to a policeman, who drinks it with a smile on his face. The appearance of the Pepsi and the fact that the policeman drinks it, causes the demonstrators to cheer and applaud. A peaceful and enjoyable atmosphere emerges between the police and the people who in the beginning were upset and demonstrated against something which to the observer remains unknown.



Image 5: A sequence from the Pepsi commercial where Kendall Jenner is on her way to handle the Pepsi to the policeman featuring the song “Lions” by Skip Marley (adapted from Bbc.co.uk, 2017).



Image 6: A sequence from the Pepsi commercial where Kendall Jenner is on her way to handle the Pepsi to the policeman featuring the song “Lions” by Skip Marley (adapted from Victor, 2017).

The commercial has been widely criticized, especially the scene where Jenner hands the police a Pepsi. This moment could be seen as inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement since it looks just like the famous photography of the moment when Ieshia Evans peacefully offers her hands to three police officers in riot gear, offering them the possibility to arrest her. A picture which is symbolic for the police brutality against black people (see Appendix 3). The discussion on Twitter regarding this ad has been loud. The commercial was called offensive, tasteless and even tone-deaf since Pepsi were seemingly making a profit off of social movements and demonstrations. Individuals were upset since Pepsi seemed so eager to sell their product within

a certain context (the Black Lives Matter movement) which was considered irrelevant for an American multinational food and beverage manufacturer. Pepsi themselves explained the aim to “project a global message of unity, peace and understanding”. However, Pepsi did apologize and removed the ad from social media as well as TV (Wong, 2019). Pepsi apologized on their website for how they “missed the mark” and for the trouble it caused Kendall Jenner. The apologies towards Jenner, who was not only paid but also voluntarily participated in the commercial, further triggered more backlash on Twitter (see Appendix 4).

### 3.3.2 Respondents

The authors performed a purposive sampling to select respondents for the study. Respondents meeting certain criteria were needed to answer the research question, therefore those who did not meet these criteria were rejected (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018; Bryman & Bell, 2011). Considering the research question, it was necessary to find respondents with actual relationships with woke brands. Therefore, the authors formulated an attitude-plus-behavior measure to select respondents, similar to that of Fournier and Yao (1997), resulting in these criteria:

1. The respondent consumes product(s) in the product category of the woke brand.
2. The respondent cares about which brand(s) of the product category he/she consumes.
3. The respondent has a preference for the woke brand in question.
4. The respondent can motivate this preference.

An online survey was sent to possible respondents who answered questions related to these criteria (Appendix 5). Those meeting all four were taken to the next step of consideration. Since the woke brands selected for the study are quite different from each other and have had different levels of success with their marketing efforts, it was preferable to select respondents quite *similar* to each other. This was in order to maintain possibility to generalize while also leaving enough room for variation in between the cases. It increased the range of information and enabled the discovery-oriented approach of the study as well as the comparative design of the multiple case study (Wells, 1993; Bryman & Bell, 2011). The respondents chosen to answer the survey are all millennial students from Western cultures. They are all living temporarily in the city of their university and will soon move again. The selection of millennials was based on the targeting of woke brands (Edelman, 2018). The other factors, as well as the millennial focus, followed Bardhi and Eckhardt’s (2017) discussion on who will most likely be, and manage being, a liquid consumer. Their similarities aside, the authors considered gender, age, nationality, marital status and motivation of brand preference for the final selection of respondents. By ensuring differences in between chosen respondents regarding these factors, the authors hoped to increase the range of insights to be found (Fournier, 1998).

Participant	Identified gender	Age	Nationality	Brand	Product used
Eric	Male	26	Irish	Pepsi	Pepsi Max
Sarah	Female	23	Romanian	Always	Always Overnight Pads
Rebecka	Female	28	Mexican	Gillette	Gillette Venus

Table 3: Selected respondents.

As Table 3 shows, three respondents were selected. This relatively small sample is carefully chosen to reach deep insights. In this study, and characterizing of qualitative study, depth of insight is valued over generalizability, why a small sample size is preferred (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Further, restricting the study to three respondents will allow for thick descriptions since attention can be paid to details and specificities of respondents' lives, and exploring on a ground-level enables new discoveries (Wells, 1993). This is needed to find the characteristics of woke brand CBRs and is in line with the study's discovery-oriented approach.

## 3.4 Data Collection

### 3.4.1 Theoretical Sampling

When collecting the theoretical data, the authors performed what is called a chain search. This means that the authors based the study on academic theory rather than investigating all available material, something which should be seen as very time consuming (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Previous research was also inspired by earlier courses at the Master's Programme in International Marketing and Brand Management at Lund University, such as for example *Consumer Culture Theory and Consumer Insights*, *Understanding Consumption* and *Corporate Brand Management and Reputation*. The authors further relied on news-outlets in the business and marketing field where valuable information on current developments in woke branding were found. Furthermore, data were collected from Lund University library database since it is considered to contain relevant articles of high quality. The database contains both reviewed and unreviewed articles, journals and studies where the search function made it easy for the authors to distinguish the relevance and quality of the content, which according to the authors contributed to the source's credibility. In addition, relevant books within the field of business research method ensured that the data as collected, used and analyzed in a reliable, credible and coherent way.

### 3.4.2 Empirical Sampling

To produce life history cases of the chosen respondents, in-depth interviews were held with them. This enabled respondents to tell the story about themselves in a relaxed and rather spontaneous way, with the possibility for the authors to ask follow-up questions. The method of interviews suited best to collect the kind of data needed. For example, a survey would not have enabled as deep and detailed accounts of data as a live dialogue did. With the aim of revealing characteristics of consumers' woke CBRs with woke brands from the consumers' point of view, the authors saw it suitable to perform interviews guided by phenomenological methodology (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). That way, a deep understanding of consumers' lived

experiences with the brands and the meanings that emerge from them could be gained (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). The interviews were thus performed and conducted in a semi-structured form. The dialogue was mainly guided by the respondents and only short, descriptive questions were asked to allow for lengthy descriptions by the respondents (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). The semi-structured form of interview further provided questions with an open character which allows follow-up questions and further might increase the possibility of avoiding dominant or directional questions, which would have been problematic since it may affect the informants' response (Lundahl & Skärvad, 2009; Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). Authors also refrained from using specific relationship terminology or references for the same reason (Fournier, 1998). Following the phenomenological interviewing method, the "why" questions were excluded so as not to force respondents into rationalizing their answers, thus not providing account of their actual experiences. Instead "what" questions that could provide detailed descriptions from the respondents were asked (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). Semi-structured interviews were also carried out to increase the flexibility and freedom of speech in the answers (Lundahl & Skärvad, 2009) since it increases the possibility of making the interviews situationally adapted, while opening up for a deeper understanding of the respondents' answers (Lundahl & Skärvad, 2009).

### *Preparation*

A few days before the interview sessions took place, the authors sent emails to the respondents with practical information about the purpose of the study, information about confidentiality as well as how and where the study's results will be published and used. Because of the in-depth aim of the interviews, and its focus on private life details, it was ethically important to gain respondents' consent and ensure their maintained dignity (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989; Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). Respondents were also asked to bring images to the interviews which would serve as conversation aids.

Before the first interview took place, the authors tested the interview guide with an external person. This was done to discover any problems in the setup or the questions and to ensure the desired information could be gathered.

### *Setup*

The interviews took place between 24<sup>th</sup> of April and 2<sup>nd</sup> of May 2019, where each interview session lasted around 1,5-2 hours. At each interview event, one of the authors had a leading role with a focus on primarily asking questions to the respondent while the other carried separate notes (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In order not to miss out on important details, the interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the respondents and the authors paid attention to body language and other non-verbal cues of the respondents (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Further, it was important for the authors to create an environment where the respondents felt comfortable expressing their view. Consequently, the interviews were conducted in quiet rooms, where

respondents or authors could not be disturbed (Bryman & Bell, 2011). During the interview, the authors provided fika.

### *Structure*

Three respondents were interviewed about their respective woke brand CBR; Rebecka about Gillette, Sarah about Always and Eric about Pepsi. The authors had three different interviews, one with each respondent. Every interview was further divided into three parts. The first part considered gaining information of the respondent as an individual and his/her life. The second part focused on understanding the usage of the woke brand in the respondent's life. The final part served to explain the respondent's CBR with his/her woke brand. The authors formulated this structure partly with the CBR theory as a foundation, thus pursuing the abductive approach taken (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Questions were formulated and organized in accordance with this structure and the study's life-history case design. Questions were also formulated to find life projects and themes of the respondents, which could help explain what characterizes CBRs with woke brands (Mick & Buhl, 1992; Fournier 1998). An interview guide was crafted, although remaining brief because of the semi-structured, phenomenological approach taken. It served as a guiding tool for the authors and can be seen in Appendix 6 (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

### *Conversation Aids*

Respondents were asked to bring a certain set of images to the interview which were to aid the start of conversation in the different parts of the interview. This idea was inspired by the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique in which images are tools to initiate dialogue with respondents and understand them through the metaphors and meanings images can convey (Zaltman & Higie, 1995). The authors saw the bringing of images as beneficial to maximize time use since they had limited time with the respondents and needed to gain deep, personal information. The images provided a faster way to reach the critical topics of the respondents' individuality and life. Since respondents had to start reflecting upon the meanings of the images it helped them tell the story about themselves (Zaltman & Higie, 1995). This was important to successfully paint the respondents' life history cases complete with life projects and themes. Therefore, these pictures were points from which the authors could start off the interview and move from one part to the next.

For the introductory part of the interviews, respondents were free to bring one or several images they felt represented themselves. For the second part of the interview they were asked to bring one or several images representing their feelings towards their respective woke brand. For the third part, the authors brought the conversation aids. To explain the respondents' CBRs with woke brands the authors thought it crucial to show ads representative of the woke-washing of respective brands (see section 3.2.1). This served to spark thoughts on the CBR on behalf of the



respondent and reveal the nature of the woke CBR. The authors wanted to make sure respondents were aware of their brands' wokeness and study how they resonated around that. Respondents' descriptions of their experiences of the ads would explain how they perceived the brands and their taken stands with regards to themselves. Studying respondents' reasoning around their brands' actions would explain what "partner role" the brands played in what type of relationship.

## 3.5 Data Analysis

### 3.5.1 Coding

Interviews were transcribed verbatim to represent the true dynamic environment of the existing dialogue (Riessman, 1993; Seidman, 1991). This was done to capture the authenticity of the interviews, meaning inclusion of pauses and non-verbal utterances such as laughter, throat clearing and silence, giving the data the depth and genuineness the authors were looking for (Bryman & Bell, 2011). As a first step of the coding, both authors made a holistic reading and interpretation of the data. Memos of the overall insights from these first readings were written. From this, descriptive and interpretive informant profiles were produced (Fournier & Yao, 1997). Given the abductive approach of the study, the coding process was two-fold. A set of a priori codes were selected based on the theoretical framework, but the authors also practiced grounded theory since the aim was to build rather than test theory. Grounded theory allows to explore and understand how different complex phenomena occur, exist, develop and relate (Brown, Stevenson, Troiano & Schneider, 2002) which is in line with the purpose of the study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The data analysis of grounded theory is mainly based on three types of coding phases; open, axial, and selective (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The open coding and the first stage of the data analysis was made to generate idea drafts of key concepts and to categorize the collected data. This was done by openly asking questions and analyzing the data line by line in the transcript. This was done throughout the analysis and created categories for the authors when coding. The transcription was then compiled and categorized by similarities and difference which contributed to increased clarity and reliability. This part aimed to understand and to analyze the range, the development, conditions and major consequences of the relationship between the different consumers and the woke brand. The second stage of data analysis, the axial coding, involved relating the different categories and subcategories as well as comparing, expanding and exploring phenomena (Brown et al. 2002). The third and last stage, the selective coding, included selecting the most significant categories, endorsing and validating chosen themes, filling in, refining and developing categories which still included some question marks.

### 3.5.2 Analysis

After the empirical data had been coded, two forms of analysis were performed, first an ideographic analysis and second a cross-case analysis. The ideographic analysis focused on the unique and individual experience of the respondents and the cross-case analysis, comparing the cases, created a coherent picture of the relationship towards woke brands. The two levels of analysis served to bring the authors deep down in the findings to be able to identify themes and concepts. Life history cases are suitable to analyze ideographically according to Denzin (1978). This since the aim should not be to find insights applicable to a whole population but rather to take advantage of the different, separate experiences of respondents. No life is similar to another and an intensive study of each individual case is needed to reveal insights specific for each case. However, Denzin (1978) further argues that ideographic analysis indeed can bring forward generalizable insights with analytic induction as working approach. This study's abductive approach partly contributes to that, namely finding proof or disproof with regards to the theoretical framework applied.

In performing the ideographic analysis, authors searched for life themes and projects of respondents which were crucial to understand the respondents' life-worlds. This was done in line with Mick and Buhl's (1992) conceptualization and use of life themes and life projects. Identifying life themes and projects was a way to understand the CBRs the respondents have with their woke brands. Themes and projects gave a foundation upon which to interpret the role the brand plays in a respondent's life and how the respondent views the brand in relation to him/herself which shed light on the nature of the woke CBR. The ideographic analysis thus intended to tell the stories of respondents with regards to life theme and projects, woke brand category meanings and interactions, and how attitudes and behavior developed over time (Fournier & Yao, 1997; Fournier, 1998; Mick & Buhl, 1992). With the theoretical framework as an analytical toolbox, authors analyzed respondents' woke CBRs, although remaining open to new theoretical concepts given the abductive approach taken. The woke CBRs' existence and nature were explored in light of Fournier's (1998) CBR theory to see if it could sufficiently explain this type of woke CBRs. Further, respondent's reactions to the woke brands' marketing strategies were considered to analyze probable expectations of the respondents and their view on the stands taken by the brands. This was then to be interpreted in the context of the postmodern consumer's liquidity and fragmentation to see whether the thought of a strong bond between a solid woke brand and an ambivalent consumer is really as contradictory as it seems.

In addition to the intense study of each case the ideographic analysis provided, the life history cases needed to be compared (Denzin, 1978). The cross-case analysis was performed to find patterns and reveal phenomena across the lives and brand stories of respondents (Fournier, 1998). Seeking both similarities and differences would help build an understanding of the main characteristics of CBRs with woke brands and what they rely on. As the comparative design of this multiple case study implies, comparing the cases enabled both confirmation of existing theory and development of new theoretical concepts (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

## 3.6 Quality of the Study

The two main criteria for assessing a qualitative study is authenticity on the one side, and trustworthiness on the other. Trustworthiness can further be divided into credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity) dependability (reliability) and conformability (objectivity) (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### 3.6.1 Authenticity

The authors are well aware that the respondents could have felt obliged to give answers that were in line with what the authors were aiming for. Consequently, the authors were critical to the fact that negative aspects can be deliberately avoided from the respondents' side. This bias was minimized by not giving the respondents the research question, but rather more general information about the study. The authors further critically examined the answers and allowed the respondents to remain anonymous in the study.

### 3.6.2 Reliability

To conduct credible and trustworthy research, it is of great importance to address the reliability of the study (Eneroeth, 1997). In a qualitative study, the internal reliability which measures dependability includes the researchers' subjective perception, perspective and interpretation as well as earlier references and knowledge (Bryman & Bell, 2013). To increase the internal reliability all interviews were recorded and later transcribed. The external reliability assesses the study's ability to be replicated by other researchers who would discover the same phenomena, something which is in qualitative research difficult to meet (Bryman & Bell, 2013). The authors are aware that the choice of semi-structured interviews makes it difficult to repeat the study. However, this was considered to be the best suitable method for the aim and purpose of the study. Further, the risk of researchers being biased was mitigated by asking follow-up questions to clarify the interpretation of the message.

### 3.6.3 Validity

The internal validity of the study includes the degree of correspondence between theory and observations by the authors and can further be divided into internal and external validity (Bryman & Bell 2013). The internal validity aims to understand and validate the causality, i.e. the causal relationship of the study. In other words, does the study investigate what it says it should? (Bryman & Bell, 2013). In this study, there is a somewhat high degree of conceptual complexity. Thus, there might be different interpretations of the material especially due to the abstract layer of identity, feelings and relationships. Therefore, internal validity might be

considered somewhat low. Other aspects that can have affected the outcome of the study are reactive effects and changes occurring during the interviews. The interaction between authors and respondents can affect the way respondents construct their life stories (Denzin, 1978). The authors reflected upon how they might have influenced the respondents' stories and which parts of their lives they were more or less inclined to focus on (Denzin, 1978). It is also possible respondents presented their life stories from a specific point of view with regards to the self-stance they adopted (Mick & Buhl, 1992). When telling their life stories, respondents are likely to become aware of how they tell it, inclined to put forward a more positive or negative story. The authors managed this by guiding the respondent to "the middle" (Denzin, 1978) and occasionally telling the respondents something about themselves (Mick & Buhl, 1992).

External validity refers to the generalizability of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2013). The external validity or generalizability is relatively low since the study is of qualitative character. Thus, the sample could not guarantee statistical randomness nor is the result representative for the whole population. However, in relation and/or in comparison to a single case study, the study could be considered as having a relatively high external validity or generalizability (Bryman & Bell, 2013). The purposive sampling of respondents further contributed to this. Even if respondents were very different from each other and had diverse experiences the similarities found between them proved transferability of insights (Fournier, 1998). Since the authors chose specific defined woke brands to discuss in the interviews, it might have affected the result of the study. However, the alternative of not mentioning specific brands would risk leaving the authors without any useful results. Therefore, using specific woke brands as examples was of the authors considered a requirement to fulfill the purpose of the study. However, it is essential to recognize that the generalizability of the study might be low.

### 3.6.4 Objectivity

Conformability examines the objectivity of the report which indicates the authors' significant beliefs (Bryman & Bell, 2013). High objectivity occurs when an additional researcher would be able to confirm the same result when implementing the same research using the same raw data (Brown et al. 2002). Consequently, this would ensure that the data spoke for itself, implicating that the final results of the study could only be traced back to the empirical collection without being colored by the values of the researcher or researchers (Brown et al. 2002; Bryman & Bell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Since the abductive approach and grounded theory provide a theoretical base, the trustworthiness might be considered rather high (Bryman & Bell, 2013). The researcher bias was further diminished since the authors tried to stay absolved and open minded, not using leading questions. Further, the authors' earlier experiences and knowledge might have affected to some extent, however, this could also be seen as a strength since it might provide a foundation and an understanding increasing the possibility and platform for new ideas to thrive and develop.

### 3.6.5 Limitation and Reflection

Since the authors have chosen specific woke brands which are exemplified through the discussion with the informants, this might put the study in a specific light or perspective. Also, the three different respondents which were interviewed and identified in relation to the brands most probably affect the result of the study. This could be considered as a limitation; however, the authors chose to see this as a possibility since the aim of the study is not to quantify or result in universal advice or conclusions. This is also something the authors took into consideration when designing the study. Consequently, the authors do not see this as a problem since they believe the ability to allow distinguishing characteristics of the cases is relevant to answer the aim of the study.

Further, it would have been interesting to supplement the study with a quantitative part which would capture aspects that a qualitative study cannot. This could bring new insights and further increase the understanding when it comes to identifying how consumers' relationships towards different woke brands are not only manifested but also different from each other in a more calculable hands-on perspective.

## 4. Empirical Findings and Analysis

### 4.1 Ideographic Analysis

The interview made with the three respondents is described and decoded in the section below. First, the respondent's life story is told, including descriptions of lifestyle, hobby, social context, and individual goals to create a coherent picture of the respondent's different worlds. Second, the respondent's life theme and life projects are identified from the life story. Third, the relationship between the brand and/or product and the respondent is identified in relation to the respondent's life theme and life projects. Especially important situations and context that combine the respondent with the brand are highlighted to create a coherent picture of the consumer brand relationship.

#### 4.1.1 Case 1: Eric

##### *Eric's Life Story*

Eric is 26 years old. Eric was born in the hospital in Dublin, five minutes to midnight, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 1993. The nurses were going to put the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 1993. But Eric's dad, Bobby, said no, because he would not pay for one more night of pension. They wrote him as the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April but technically, Eric's birthday is April 4<sup>th</sup>. He was meant to come on April Fool's Day. But as a joke, he did not come. This describes Eric as the funny guy he is, and with the pictures he selected to represent himself, it was easy to recognize both his open, social, but also caring side.

Eric describes how he has 12 photos hanging on his wall, right next to his mirror, which he does not like since he "can see myself in the reflection". These photos were all gifts from old close friends before he left, holding a lot of sentimental value. Most of them are jokes, all printed out and given to him before he left Ireland so he would remember them when he came over here (to Lund), since "I wouldn't stay here forever. I'd come back to them". One of the photos display the two mugs that Eric and his friend used to have. The friend got the mug as a present for his birthday, and they used to come in for work, have a mug of tea each and watch *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* (a TV series). The mug is like a giant cauldron, huge and takes up to a liter. His friend actually hated it, but since Eric bought it for his birthday, he had to keep using it. "It's just really impractical. It mysteriously broke..."

Another picture shows a practical joke,

You can see we're all in jail gear. So, this is in work, so that's Steve, Mick, Tom. They're all from, like... I didn't know them in school or anything. We're all just colleagues. The joke which

nobody got was that we were the prisoners of the company article. So, we all had article prisoner 1,2,3 and 4 in the back. We wanted our whole team to do it. But everyone was too scared to get fired.

Another picture shows Eric and his friends at a music festival. They thought I'd be funny to send a picture to their friend who could not be there with them. And they just decided to start pointing at things. And they just kept on since "it's funny when like in pictures, you see people pointing at things".

Eric grew up in Clontarf, Dublin with his two brothers, his grandmother, his dog, Harry, which he loved very much and his mother and father, married for 33 years. Overall, the family is very important for Eric and he explains that they are super close, "Yesterday, I spoke to my brother for two hours and two minutes". With his other brother, he has to schedule calls. "He's a salesperson, so we are formal like that". Now when he does not live at home, he misses them a lot and it is easy to see that Eric's family plays an important part in his life. Also, the Irish culture is of importance to Eric.

There have been so many, so many times where people have claimed them from the UK. And obviously, you don't expect everyone to be, you know, (be) educated on history, you know, but there is, like, we've been independent for like, a hundred years...we have our own language, ...and there's just, you know, yeah, it's a very different sort of culture.

As a child, Eric considered himself to be interested in things around him, but at the same time wanted to be left alone.

"I just wanted not to go to school and do things. So, I could learn more interesting things... more history, more video games, just stuff that was more, you know, kind of more relevant to a 10-year-olds life".

Not only are the video games an important part of Eric's life, but he also did a lot of sports when he was younger. As he describes it himself, he "did a little bit of everything".

When I was a kid, it would have been; Monday the scouts. Tuesday was Gaelic... Gaelic as the traditional Irish sports. And everyone plays it because it's so funded by the government. And Wednesday, I would have gone out with friends, Thursday would have been Hurling, Hurling the older, Irish sport. Friday would have been, probably, since my mom used to take like the controllers for the games. So, every Friday, I used to game all day because my parents would take them on school days so I wouldn't play it. Which was really wise looking back... and so used to always, and that's actually a thing that's kept going in my life... always on a Friday after work, I would never go for pints.... I'd always go home and play games. And Saturday, I would go out with my friends, it was always like quarter past two and go to the shops, sit around, do nothing. Go home... Do it all again on Sunday, then go to school. And repeat.

Eric's love for his friends paints his life with color. Even though he wanted to be left alone, he only wanted to be left alone for the things he did not like. But he liked talking and spending time with his friends and constantly learning new things. What they did together varied throughout the teenage years, in the younger years, it was more "hanging around, just sitting on walls, going to shops, buying Pepsi". Eric describes that even when you are young, going to the

shops, money is scarce which makes it a big deal to be able to buy things since it shows a form of independence. When Eric got older, the activities progressed. Around 15, Eric and his friends started drinking alcohol, which Eric describes as “really late” in Ireland. At 17, it was more going into town and nightclubs using fake IDs, meanwhile the year between 19-20 was dominated by college. Eric went to Trinity College, a number 1 college in Ireland, where he did “every society when I was in college”, further showing his social context and love for social gatherings.

Today, Eric lives in Lund where he studies his master’s in strategic management. There were two reasons why Eric decided to go to Lund. The first one is that in Ireland, the comparative course would have been 15,000 euro, money he did not want to waste to get a degree from the university which was ranked lower. Secondly, Eric wanted to move to Sweden. He went here, visiting his friend who studied here on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 2016. “All I remember was it was freezing. It was absolutely freezing”. However, Eric really liked it. “I thought to be super cold. Like, I mean, you know, Game of Thrones style... No, it was that comparative to Ireland actually prefer it...”. Other things Eric became fond of was the Helsingkrona building. “It was taller than any building in Dublin. Like that's ridiculous”. Eric actually applied to live there, since he did not understand how the application process worked and he just thought that they would let him in. “They emailed me back and said, said ‘Well, I can talk to you again if you’re lucky’ and then I was like, I just emailed them back saying I’m a lucky guy”. Now, however, his goal is to get up to the top of that building before leaving. “I'm trying to wiggle my way up to the top...I don't know why it's just a goal I have”.

Instead, Eric lives in a corridor with students with varying demographics, ages and nationalities. People who have come to play an important role in Eric's life. “They are really good and made my experience here great”. However, he was actually offered an apartment, but emailed them and asked for a corridor. “I've lived by myself before for six months, I hated it... I really, really hated it. It was really lonely”. He asked them if he could have a corridor and they gave him the corridor and the room that he has today. However, he wouldn't have taken it if he had known about the giant speaker of the guy living above him. “It's like, it was something you've seen a club... it's huge”.

The speaker further effects Eric’s morning routine. “I would get up at 8, depending on if the guy above me speaker’s going off. If not, then I'm getting up at 10 because he'll go till 3”. However, Eric does have a morning routine which he sticks too. He gets up, put on a timer for three minutes. “It's like this egg thing I got in Tiger [a shop]”. And he brushes his teeth. “And then after I've done that I floss, and then, mouthwash”. He explains that he needs to do that because of all the cavities from the Pepsi Max. After that, he takes his medicine, and then he cleans his room for ten minutes and does five minutes of meditation. Since it clears his mind for the day and helps him relax and makes him focused. “Obviously, sometimes I have to skip it because I was woken up late for an appointment when the guy above me speaker’s going off”. Otherwise, Eric keeps a diary which he updates regularly. Every day with the exception from days when he is hung over...” then I just lie in bed and cry”.



When talking about the future after graduation, Eric is not sure where he wants to go. However, Hong Kong is on top of the list.

My best friend of 18 years is there. And he's lived there for two years. And he's desperately trying to get me to come over. So... I said, you know what, I'll go, I'll move over there for six months, see how it goes. He initially moved over for a year, and he is now two half years over there. He loves every minute of it. So, he's trying to convince me now to come over. And yeah... so my only goal is to move there and get a job and just pay for an apartment. And that's like, my only goal.

However. Eric is not a work oriented person at all, and he does not engage in office politics, "...or I don't care... Like, I don't care about work". He is not career driven, instead, he cares about personal development. About making people laugh, and about constantly advancing, doing better than you did yesterday.

I don't care for helping some CEO's profits. No, I've never cared. I don't... I don't engage in my office politics or anything of that sort. Which is really bad. Because it's 'fecked' me over a lot of times before.

Erik explains how most people who are career driven and who commit themselves fully to work will regret it later on. To commit that level of energy to someone else's goals will kill you in the long run. For Eric, it is important to go his own way. It is the reason why he is one of 10 people out of 256 in his previous bachelor who did not go into the "Big Four".

I worked in a company and there were like cards on the wall, three cards in the wall of people in the last two years who had heart attacks. And, like, your family will take a hit like... you only have finished the amount of energy and takes all your energy...So... it removes it from ... and it removes it from things that you should actually be doing.

### *Eric's Life Theme and Life Projects*

Talking with Eric a life theme emerges creating a coherent picture of Eric and his life so far. A strong theme throughout Eric's life is the great importance of always going his own way, *the life theme of individuality*, something which could be seen strongly connected to the private self (Mick & Buhl, 1992). This could be shown already from young ages, when Eric described the weight and independence of being able to buy things with his own money when "hanging around, just sitting on walls, going to shops, buying Pepsi", but even in older days when he was one of ten people out of 256 in his previous bachelor who decided not to enter one of the Big Four. The individuality of identity construction could also be seen when Eric states the fact that he does not care for office politics or career, even though he describes how it has back-lashed several times before, creating unpleasant outcome. Even though, Eric continues to stick to his ethics and moral. The fact that Eric does not care about his career could be seen rather contradicting since he has been studying bigger parts of his life, not only did he decide to go to the number one college in Ireland, but he also went abroad to further study a master. This, however, could be linked to Eric's goal of individual and personal development, caring about "about constantly advancing, doing better than you did yesterday". In the same time, however,

Eric is easy going with goals and indulgence such as conquering the Helsingkrona building and watching Game of Thrones.

Linked to Eric's private self and the *life theme of individuality* through his identity construction, is the *life project of being an Irish citizen of the world*. In Eric's new socio-cultural context in Sweden, his Irish heritage is of great significance and the traditions which comes with it. Not only has he played a lot of Irish sports, such as Gaelic or Hurling, but he also puts a lot of weight in Ireland's history, independence and culture. Read through between lines is the fact that Eric gets somewhat offended when someone claims that he is from the UK, further showing the importance of his Irish identity creating a coherent of the pictures of his private-, nationality and community sphere. However, Eric further describes the importance of merging several different cultures and labeling himself as being rather international, which he concludes by saying that there's nothing better than meeting people from other cultures. This is exemplified by the fact that most of his friends the last three years have been European or outside, for example, his master thesis partner from China. Further, Eric describes his only goal as being moving to Hong Kong after graduation, showing that he's flexible, easy going and international seeking.

Another important *life project* of Eric's is *being humorous*, something which could be read throughout the whole interview. This has three purposes. First, he has self-distance, acceptable of the fact that he might not be the tallest or most handsome man, for example when he jokes about his reflection in the mirror "I don't like it, because I can see myself in the reflection" or the constant joke about his short length during the interview. Humour becomes a way to make up for his shortcomings. Second, he has noticed that people around him enjoys his humour, it has become part of his identity now which he continuously constructs around being the funny, ironic, guy. Third, humour is an excellent tool for him to be this easy-going, not goal- or career-oriented person, he sees himself as. Humour grants him with a relaxed attitude, just like Pepsi and meditation.

### *Eric's Woke CBR with Pepsi*

Even though Eric's life story paints a picture of Eric as being both individualistic and independent, he considers himself to be "dominated" by Pepsi. Consequently, Eric's overall *life theme of individuality* could be considered somewhat incoherent with his relationship to Pepsi. Eric describes how he deposited 72 cans of Pepsi Max, all from his room ("please don't judge me"). Even though he does not know for how long they have been there, he describes himself as "definitely addicted". He tried to quit once but instead, he supplemented it with a brand called Sentinel free. Sentinel free is basically Sprite Zero which as Eric describes it "makes it somewhat pointless". When answering the question of if there was a time he did not drink Pepsi except from the time when he was supplementing it for something else, he replied never.

When have I not been drinking Pepsi...? No, never. Never, since about 18, never, no. There was like, one day, one time I was without Pepsi. In on July 12- 14, 2015 because my appendix ruptured, and I was in the hospital. My mom was there and she did not give me any Pepsi

(laughs). They [family] got concerned because all my friends came to visit me, and they came in one by one and by the trade side your bed was just full of Pepsi and Coke Zero.

Eric further describes that if his mother saw him now or would know how much Pepsi he consumes “Oh my God, [then] she should be really upset”. His family is not the only one he’s hiding his relationship with Pepsi from. He further describes that he is lying to the dentist all the time. However, he is well aware that it might affect his teeth and his health which he further explains would be the only reason for him to quit Pepsi. Consequently, he has his morning routine where he brushes his teeth, floss and does mouthwash to prevent himself from all the cavities from the Pepsi Max.

Eric has become more sustainability conscious since he arrived to Sweden and he had no idea about recycling before he came here. A behavior which could be considered making up for the addiction he has towards Pepsi, somewhat destroying his individualistic and independent self. This self-destructing, but at the same time pleasurable relationship creates a somewhat incoherent picture which does not go hand in hand with his *life theme of individuality*. The relationship is moreover rationalized by saying that it’s a cheap addiction.

You could have gambling, or you could have started microtransactions and video games. And like, some people would be spending like, like 50,000 credits a month on a game. I'd like the lower end.... server spends 5000 euro per month... when a game like that's a bad addiction.

Eric describes a memory from his early age when he was approximately 9-10 years old. He used to always go to the shop on the way to school in the mornings and buy a cadet. He did love it and explains that was his favorite thing about the day. This illustrates how soft drinks have been a part of Eric’s life since early age, creating a heritage of importance and a part of his identity, just as his Irish heritage is of great importance for him. Consequently, Eric’s relationship towards Pepsi could be seen somewhat helping Eric not only in his life *project of being an Irish citizen of the world*, but to remain his identity wherever he might be.

...and then I stopped going in [to the shop] for like a week because I remember my mom said she talked to the shopkeeper and he said he wouldn't sell me anymore cadet. I was like 9 or 10 so I believed her, like... “oh god, I'm in trouble”. Yeah... And then it got two bottles of cadet then the full bottle, the 500 ml of Buffalo and it just progressed.

However, read throughout the interview is the fact that several different soft drinks have been consumed throughout the year and that Eric consequently has been cheating towards Pepsi, even if Pepsi still is considered to be at the top of the list. When comparing Pepsi to other soft drinks and what makes the relationship with Pepsi special, Eric describes that Pepsi is much preferred over Coke by the simple reason that it tastes better. “I can tell the difference between all of them [different soft drinks]. It's really scary... it's usually a party trick”. Eric described that Coke is more watery but in terms of brand perspective, he does not really care.

It's nothing to do with image, it's nothing to do with the coloring the texture and, it's purely the product itself. They could have a big pink bottle and I wouldn't care. I'm like, yeah, I'm drinking that. Once it's Pepsi Max, it's the taste of it I like, not the brand image. They could have text like on the cigarette packet I drink that, and I'm telling you I'd get it. ...the brand imagery doesn't

affect me. The placement does, in a shop. If I see one when I'm going, I'm definitely buying one...those ads don't mean anything to me.

Eric does not have lunch, he just drinks lots of Pepsi. "Have you ever seen me at ICA? I look ridiculous holding all the Pepsi Max". Eric drinks approximately five liters a day and he further describes, jokingly, that Pepsi means more to him than his family.

My vape pen and Pepsi Max. And the two things in my life. Someone was like, what would you bring to a desert island if you were stuck, like my vape and infinite supply Pepsi Max, and I just would not care about anything else.

Eric's opinion about the ad is that it is purely ridiculous, and that Pepsi is trying to capture something that is not Pepsi and has nothing to do with Pepsi "It's not like, Pepsi is going to start a revolution...Pepsi is for relaxation". This is further shown in the pictures Eric chose to represent Pepsi. A picture of Eric hung over, a picture of Eric being stressed, a picture of Eric relaxing and "every single picture that I ever have, you can put that in." This could also be translated to the fact that Eric wishes for more relaxation in his life, representing, for example, the five minutes of meditation in his morning routine. This since the meditation clears his head, "it will let you have a clear mind for the day ahead and keeps you focused".

Eric describes the best part of the ad to be the sound of the can being opened after being handed from Kendall Jenner to the police, which immediately created an urge for him to drink Pepsi. Since the ad does not affect Eric more than the urge to drink Pepsi, however, he describes that other things would.

If they're changing the flavor, or if they were changing, you know, something a key component like with the new Coke in 1961 or something, then yeah, I would, I'd be, you know, I'd engage almost lead the revolution.

As stated above, Eric claimed that his relationship with Pepsi has nothing to do with the brand and that it is purely the product itself that attracts him and further creates the relationship. However, it is inevitable that the brand of Pepsi, with its brand image with all it includes, has become a part of Eric's personal identity as his relationship with Pepsi has evolved. One example of this is from when Eric spent time at the hospital due to a ruptured appendix and his friends which came to visit him "they came in one by one and by the trade side your bed was just full of Pepsi". Being "The Pepsi Guy" creates a gimmick which add on build character to Eric's life project of being a humorous, ironic, guy. Eric's consumption of Pepsi could be considered as a type of trademark or spectacle which he could joke around with, however, Eric's relationship with and towards Pepsi is consequently a part of his identity and should be considered somewhat more intimate than he would like to consent to.

## 4.1.2 Case 2: Sarah

### *Sarah's Life Story*

Sarah is a 23 year old finance student from Romania who currently studies her master at Lund University. When she entered the room for her interview, she was very energetic and eager to talk. She was so enthusiastic that the authors almost did not have time to put on the audio recorder before she started talking about the first picture she brought. Throughout the interview she remained relaxed about the topic and talking about herself, at the same time she was very much in control. She giggled a lot but had some moments of serious tone in her voice and did not shy away from serious topics or experiences she has had.

The first picture she brought, representing her, was a picture of superhero Wonder Woman. Sarah sees herself in the comic character because she takes care of others and is very ambitious and strong. Sarah's ambitiousness and strength were shown in what she talked about during the interview, but her caring side was mainly left out of real-life examples. However, she is a firm believer of certain values which she sticks to.

My top three values have always been, you know, being passionate about what I'm doing, being ambitious is like always wanting more for myself and, yeah, striving to do more and better, doing things better. And then ... to be kind with people all the time and deal with stuff and, in a kind way, in situations.

To Sarah, Wonder Woman is also determined and a defender of herself and others, characteristics she wishes to ascribe herself with. She reflected upon how others see her, and that she has many different sides to her personality, but Wonder Woman is clearly who she wants to be.

I didn't like, provide a picture of myself it's just, yeah, cuz I don't feel like I have one that accurately defines all, like all of my sides because, the way people perceive me, it's like so different. It's very interesting to see like people have different versions of you and some people perceive me as like very cool, some people perceive me as like very introverted, some people just yeah, it's, it's very weird.

Sarah was puzzled about the different sides others see in her, and since she took an external perspective when figuring out which picture to choose, it shows to be somewhat of a concern of hers. Talking about her life, she brought up events and personal characteristics revealing the different sides of her and the transitions she has gone through. Sarah was born in the southern Romanian city Craiova where she grew up and lived until she was 19 years old. She only switched school once which was when she began high school. It was a really tough time for her as she had troubles finding friends and felt as though she did not fit in, something which affected her deeply both psychologically and physically.

I was almost like on the border of getting depression and I was anxious most of the time when I went to school, I couldn't fit in. (...) I used to have these, this feeling of throwing up all the time

even though it never happened. It was just from here [points to throat], I got like a full body, how do you say, like analysis like blood tests and like scans and everything, there was nothing wrong with me. It was just in my head you know.

Eventually, Sarah did find friends, and her best friend, through a common interest for Korean music, K-pop. Together with a group of girls she formed a dance crew creating dance covers of famous K-pop songs which led them to end up second place in a competition in Budapest, Hungary. Sarah remembers this as a “really fun adventure, we had a lot of fun, it was a fun part of my life”. That period of her life ended in the final year of high school when she focused completely on studying, a decision she today can view with other, more relaxed, eyes.

I used to take guitar lessons as well and I had the dance group, but, and I slowly quit every... single action... every single activity and focus entirely [on school] which I don't think it was a good approach in my, in my mind because all I was doing it was just ...studying.

Sarah remembers being sad and not very social at this point of her life, why she in hindsight thinks she should have kept her interests and activities. However, being ambitious in school is a prominent characteristic of hers. She chose to focus on studies to get grades good enough to get accepted to university. While there, she decided to go on an exchange year in Amsterdam where she kept on studying hard. But in Amsterdam, she also hit her first bump in the road study wise, something that completely knocked her off her feet and she started questioning herself.

When I went to University of Amsterdam it was like a whole different thing. A whole different level. It was really hard which is why I for the first time, I used to think I was just like straight A girl. I got high grades I had no problems you know... writing my assignments or writing tests and then I got confronted with my first ... uhm... retakes because I failed three subjects, and, while I was there. Two accounting subjects and one game theory and... it was like very, a very stressful time because I thought I was a person this, person who's like very smart and then I come there, and all my grades are like from a scale from 1 to 10 they have... I was getting 6, 7.5 you know that was the highest that I got; 7.5, and I was like “I'm a 10 person in Romania I get 10s!” you know so I... I was very deceived at that time.

Sarah is also ambitious when it comes to work and other commitments. Currently, she is part of a committee of the student union, but she is also helping her dad with his company, all this alongside studying full-time for her master's degree. Although she is working hard and goal-mindedly she did have some troubles answering questions about her future. Sarah was not completely sure with what and at which type of company she wants to work at or what her dreams are.

I don't have this very big dream right now because my biggest dream was to come here and study here so... that's kind of being fulfilled, I'm looking for a new dream, a dream right now. But I would love to uhm... yeah, I want to work in the finance. I'm not sure for what company, what field should the company be or whatever.

She found it easier to state what she does *not* want for her future. It is important for her to not live a “boring” life and to keep looking for opportunities to grow. Also, she might consider teaching others since she really enjoyed the teaching part of an internship she had during her third year of university studies.

My biggest fear is becoming this boring person who goes to work every single day, comes back from work and all they do, I mean I love Netflix, but all they do is like watch Netflix, chill with their boyfriend then go to sleep and start it all over again and then on the weekends, who knows, maybe we go to, on a little trip to the mountainside. No! I don't want that! It's so boring!

At the time she failed those courses in Amsterdam, Sarah had recently broken up with her boyfriend which made it even tougher for her to handle the academic defeat. “He was being a dick to be honest” she explained to the authors with a laugh, giving a hint of the strong feminist ideals she has. The reason for the break-up was the boyfriend’s close-mindedness, which Sarah throughout her grown-up life has decided not to accept. She relates to Wonder Woman having to defend herself from enemies, as she has had to defend herself from men.

Sometimes I feel like I have to defend myself from uhm... what... other people say, especially men because I have had to deal with men who are simply just like close-minded and very uhm... negative about... me... just being ambitious or stuff like that or even my... I've had situations where my own dad could not think that I would possibly, you know, get this particular job or something.

In line of defending herself, Sarah has read a lot about feminism. For example, Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg’s book on gender equality in the workplace which she read in order to be prepared for work life.

I was starting to see the way he [her first boyfriend] was treating me was not okay and I kept like reading these stuff about gender equality and what things are okay, when the things are not okay to happen or to do in a relationship, and I started seeing the signs and I was like okay this is not good so I also started reading a book by Sheryl, Sheryl Sandberg, she's the COO of Facebook and it's called “Lean in” and she's talking about all of the problems that women face at the workplace. And I was basically reading through it and I was saying okay this is... probably gonna happen to me, I wanted to read more into it just to make sure that... I see the signs and I don't let myself... you know... beaten, by some behaviors that my colleagues might have and stuff like that.

Sarah’s belief in gender equality grew stronger when she presented her thesis work to the board of examiners in her final year of bachelor’s studies. The thesis she wrote was about gender equality in the workplace which she found really interesting, however, one of the female examiners gave Sarah the “shock of my life”. She was still baffled and upset when she told the authors about how that examiner had said “if you want to do research, you should at least do research as well as a man would do it” and that the examiner did not even believe there was such a thing as gender *inequality*.

After graduating from Lund University, Sarah looks forward to moving back to Romania and Bucharest where her current boyfriend lives. Even though she really “hated it” when she came back from Amsterdam and left soon again for Sweden, she has always been missing Romania and Romanians and it’s easy to see that her home country is after all very important to her.

When I came here it was really hard in the beginning because I didn't know anyone and usually... it's this thing about Romanians, wherever you go you will find them (...) but here I didn't see any, I didn't meet any. For a very long time I thought I was the only Romanian in this town, I didn't have

any other Romanians to talk to, so I was mostly talking to my boyfriend and my family and my friends [back home].

Sometimes I would like to talk in my own native language. I kind of miss it even though I'm not fond of it, my language... uhm... but sometimes it's nice to speak in your native language with someone who's like, right there in front of you, not through a screen. And also because in my previous experience in Amsterdam, we kind of had our own Romanian clique, like group of friends and we did everything together and I was kind of expecting this to happen in Lund as well but it didn't so I had to turn to foreigners to make friends and do all those things that I used to do, yeah like traveling and going to parties and that.

When Sarah gets back to Bucharest she will start applying for jobs and see what happens, until then she has to finish her master thesis. Her mission at the student union committee also recently came to end, which saddens her. There, she has found her main group of friends and social context throughout her studies in Lund, with weekly meetings and other gatherings.

### *Sarah's Life Theme and Life Projects*

Learning about Sarah's life, an overall *life theme of ambition* emerges. It is the strong desire to always do better and aim high that guides Sarah in life – whether it regards studies, work or regular life. She is on the hunt for a life out of the ordinary and works in a structured and focused way to get it. Her ambition is further reflected in her *life project of feminist identity construction*, connected to the private self (Mick & Buhl, 1992). As people around her have challenged her, mainly men, but also those with which she did not fit in, in high school, her image of identity has too been challenged. She knows people perceive her very differently which she considers “weird” and is something that she thinks about. To resolve the image issue, to create a uniform view of her identity, a tool to construct and control identity comes in handy. This tool became feminism and with Wonder Woman as a guiding star Sarah devotedly educates and trains herself in the gender inequalities of the world to be her own superhero. Connected to community (Mick & Buhl, 1992) is Sarah's *life project of framing relationships*. Throughout her life, the most meaningful relationships she has had existed within clearly defined frames; the K-pop dance group, the Romanian clique, the student union committee, the boyfriends. Framing and labeling her friendships grants her access and defines her expectations of the relationships as well as other people's expectations of her. This project relates to her identity construction project, knowing the nature and label of each relationship enables her to control the role she plays in them as well. It also gives Sarah guaranteed acceptance. In these relationships it is not about fitting in – if you are a K-pop fan, a Romanian, a student or the love of someone, you are in. This project has also evolved into Sarah herself configuring the frames of relationships. When her religious Baptist ex-boyfriend could not fully accept her being Christian Orthodox, she ended the relationship.



Sarah brought a picture of a dammed river as describing what Always represents to her, a blocker which protects her from being stained by blood. She views Always and their pads with practical eyes and had little to say about the picture other than coming up with other analogies that could explain the practical function of the brand. Sarah started using Always from the first time she got her period, mainly because her mother used the brand. Her mother turns out to have played a big role in keeping the relationship with Always alive since Sarah always used whatever her mother bought for her. Now that she lives on her own, she sticks to Always. However, it is with little involvement that Sarah keeps buying the brand “I was like, you know, just put it in the bag, I didn't feel *anything* it was just like it's another day at a month, I have to buy these, okay”.

Even though Sarah's use of Always has been constant ever since she started using them, she has had different feelings towards the pads and the brand. In the beginning of this relationship, Sarah felt awkward wearing the pads which she also connects to the general feelings of awkwardness teenage life brings. Sarah stopped using the pads during daytime when she got a more active lifestyle in Amsterdam, biking every day. Tampons were consequently better to wear, and she did no longer feel comfortable with Always during daytime. However, she continued using Always night pads which today is the *only* pad she uses, which she explicitly points out. Nowadays her feelings towards buying Always have changed, she feels the most secure with their pads during night time. However, she has gone from a state of inertia when she purchases the pads, to feelings of guilt or bad conscience due to her recent interest in sustainability issues. “I feel bad about *me* choosing the pads even though I ... know there are other more sustainable ways”. Further, Sarah is not a fan of big corporations and FMCGs as a product category. She acknowledged that Always is part of Procter & Gamble (P&G) which she has a “problem” with. This is to the point where she is actively considering switching from Always pads to a menstrual cup.

[Big companies] are ... doing a lot of bad things to the planet, because of their products so now, since I've been [in Sweden] I've also switched to more sustainable mindset than before and hence why I want to try the, the cups because the cups are more sustainable.

In this sense, Always as a relationship partner is not in line with Sarah's *life theme of ambition*. With her newly adapted sustainable mindset, she wants to do better than the pads by using the cup. Because of her ambition, she educates herself on how she can be a better consumer and her ambitious side is what creates a feeling that she needs to buy the cup. Sarah knows that she could and should do better, and in this scenario Always becomes the bad guy hindering her from being better and improving. She justified her continued purchase of Always saying “I'm gonna buy [the cup] next month”, but it is a big one-time cost which turned out to be a bigger threshold than her sustainable thoughts are motivators.

On the days of her period, Sarah usually feels a bit stressed and anxious about the logistics of it all. “Still there are some leaks happening so you get this anxiety”. She does not fully trust in Always' ability to protect her sheets from stains while she sleeps, and this distrust is another

reason why she is considering switching to the cup. The cup attracts Sarah also because of its almost exotic allure.

I was so shocked because you won't see this in Romania. You don't even see it in like pharmacies, yeah, you have to order it online or something. Because people are still a bit fearful. They're also a bit fearful of tampons because you have to put them in and "oh my god what's gonna happen, it's gonna be painful" or whatever, especially for girls who are still virgins and all that.

The presence of the cup in the local grocery store in Sweden reminds Sarah more about her feminist ideals than Always pads does. The way she almost mocked the general perception of feminine hygiene products in her home country showed that she is perhaps above and over Always pads. In *constructing her feminist identity*, the cup and tampons are suitable because Sarah perceives them as more progressive than pads.

When her mom for a short period changed to another brand called EveryDay, Sarah started using those too because they did not irritate her skin as much as Always day pads. However, she always used Always night pads because there is less movement and friction when she sleeps.

I don't have like a very deep connection with the brand itself, it's just that, since my mom used it and she introduced me to it, I kind of used it and have never looked at any other options that much. I only started like experimenting with other brands when, I was living by myself, like in Amsterdam, and here, I've been trying Libresse because I think this, is it a Swedish brand?

It seems as if Sarah's relationship with Always, or should one say Always' relationship with Sarah, is hanging on by a thread. In addition to having been degraded from the only product used to now being a supplement to tampons, Sarah has also experimented a bit with other brands, and she consciously refrains from connecting emotionally with the brand. However, Always has remained the brand of choice for night pads, it has been a constant in Sarah's life for a long time.

Sarah's dislike of FMCGs and big companies like P&G creates a relationship where Always is sort of slapped down to a role it cannot get out of. This links to Sarah's *life project of framing relationships*. Because Always belongs to P&G, Sarah places the brand in the same evil corporate category as the big companies she does not like. This dictates the expectations she has of the brand which are consequently very low. Even though the brand made an ad with a message in line with her feminist opinions, she has set such rigid frames for the relationship that she does not validate actions and behavior breaching those. It does not seem to matter how Always act, Sarah wants to be in control. In this relationship, it is not Sarah who has to fit in or qualify, it is Always that needs to behave in order to stay in her life. The brand is only to function as a dam during the nights of her period, nothing more. Although Sarah did not speak fondly of Always, the brand has still become a constant companion in her life ever since she got her period. This is much thanks to her mother, a relationship which is thereby sort of framed by Always. It links this life project also to the family sphere of Sarah (Mick & Buhl, 1992). The brand has always been there and that is all she needs. Because of the frames of Sarah's relationship with Always, the message of the ad was mostly neglected by her. Sarah did not consider it to be true to the brand of Always, the message is outside of the frames she has

constructed of the brand. Her perception of the brand did neither change after she saw the ad. To her, Always cannot change, she is in control.

At the same time, she did foresee this coming from Always and was not surprised by the ad since she recently has seen this type of message from other companies. She viewed the commercial as a type of “femvertising” which she is somewhat negative towards.

I agree with the message of the video. It's just that coming from a big company it's really hard to, believe it, to believe that it's genuine and, this whole thing right now it's, it's called “femvertising”, like advertising and in a feminist way. And I agree with their messages usually, but I don't know if they're believable especially to our generation. It feels a bit forced, maybe today younger audience, if they see this, they will feel like inspired. But to us it's a bit, disingenuous for some reason, it's like they, they want to cash, cash out on our empowerment so to speak.

Sarah thus viewed it as Always is looking to capitalize off of feminist ideas which she cannot stand behind. It therefore opposes her *life project of feminist identity construction*. Even though she was emotionally moved by the ad, she still thought it was ingenuine. She could not internalize the message, even if it is in line with her feminist opinions. Even though she said she was not convinced by the ad, it did spark a thought in her: “the commercial was actually a bit emotional, not gonna lie. It makes me think that girls are being taught how to *not* have confidence”. Her *life theme of ambition* is reflected in this line of thought. Here, Always as a brand did succeed in appealing to that part of Sarah, although she did not recognize it. It is this idea of confidence in girls that she could relate to, which she has struggled with and been challenged for by men. Her voice was trembling when she shared this thought and she continued: “I feel that if we encourage girls to *explore* more and be more adventurous then, we wouldn't have this type of issue.” Here, Sarah actually developed the message from Always and the brand became an ally in her strivings. It tells her it is ok to be ambitious and to aim high. Exploration and adventure are outcomes of confidence and ambition, and Sarah is hoping to keep that part of her with her throughout her life. She does not want to become “this boring person”.

Sarah is not sure *when* she will stop using Always, indicating she is looking to end the relationship eventually. She thinks she will still have some night pads at home even when she starts using the cup, as a backup. If Always was to disappear from her life she claimed she would feel indifferent and just start using another brand. However, she is not interested in changing brand.

They *can* be replaced with another brand or with another cup it's, the only reason why I'm not switching to others is because I've used them for such a long time and I know they work and I don't feel like experimenting when it comes to this thing I don't want to wake up with my favorite pair of lingerie, you know, destroyed.

In this way, Sarah puts more significance to Always as a brand than she might think. Even though the trust is not fully there, because of leaks sometimes, she relies on Always to keep her underwear from being “destroyed” and the stakes are too high to try another brand. She is not sure what it would take for her to stop using Always.

If Always as a brand did something wrong ... something really bad ... if I found out something like a scandal that would definitely make me change or something like environmental related, if I see something that really shocks me and I'm like "okay this is the last drop, I'm switching" you know, that would make me change. But other than that, it's maybe if I get like a sample from a different brand and I get to try it once and I feel okay with it then I might change. If it's cheaper, if it's not cheaper than why change? I already like it the way it is right now.

Again, cost surfaced as a determining factor essentially conquering Sarah's sustainability and feminist interests. She further does not want to be let down by her brand partner, if it does "something really bad" she will leave no room for negotiation.

### 4.1.3 Case 3: Rebecka

#### *Rebecka's Life Story*

Rebecka is a 28 year old student from Mexico, currently located in Lund where she is studying for her masters' degree in Managing People, Knowledge and Change at Lund University. Rebecka was born in Mexico, but moved with her family, consisting of her father, her mother, her two brothers and her sister from Mexico City to Toluca, approximately 40 minutes from Mexico City when Rebecka was younger, something which she did not appreciate "I hated Toluca, it was a small place with not that much things to do".

The picture Rebecka brought to represent herself was a picture of herself when she volunteered with an NGO after the earthquake in Mexico City 2017. The picture shows Rebecka, together with other participants, visiting different communities where all the houses had fallen which they were trying to rebuild.

I think that, like this, represents me in a way that I'd like to be someone who like takes action, like, it's not only like saying but also tries to do something about things that worry me.... I don't know why but, it gives me a little bit the sense of freedom as well.

Freedom has been important for Rebecka and she continues by stating that she thinks that "the most important goal ... to feel, like I'm free to take my own decisions and to do or go whatever I want to go." The determined person who takes action, as during the earthquake, started to grow in Rebecka already from an early age. When her family moved to Toluca, she found herself in a particular context during elementary school as well as at home, making her feel sad and lonely. With a problematic situation both in school and at home, she became the problem-solver for both herself and her family.

I think since childhood, I was like, you know, when, something was not able to be done I will always try to find the ways to do it. So, I think, and as well when I go to interviews, I think I describe myself like as a problem solver because I always try to find a way of how to do it... I think it has been like since the beginning with me.

Rebecka's parents cared for her education and sent her to a private elementary school to make sure that she was well educated and had good opportunities for her future. The knowledge gap between her public kindergarten and the private elementary, however, was big. When Rebecka started private elementary school, she was one of the few who did not know how to read or write. Her dad sat down with her every afternoon after work until Rebecka was able to reach the other students' level. However, the feeling of not fitting in stuck with Rebecka and came to affect all of her 6 years in elementary school, something she remembers with sadness.

I kind of, the point is that I think I'd never develop friends during elementary school actually.... thinking about it, I think it was actually the saddest part of my life because I was always kind of lonely, and you know, like, this break time which like all the kids enjoy it because it's time for to go and play and...I hated them, because I had no one to go and play with so sometimes I took lunch like you know in the bathroom... I hated to let them know that I was kind of really lonely and then, then, I had to go to the bathroom or sit down alone .... oh, I don't know.... I remembered I hated that so much. I hated the breaks with all my heart.

Rebecka tried different approaches, in the beginning, she tried really hard to be a part of the group in elementary school.

We played you know this game where you hide somewhere and then people look for you and then, for example, I was hiding and nobody, I never... at one point, I realized, like, it makes no sense for me to keep trying with these kids.

Here, Rebecka realized that her life depends on herself "the goal it was like, I'm going to change the school, I'm going to start over". This experience made a huge impact on Rebecka and the person she became. However, she confessed that at some point, due to feeling both lonely in school and misunderstood at home, around 9-10 years of age, she even considered suicide. Thanks to religion, she found her strength in her faith in God and the communication she had with him during the hard times. "I was like, it's on you, like, you can do this. And since then I think I've been having like this sort of ... like, it's you, it's you ... you can do it. Whatever it takes. It's, it's, you."

When Rebecka started middle school, things changed and she finally made friends, some of them which she still stays in contact with today. In terms of friendship, things got better. Rebecka explains that her Erasmus (exchange semester) was one of the best experiences she has had because for the first time in her life, she felt that the love that she gave was given in return "like, real friendship". Today, she does not care if anyone does not like her, "I don't feel the need to make them like me, you know, it's like, I don't care anymore, it's like, it's not something I need any more". If something gives her stress or anxiety, she has no urge to feel that she has to put up with it. For Rebecka, the earthquake was the worst thing that could happen in her life, to her city and to her family, giving her perspective about her fundamental values and what is important in life, and she continued to solve problems, just like in early age. Rebecka's life story reflects the complex situation of always trying to solve problems, yet trying to escape them to create freedom and the life she would like to build up for herself elsewhere, far away from home. Consequently, she is constantly drawn between the conflict of dependence and independence with her family.

I think that some point that became like, something, really heavy to carry because it has to be like about everybody's problem: my dad, my mom, my sister, my brother. And then I think that's as well where I started to travel or try to, like, because, I don't know, here, outside, like, you don't know those things right? So, you don't need to worry about them and again I feel like a little bit like free...free for you of those worries.

These problems were the main reasons Rebecka pushed herself to take long trips, start studying in Sweden and aim to meet people from different cultures and with different perspectives. So, she could learn more and be even freer. However, it took a while for Rebecka to be able to take her master's degree. Either it was health issues, family issues or financial issues which were standing in the way.

Like ...and there was another issue.... another issue...another issue .... like again and then I remember I was like I don't give a shit even if I have this zombie virus, I'm gonna take that plane and then go to Lund and I was like I have to do it.

In May, before coming to Sweden in August, Rebecka ended up in the emergency room where they had to perform surgery. Since her insurance was not that good, she had to pay a lot of fees which significantly reduced the money she had saved for her studies abroad. Since Rebecka is 28, she has already been working for some years as a business consultant "I was really used to get like my own money and to spend it on whatever I wanted to do". This has restricted Rebecka from going out for cocktails, going to classes such as kickboxing, tennis, badminton, going to theater, museum or other cultural and social activities. Inevitably, Rebecka finds herself in a battle between being an independent hard working woman not leaving the office until 9 o'clock in the evening ("you're like, oh my god I went out early, that's amazing") and the limitations life as a student brings, making her codependent on her family.

When I ran out of money... I was like, I should start like asking for my parents..., like, I need to stay...and then my youngest brother of us, like, already working, and I remember that he was texting me like "how much money do you need I will send you some".

This shows the strong ties she has to her family. Since Rebecka is the oldest of all the siblings and the first to learn English, she was responsible for teaching her younger siblings. Gradually, Rebecka came to take more responsibilities at home, becoming an additional mother for the whole family.

I remember even when my, my sister was, she had an exchange in Dallas, she was texting me or calling me like "what soap should I use for the clothes", or... my brother, my youngest brother, was calling me like, so they are asking me for this, this job, 'should I take this?' Which is nice, like they trust you, but you know, at some point, I was really in charge of them and then as well my mom thought that it was a good idea to be open about their, uh, like.....like their discussions as a couple but then I ended up mediating between them and then sometimes knowing more then I should..... or what I would like to know, from whatever was happening between them.

Rebecka actively maintains ties to her home base while making concerted efforts to separate herself from her family, reduce her dependency on their support and authority, and develop a new life of her own. The conflict between dependence and independence proceeds. Rebecka's

goal was to find a job in Europe, however, since Rebecka's mother needs to have spinal surgery, she is going back to Mexico to help her family.

They [parents] were calling me because they were kind of not sure of what they were doing... some doctors were doing this, and some doctors were saying other things.... and then I remember, I don't know at some point that my dad told me like, like, "we need, we need you here, to take the decisions because you make questions that we don't ask. You make research that we don't do, and your siblings are not helping.

Rebecka explains that she loves her parents and of course, if they need her she should be there for them because they were there for her. However, in the long run, she dreams of adopting kids.

I'm not able to see long turn future.... but first, I think I would really like to adopt, to be able to adopt, one or two kids. I really believe that first, it is not relevant that we keep bringing new babies to this world that we'll end up soon and second, I think those kids are already here and there is nobody here to like love them and take care of them I feel totally capable of loving the child that has never been inside me.

In terms of future jobs, Rebecka would like to either develop her own network for mentorship towards companies, for example, an incubation hub with startups, or join as a mentor to a bigger company. Except that, she explains she wishes to put her feet in one country of every continent of this world making, once again, traveling and the freedom it brings one of her big passions.

### *Rebecka's Life Theme and Life Projects*

After the interview with Rebecka, the *life theme of solving problems* emerges as a read thread throughout her life. This theme is strongly linked to the private self sphere and her meaning of being an individual human (Mick & Buhl, 1992), however, her life theme continuously drags her between the both drivers and barriers in different spheres, such as within the community sphere with her own, career goals and the family sphere with her own family and the family she wishes to create for herself, always fighting a constant battle of wishes to be fulfilled.

This *life theme of solving problems*, yet constantly striving for the *life project of being a free individual* collides, creates a prison from which she cannot escape. Consequently, Rebecka finds herself torn between what she wants for herself, and what she should provide for family. Since Rebecka is a student, she found herself in an issue of finance she never has experienced before, leaving her financially dependent on her family. The longing for her own job and income, reducing the ties from her home base to separate herself from her family is strong, not only physically but also mentally. The wish to reduce her dependency on their support and develop a new life of her own is growing solid but rather secretly inside of Rebecka. A strong, loving and culturally embossed connection tells her to focus on her existing family, meanwhile, another strong voice tells her to focus on creating her own family, adopting the children she wishes for and to achieve her own goals and dreams. Thus, Rebecka is torn between doing something for herself and sacrificing herself for the family who so desperately needs her. Rebecka's retrospect of her multiple, colliding self-pictures and self-definition compose a

central life task for Rebecka. Since both goals are of central importance, the two remain leaving her feeling insufficient since the two of them are incommensurate. Interesting is, however, the fact that no relationship, except for the ones with her family appears important during the interview. Might it have been, that the tough years during Rebecka's childhood left so deep marks that they never healed?

Another *life project* of Rebecka is the one filled with *unselfishness and generosity*. Firstly, through the future children she would like to adopt, secondly, during the earthquake in which she volunteered to resolve and rebuild the city she once called her home and lastly in her future career as a mentor. The chosen picture of the earthquake, chosen to represent Rebecka's life becomes a symbol of everything Rebecka believes in: Solving problems, freedom, generosity, and her family.

### *Rebecka's Woke CBR with Gillette*

Rebecka explains that she is really loyal towards the brand as she describes the product which she uses, Gillette Venus, as "effective but soft at the same time". She further describes how Gillette gives her a sense of confidence. This was also the reason why she chose a picture of herself standing in front of the pyramids of the Aztecs in a confident pose to describe what Gillette meant for her. She likes this picture of herself, "it's nice, it's cool", because it shows her confident, happy self.

If I am going to go to the beach or I'm going to wear a dress or something like that and then.... it's just the first, like, I just feel [confidence] that there won't be any hair saying hello somewhere.

She trusts the brand, "I trust that I can use it and it won't harm my skin or, I won't get like that, risk of hurting myself..." consequently, Gillette is a solution to one of the many problems in Rebecka's life, creating a utilitarian function. However, just like for Sarah, a hint of her individual, strong and free side shines through when she describes how the same product for men and women can vary in price, being more expensive for the females. Another project which she would like to solve if possible, displaying once again her life theme of solving problems.

Rebecka further describes how she was late with the use of shaving products since her mother was against it. Consequently, Rebecka's relationship with Gillette is in line with Rebecka's life project of being a free individual, breaking free from her family's habits and values to go her own way. Since her mother did not shave, she started to use whatever was laying at home which just happened to be the razors her father used. "I remember the first..., (it) was like this basic blue, which is really bad quality, it's really cheap and it really hurts". Today, she uses a combination of laser and shaving with Gillette. As long as she has shaved, Gillette Venus has been a loyal partner, "always getting the job done in a gentle way" as she describes it.

Rebecka is not the only one in her family who is a fan of Gillette, even though her mother is considered to be a somewhat opponent.



My youngest brother, as well, he's like a fan of Gillette so he has like these...do you know this is special razors that you changed some stuff that it's kind of metal kind of fancy one...and, so, he trusts the brand, because, the moment he starts owning his own money, uh, he bought like this more sophisticated Gillette package thing so I think... the more he is able to invest in the brand he's investing...even in the skin products or stuff so.....and, so... I think the family is more Gillette.

Even her sister uses Gillette and back home, they sometimes went together to the store, buying Gillette and switching the colors after preferences, something which created a bond, making her relationship not only with her sister, but also with Gillette stronger.

She further describes the bad experience she has had with a competing brand within the same category, called BIC. "It's the blue one, it's a really cheap and simple one that you can kind of use, but I don't trust it. I'm afraid that it will hurt me..." For Rebecka, Gillette, in comparison to BIC, represent confidence and good quality.

Speaking about the ad, Rebecka was not surprised about the change of direction from Gillette, even though she expresses that she was not expecting it when Gillette went from 'the best a man can get' to 'the best a man can be' in their commercial. She describes how Gillette is joining the wave with brands getting into discourse and discussing relevant topics, something she does not stand against, even though the opinions expressed are rather gentle and cautious.

But somehow, I think that it's okay because it helps to normalize, even if you don't believe the brand so much, the fact they are doing it (wokeness) helps somehow to normalize this idea of stop behaving the way we were behaving, and so, you know, I think that it's, it's okay that they contribute to reach this type of topics because I think that brands somehow, sometimes, they have like this power to influence others or so if they are using actually their marketing to help to improve some perceptions it's okay.

Even though she earlier explicitly described her trustfulness, she now describes how she is having problems trusting the brand "I know that money at the end it's behind everything, right...". On the other hand, she likes the ad since she can see the reflection of her own experiences in it.

I have experienced that, you know, it, I think it triggers a feeling of .... I'm not sure if nostalgia is a good word but you know like, saying, like, I've been there... I've been experiencing that, so if you're really working for that to stop that would be really nice.... I feel related.

She found the ad especially interesting since they were targeting women.

If you as a woman feel connected, then you will tend to use it because at the end you're the one who is selecting it for the men.... like, when my little brother came to live to the apartment with my sister and I...so when we were going for groceries for example, we were buying the razor for him, and then as well...I remember I used to go with my mom for shopping to the supermarket we were buying the same stuff for my dad, for my siblings...

However, once again, Rebecka states that she still trusts the brand and that her perception of the brand did not change "like, I still see it as a reliable brand with good quality products. I think that's mainly it". She would not like to change brand since it would be an opportunity cost, she rather travels to another store than her usual one.

To focus on finding a new brand and that's, and that's, it's like extra work I wouldn't like, you know, because you know I already trust them, so, if there was like a reduction where I have to do some things in order to get it I think I will have the will to make an extra effort to find it....

Yet, Rebecka stated that at some point she might stop using Gillette, mostly since she is trying to be more sustainable, displaying the project of hers of being an unselfish and generous person, an action which is in line with her restitution towards the family or her volunteered after the earthquake in Mexico City 2017.

Like for example, I am not buying anymore the plastic bottle for the liquid soap...and I'm trying to with the shampoo so.... so, uh, I think that eventually if I find some, some brand that is more eco-friendly the I found that there are some made of bamboo or stuff like that, that, will be my turning point maybe, like the material and the plastic will be the thing that made me change the brand.

#### 4.1.4 Summary of Ideographic Analysis

To summarize the findings of the respondents' woke CBRs with their respective brand, Table 4 shows how they relate to respondents' life themes and projects.

	Eric	Sarah	Rebecka
<b>Life Theme</b>	The relation to Pepsi as such is incoherent with Eric's theme of individuality, but Pepsi the brand has become part of his identity.	Always, mainly, does not relate to Sarah's theme of ambition. The brand holds her back from being a more sustainable consumer, but its call for confidence in girls does stir emotions in her.	Rebecka has a somewhat rational relationship with Gillette which clearly relates to her theme of problem solving, it helps her solve problems.
<b>Life Project 1</b>	Pepsi helps Eric with being an Irish citizen of the world. It builds his heritage and grounds him in his background. As a global brand it also brings him out in the world as global citizen.	Always is a tool for Sarah to frame relationships, both good and bad ones. Always has become part of the benchmarks she has for identifying "evil" corporations but also a part of the frame of the relationship with her mother.	Gillette stops Rebecka from being a free individual, it ties her down to her family. It also gives her freedom through opposing her mother's opinions and making her feel secure and confident.
<b>Life Project 2</b>	Pepsi helps Eric with being humorous. As "The Pepsi Guy" who drinks Pepsi instead of eating, Eric can be funny and relaxed.	Always does not help with Sarah's feminist identity construction. The products are not progressive enough and she cannot support the brand's "femvertising".	Gillette's razors are unsustainable. To be generous and unselfish, Rebecka should stop using Gillette. But Gillette is also a tool for her to show generosity in how she buys razors for family members.

Table 4: Woke CBR in relation to respondents' life themes and life projects.

## 4.2 Cross-Case Analysis

When analyzing the different relationships, both differences and similarities could be identified. Looking more into Eric and his relationship with Pepsi, something which comes across is the strong dependency, Eric is a slave under Pepsi which in some ways hurts him. This seems to be embedded in the love and passion he feels towards Pepsi. This somewhat confusing relationship is sometimes fled from to other soft drink brands, making Eric a cheater in the relationship and

also the only regular cheater in comparison to the other respondents. Although Sarah have tried other brands of pads, it has only been one time events and happened rarely. Eric is well aware that he has to stop drinking Pepsi but justified the addiction with the low cost and the possibilities to recycle. The environmental perspective as a possible relationship dissolver was seen in all relationships, where everyone wished for more sustainable relationships in terms of environmental aspects. Interesting about Eric's relationship, is, however, that meanwhile the relationship is a secret for some, such as his dentist or his mother, he is still proud over it, showing it off for friends, making it an integrated part of his identity, even though he might not want to admit it.

Eric's delicate brinkmanship towards Pepsi could further be seen in Sarah's relationship with Always, a relationship more or less imposed (by her mother) but at the same time by choice. She relies on the brand and does not want to experiment with others, an idea she has in common with Rebecka who deem switching brands unnecessary since it implies switching costs, making it impractical. Since Sara's relationship with Always was initiated by her mother, it could be a reason she has stayed in it, even though she repeatedly talks of the plenty reasons to leave. Perhaps Always reminds her of her childhood and the gentle relationship with her mother – a connection invaluable to keep alive as she does not live near her mother anymore. Even if Always is seen as a companion Sarah, in a contradicting way, still sees them as the bad guy responsible for climate change and equality injustices. It does not matter what they do – it is never good enough for her.

Rebecka, the rational problem solver, shows loyalty towards Gillette because “they get the job done” – a practical perspective and well thought-through which is not to be seen in the other relationships to the same extent. With Gillette, Rebecka feels safe and confident and her relationship appears stable. The brand is like an old friend of hers, it has been part of her life for a long time, they have gotten along well but are not too close. Yet, Gillette keeps tying Rebecka to her family, thus encouraging the destructive habit of choosing their needs over her own and neglecting her sought freedom. However, she did not want to commit fully, when she modestly expressed that she appreciated the woke commercial. Common for all three respondents is the reluctance to fully commit to their relationships. Rebecka's choice of brands was and is always actively made, however, she still cannot fully commit but remains somewhat distanced.

#### 4.2.1 Contradictions

All relationships and respondents share the presence of several contradictions. The respondents talked a lot about ideas, opinions, future plans and wishes in ways that sometimes contradicted what they actually did or do. Sometimes they even contradicted their own lines of thought. These contradictions surfaced in their woke CBRs. Eric expressed his absolute love for Pepsi while he also wants to leave the relationship because Pepsi is bad for him. Sarah talks about ending her Always relationship because of Always' flaws but she also considers the brand to be the best. Rebecka is looking to eventually stop being loyal to Gillette in favor of more sustainable alternatives. Eric, Sarah and Rebecka are tied up in *bad romances* so to speak.

Eric hides Pepsi from some people while at the same time he is “The Pepsi Guy”, it is a *private and public relationship* all at once. Rebecka too has kind of a private and public relationship with Gillette in the way she is open about her use of Gillette but does not really want to admit to liking the brand. She does not want it to define her. Sarah’s clarifying of how she only uses Always for the night and nothing more indicates the limited spotlight Always can get in public.

Eric praises Irish culture while he also wants to live internationally, a *local versus global tension* appears. Sarah exposes similar thoughts and actions. She wanted to leave Romania for Amsterdam but spent time mainly with Romanians while there. Back in Romania once again, she hated it and left for Sweden, only to find herself disappointed in the lack of Romanians. She wishes to conquer the world but plans to immediately go back to Romania to her boyfriend after graduation. Rebecka dreams of traveling the world and wish she could stay and work in Europe but is drawn back to Mexico over and over again. However, no matter how grounded she is in the local, her longing for the global remains strong.

Another contradiction of Eric is his claim of being rather relaxed and not career-oriented, but at the same time pursue higher education. This indicates that some career-related goals must exist within him. Sarah watches a lot of Netflix, she loves movies and TV series, but her worst fear is becoming a boring Netflix couple with her boyfriend. Rebecka says she trusts Gillette, but she does not trust their ad. She further does not care about the brand of her razors, but her great loyalty towards Gillette begs to differ. Eric stresses that the brand of Pepsi has nothing to do with his consumption of the soft drink, even though his bonds to Pepsi are dreadfully strong. The respondents contradict their own beliefs and actions and are completely unaware of it, these are glitches that occur unnoticed creating *system error* in the human mind.

There are other contradictions that respondents are perhaps more aware of. Sarah is a feminist, but she does not fall for Always’ feminist branding. However, her disapproval of “femvertising” is a thought-through reason for it. Both Sarah and Rebecka aim to do better than their brands in terms of sustainability but consider it too expensive and risky to do so at the moment. It makes it valid to question how strong Sarah’s and Rebecka’s environmental idealism really is, and if they actually “*walk the talk*” when it all comes down to it.

In Rebecka’s case, there is one contradiction that her woke CBR partner Gillette helps balancing out – that of independence versus dependence. Gillette constitutes the perfect middle way in the ongoing tussle between living her own life and being forever tied to the needs of her family. Gillette is hers but also her family’s, it balances out the contradiction as an *equaliser*. In similar manner, Pepsi balances out Eric’s contradiction between being locally grounded and globally present. Same goes for Sarah, while she’s drawn out into the world, Always pulls her back to Romania, with her mother as an anchor.

## 4.2.2 Wokeness

Even in the woke CBR in terms of life themes and projects, different contradictions could be found. Seen in Table 4, the brands can both correspond to and avert from the respondents' life themes, they can also help or hinder respondents from advancing in their life projects if the wokeness of the brands lines up with respondents' life themes and life projects.

Looking into Eric's relationship with Pepsi, Eric does not care about the woke commercial, he does not even reflect or comment upon the message if not asked for. For Eric, it is important to stay unattached to Pepsi's brand. However, the message expressed in the commercial should be able to help him advance in his life theme and projects since it actually corresponds with them. Pepsi encourages consumers to "live bolder, live louder, live for now" something which should relate to Eric's theme of individuality, but also encourage his life project of being an international Irish with ambitions to see the world, exploring limits and try his boundaries of possibilities. To "live for now" is also in line with Eric's hunt for a relaxed attitude and lifestyle with the project of being humorous. However, Eric remains unattached and bored.

The same overlapping themes apply for Sarah who by definition is a woke feminist, but just as Eric, she refuses to sympathize. Sarah dislikes "evil corporations" and cares greatly about sustainability and feminism, with ambitions to become Wonder Woman. Something which Always, in their commercial, tells her she can be. However, she turns down the offer. Her theme of being ambitious correlates with Always telling girls to be confident, and Always even helps her to frame the relationship when they formulate themselves as "the good guy", a position she is not willing to give them. Always takes a clear stand in the feminist discussion, however, Sarah remains unhappy. Consequently, Eric and Sarah have the same attitude and view.

Rebecka, in comparison to Sarah and Eric, is the only one who shows some gentle positivity towards the woke commercial and further internalizes the message and in a rational way relate it to herself yet being able to see the bigger picture. Gillette is generous in the sense that they want to change the perception of "how to be a man" and make a better society for all, something which is in line with Rebecka's theme of unselfishness and generosity. Gillette is further increasing her freedom, by contributing to a society free from the oppression of toxic men, with whom she has had unpleasant experiences before. Even if Rebecka is slightly positive, it is not without hesitation. The same fear of being fooled, leaving her to feel stupid is visible in how she, in a rather uncertain way, navigates through trust and mistrust, security and insecurity as well as fragmentation and holistic.

Interesting is that even though the woke perspective is in with the life themes and projects, the relationship does not match as it should. Why does it not work? Or does it?

### 4.2.3 Snapshots of the Woke CBRs

To further clarify the three woke CBRs studied, they can be illustrated with the theoretical framework as a template.

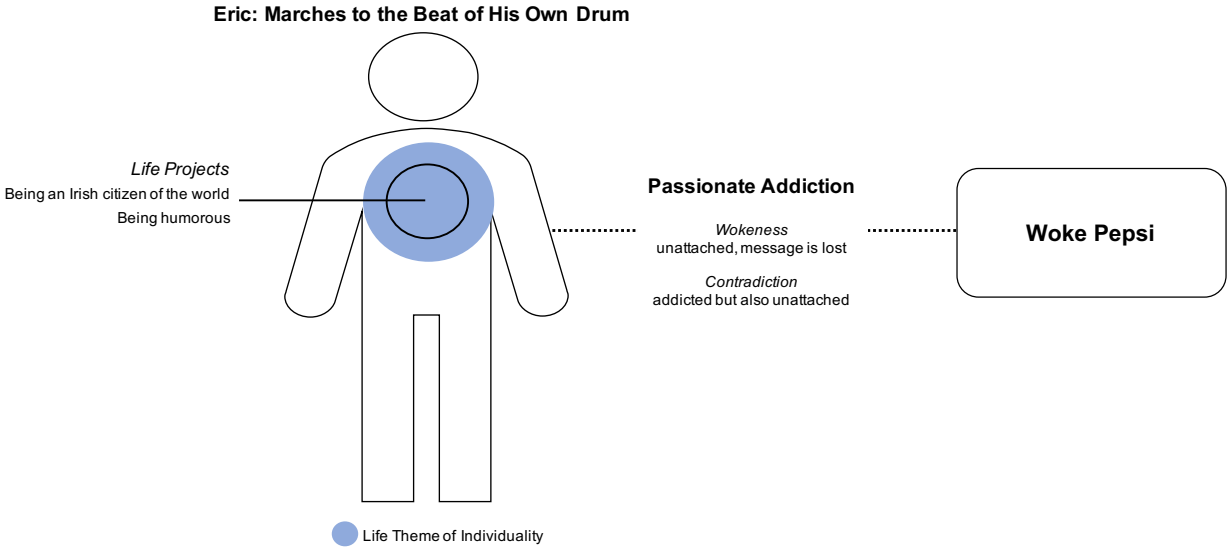


Figure 5: Eric and his woke CBR.

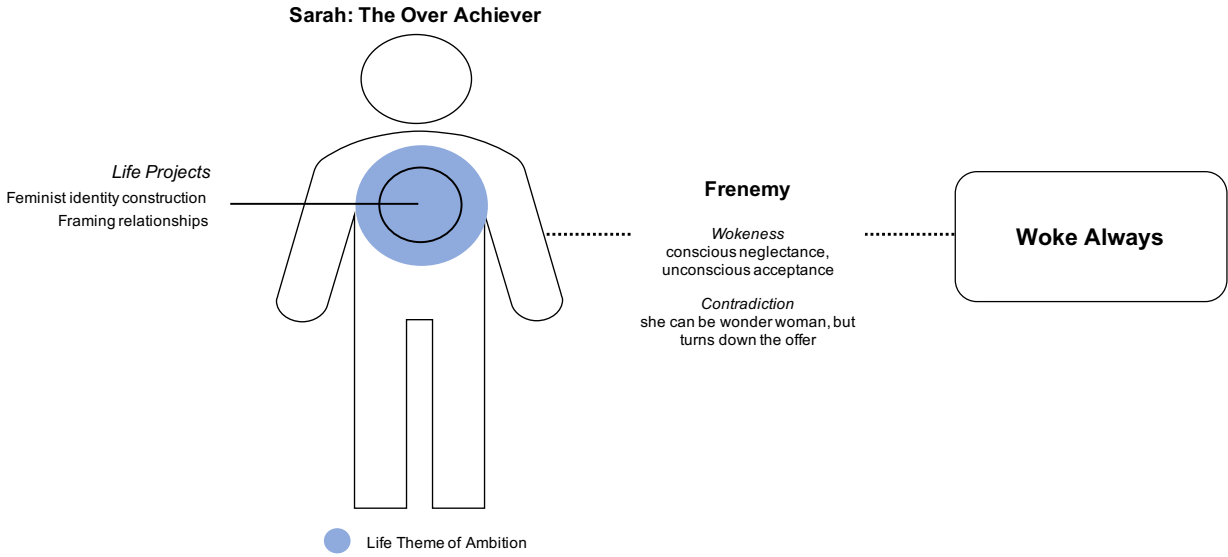


Figure 6: Sarah and her woke CBR.

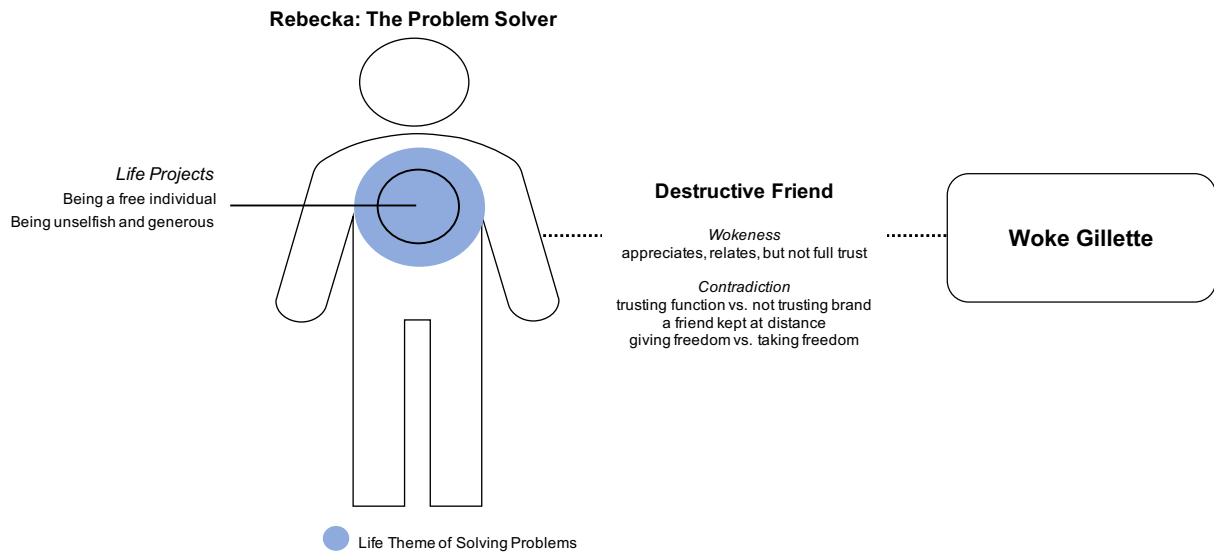


Figure 7: Rebecka and her woke CBR.

### 4.3 Characteristics of Woke Consumer Brand Relationships

First of all, the state of consumers is crucial to explain to further understand the characteristics of woke consumer brand relationships. To a great degree, the respondents are indeed postmodern consumers. The many contradictory thoughts and behavior manifest their fragmentation (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993;1995). Navigating between opposing identity layers tells of a wish to, on the one hand, present a marketable self, and on the other, make up one's mind in the dilemma of choice consumers find themselves in (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Firat & Schultz, 1997; Gabriel & Lang, 2006). Respondents do not admit to fully committing to the woke brands in an attempt to construct their identity by themselves, they do not want brands to define them. Respondents' behavior is also a result of their liquidity, they focus so much on being, or at least appearing unattached, which causes sort of a chaotic, fluid individuality with contradictory traits (Bauman, 2000).

From the provided snapshots of the three woke CBRs, their relation to previous research shows. The woke CBRs of this study are all paradoxes. It becomes evident in the double-sided meanings of their assigned labels: passionate addiction, frenemy, destructive friend. These are a type of relationship that span over several of Fournier's (1998) relationship forms. Because of the leading role that contradictions play, woke CBRs would be a mixture of several, contradictory, relationship forms. Fournier's (1998) 15 relationship forms thus falls short in defining woke CBRs. Consequently, some aspects of the relationships can be explained with this study's theoretical framework, and some cannot. A new relationship form is thus needed to rightfully define a woke CBR.

### 4.3.1 Bad Romance as New Relationship

It is challenging to understand why the respondents do not break up with their woke brand partners since they don't seem happy, creating a relationship similar to the humanized relationship of a bad romance. The respondents seem to be trapped and unable to break up since the woke brands have become an integral part of their daily lives and considered superior to other brands, which indicates some level of interdependence and intimacy in the woke CBRs (Fournier, 1998). However, the way these relationships are wrong and right at the same time is perhaps best understood in light of respondents' fragmentation. They might not think they are committed, but some part(s) of their multidimensional selves still are (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; 1993).

At the same time, respondents stay in the woke CBRs by choice because they sympathize with the brands. Cheating with other brands and communicating their plans to leave do not change much. It seems like these romances would dissolve only due to managerially imposed stressors, such as the brand withdrawing the product from its assortment range (Fournier, 1998). A reason respondents sympathize with the brands is because there is a self-connection present. The brands correspond to some or several parts of respondents' life themes and life projects, their identities, which strengthens the relationship (Fournier, 1998; Mick & Buhl, 1992). The self-connection can further be recognized in how the wokeness of the brands reflects respondents' themes and goals. It creates a vision for respondents' possible future selves (Fournier, 1998; Kleine, Kleine & Allen, 1995), although not consciously recognized by them.

Further, five characteristics describing the woke CBR, the *Bad Romance*, have been identified in relation to respondents' life themes and life projects, and to the contradictions discovered, which will be analyzed in the following.

#### *Private and Public*

The woke CBR is both private and public at the same time. It can be a secret to some or something that is not talked about with others. It is no one's business, but also shared with others in a controlled manner. Considering the bad romance aspect of woke CBRs, it is likely respondents feel some kind of shame. The shame is shown in the careful distance-taking from the brands that are not allowed to define them. They know they are engaged in brands that are no good for them, or not good enough. It is as if respondents are trying to resolve their own mixed feelings about their relationships, which is why some parts are private and others public. It becomes important to hide the relationship from those who could judge the most (the dentist) and tell others about the shortcomings (not sustainable) of the brand, decreasing the risks of being judged. Fournier (1998) identified secret affairs and non-voluntary dependencies, enslavements and enmities, however, Fournier (1998) leaves out the perspective of shame as well as managing private and public consumption. A more suitable explanation for this aspect of woke CBRs is fragmented identity construction explained by Firat and Venkatesh (1995;1993). Respondents carefully make sure they publicly seem aware of and unattached to their bad brand partners. Showing behavior of liquidity, the brands are not allowed to



completely define their identities but must remain at a distance (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; 2017).

### *Local versus Global Tension*

Within the respondents themselves is the tension between local and global. It is a difficult task for them to solve. Where should they live, when and for how long? Both Eric, Rebecka and Sarah are all strongly grounded in their home-countries but eagerly reaching out into the world, consequently demonstrating the fluidity that postmodernity entails – in the liquid society, being solidly attached and still is frowned upon (Bauman, 2000). The global brands that Pepsi, Always and Gillette are can help in maintaining a link with the global community while stopping by at home. The woke global brands also provide respondents with global values and ideas that could be beneficial to share with other globetrotters to be accepted and fit in. The local versus global tension is thus both a driver to initiate the woke CBR but the woke CBR can in itself help resolve this tension.

### *System Error*

The many contradictory thoughts and actions of the respondents are at a first glance typical characteristics of the postmodern consumer. Fragmentation causes paradoxical juxtapositions of ideas and behavior, for example watching a lot of Netflix while also disapproving of those who do does not go well together. There is an ambivalence present while consumer surfs through different selves and dimensions of the self (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; 1993; Firat & Schultz, 1997; Gabriel & Lang, 2006). What is striking about consumers in woke CBRs is their lack of self-awareness. In fact, they contradicted themselves in the same sentence without recognizing it. What is interesting is that these system errors are not contradictions between two or more of the respondents' multiple selves, they seem to appear within the *same* self or dimension of self, thus complicating the paradox. Of course, this further complicates the circumstances of the woke CBRs. With contradictions within each dimension of the self and between dimensions of the self, plus the contradictory nature of the woke CBR it becomes clear how impossible it is too *fully* reach through to the consumer.

### *Walk the Talk*

This contradiction is similar to those causing system error, however, respondents are aware. Even if environmentalism and feminism drive respondents, they still do not drop their brand partners. Again, failure to keep their promise is a consequence of fragmentation. But more baffling is that even though respondents are driven by some type of idealism, the idealism of the woke brands does not engage any of them to a greater degree which results in actual action. Sarah's feminism explicitly matches with Always' feminism, but she does not embrace the

message. Perhaps the increased demand for wokeness from millennial consumers (Edelman, 2018) and the overall consumer demand that has brought the woke brands of today, is not such an important factor when building a relationship with the consumers. Could it be that being opinionated, or woke as a consumer, does not necessarily mean caring about all different fields that woke includes? As it seems, it is easy for consumers to talk, however, they are still missing out on the walk.

### *Brand as Equaliser*

One of the qualities of woke CBRs is their ability to balance out contradictions and tensions facing respondents. The woke CBR can possess dual meanings or serve dual purposes which smoothly put the imbalance back to status quo. In this way, woke CBRs sort of enable the fragmentation of consumers, they do not create a unified self but help consumers manage their multifaceted and ambivalent selves (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; 1993; Firat & Schultz, 1997; Gabriel & Lang, 2006). Fournier (1998) leaves out this duality of CBRs, although the relationship forms can serve different purposes, their ability to balance out contradictory aspects of consumers lives is not noticed.

## 4.4 A Framework of Woke CBR

To conclude, we can see that there is a demand for companies to stay culturally relevant and woke. It further seems that consumers are woke as well. However, the question remains if it even matters since the wokeness, ironically, does not seem to be a central factor in the woke relationship between the consumer and the brand.

The characteristics of woke CBRs, the *Bad Romance* are: *Private and Public*, *Local versus Global Tension*, *System Error*, consumers who do not *Walk the Talk* and *Brand as Equaliser*. They illustrate that Fournier's framework is not enough to explain the fragmented consumers of today. Woke does not fit in to any of the earlier framed relationships since consumers are so fragmented that they could not be placed in such a narrow and specific framework.

Interesting is, however, the fact that even if Eric, Rebecka and Sarah all react somewhat the same, not putting too much thought if any into the wokeness of the brands, in a contradicting way they still act differently. Eric misses the woke message, Sarah refuses the woke message and Rebecka stays open to the woke message. To conclude, the wokeness is never received as it was meant to be, with none of the brands making a home run as they might have wished for. This is illustrated in Figure 8.

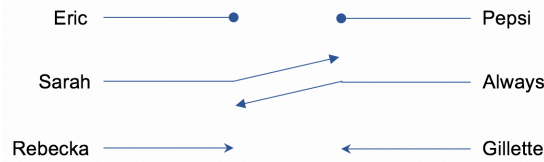


Figure 8: An illustration of the ways respondents receive the messages of woke brands.

However, since the life theme and projects of each individuals are actually in line with the wokeness of the different brands, maybe it works anyhow? In the end, both Eric, Rebecka and Sarah are all loyal consumers – and even if they say that they want to end their relationships, none of them have actually done it – yet.

The present findings together form a new addition to the theoretical framework presented in section 2.4.1. A woke CBR can be metaphorically understood as an umbrella, a metaphor with three levels of meaning. First, the authors view the woke CBR (the Bad Romance) as an umbrella term indicating that the five characteristics are all different terms to be used when talking about woke CBR. Second, all contradictions are gathered under the umbrella which shelters them from the rain and keeps them close together – despite their differences. They will not walk outside of the umbrella and get wet but stick together even if they contradict each other and themselves. Third, the umbrella is indicative of a certain type of weather, an environment – the macro context – the woke CBR exists within. This context is postmodernity and its fragmentation and liquidity. Because time moves on, consumers and brands do too, and the “weather” might change in the future. Then, an umbrella might not be needed to hold contradictions together anymore, but until then the woke CBR is ready for any kind of “weather” with the *Umbrella of Contradictions*, as shown below, presenting the conceptual framework of woke CBR.

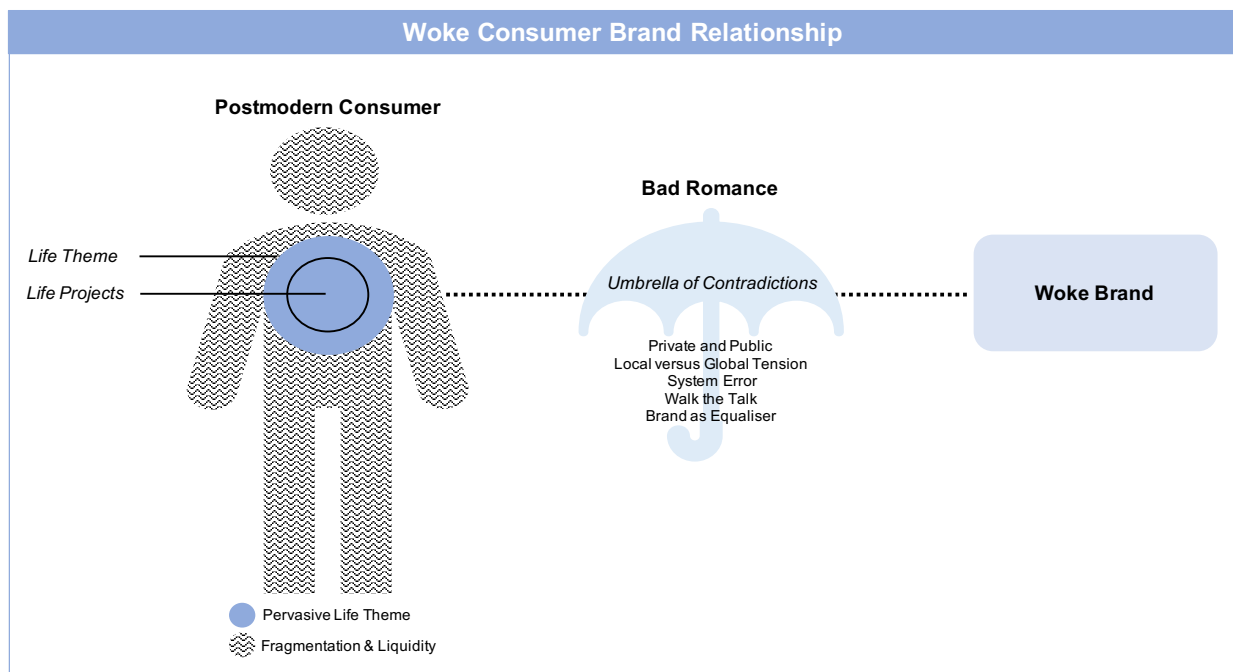


Figure 9: A conceptual framework of woke CBR.

## 5. Discussion

The new relationship that has been formulated, a Bad Romance, explains the conflicting feelings consumers feel towards brands. Knowing that the woke brands are not good enough for them, Eric, Rebecka and Sarah want to feel smart and shed light on the fact that they are somewhat superior to their brands. There seems to be a fear of being fooled, to fall for calculated marketing ploys. Due to the fact that woke brands are considered to be inferior partners, the consumers know that there exists a risk of making a fool out of themselves if they are not being careful. Therefore, they themselves need to expose the shortcomings and schemes of the brand before anyone can claim they should have known better. One wonders, why is this so important for the respondents? If they are so scared of being fooled, why do they not break up with their brands? Is it that they do not have the ambition to break up, or could it be that for them, it is more scary being on their own and therefore, they would rather be in a relationship which could not be considered a hundred percent good or healthy? Since they do not perceive the relationship as sufficient, neither do they have to commit fully and accordingly, they decrease their vulnerability and fear of getting hurt if or when they are left behind. A conscious non-commitment further gives them the possibility to flee if something bigger or better might be expected around the corner, consequently, they can “eat the cake and keep it too”.

It is reasonable to further reflect upon the idea of bad romances as such. Although this definition is sprung out of exploration of woke CBRs, the woke aspect is not as central as one might have thought. The three brands of this study; Pepsi, Always and Gillette; exemplify three nuances of wokeness and success in communicating that. For example, it is easy to assume that because Always' wokeness was positively met, Sarah would open her arms to it too, especially considering the kind of feminist wokeness central to her. Overall, nuances of the brands' wokeness could not be translated into nuances of the woke CBRs, thus further indicating the non-centrality of wokeness. Therefore, it could perhaps be replaced with something else? The same way millennial consumers' demand for woke brands and woke brand strategies have evolved, new demands and strategies will emerge in the future. It is likely the Bad Romance CBR could be applied for that future and be used to signify a certain type of relationship – that of contradictions. Here, the Umbrella of Contradictions plays a crucial role, all or some of the contradictory characteristics it covers could possibly be identified in other types of relationships both in the future and now. Since wokeness has a less significant role, other contemporary CBRs could be explored through it. However, for woke CBRs the macro context they exist within, postmodernity, highly affect the presence of contradictions and need for the umbrella. Moving into future eras, what will the weather be like?

Connecting to the conditions of eras, Eric, Rebecka and Sarah are “children of their time”. They all ask themselves, “why do wrong when you can do right?”, and “why be bad when you can be good?”, which could be seen as originating from the fact that they all are millennials in this day and age. These questions are not so much questions as they are dilemmas reflecting the virtue of “staying woke” in society today with respondents' unison wish of always improving and developing. Consequently, consumers expect more, not only by the people around them, but also by themselves. Being an ignorant consumer is outdated. However, as findings show,

talking is easy but walking more difficult. Even if respondents state their ambitions, they often do not walk the talk in the end, making them not better than the brands that they so eagerly complain about. This connects to the private and public characteristic of woke CBRs, where hiding the relationship in some senses is an outcome of shame. Either because it is a bad romance or because you have not “done right” or “been good”. The tension between local and global can also be explained by the high expectations consumers put on themselves. Remaining local and immobile is not the melody of today, consumers are expected to seek globality and movement in life, along with other achievements. This requires knowing one’s way around the world in terms of global values and ideals, in which a woke CBR can help.

To be woke is to be well aware of the hidden structures in society, especially those causing injustice and discrimination. Maybe, there is another type of woke perspective to be identified, not from brands to consumers, but from consumers to brands. Even if the brands follow the demands of consumers, maybe the consumers have already moved on. As it looks today, it is difficult for brands to be something else than the already imprinted picture in the eyes of consumers. This means there are now woke brands and woke consumers that are woke about the woke brands, confusing to say the least. Maybe this heightened of awareness of what is going on in society *and* in the marketplace causes a system error similar to those within consumers themselves. With woke brands and two-kinds-of-woke consumers, how could the two ever come together completely? It is like a game of chess where brands and consumers each try to calculate their opponent’s next move. It refers back to the idea of consumers not wanting to be fooled or seem oblivious to marketing and branding strategies.

It is clear that woke brands are trying to work on their relationship with consumers, however, this does not seem to be what consumers want them to do. Is what the consumers want actually something else – and if so, what is it? Does wokeness even matter? And does it matter what the brands do since they cannot seem to do the right thing in the eye of the consumers, no matter what? Even when they act in line with consumers’ own values and beliefs, life themes and projects, it is still not enough. Why do the brands not get a response? As shown in the findings, woke brands are perceived and processed differently by the respondents. Sure to say is that woke brands have troubles hitting the bull’s eye. This finding entails a question of, not whether postmodern consumers can stick to a message, but rather if the message can reach them at all. Apparently, it can in some way. Despite the contradictory prerequisites of woke CBRs, they do exist. Woke brands’ power as equalisers seems to overcome consumers’ ambivalent dance between demanding wokeness and resisting it when offered.

## 6. Conclusion

The study aimed to answer the question of *what characterizes the relationship between consumers and woke brands*. A question based on the observation of a contradiction between the empirical phenomenon of woke brands and the theoretical notions of postmodern consumers. A research gap was identified, because research of woke brands is lacking and understanding of consumers' relationship to them is unexplored.

The authors found that contradictions are the very foundation of woke consumer brand relationships. These contradictions exist both within consumers themselves but also in the consumer brand relationship. Conceptualizing these contradictions, it was found that woke consumer brand relationships are *Bad Romances* characterized by the following five characteristics: *Private and Public*, *Local versus Global Tension*, *System Error*, *Walk the Talk* and *Brand as Equaliser*. All characteristics are some kind of contradiction, which is why they stay together under the *Umbrella of Contradictions*. The woke consumer brand relationship should be seen as just that, an umbrella term, including the different characteristics of this type of relationship but also indicating that there is a certain context of postmodernity present.

Further, the study found that the five characteristics of woke consumer brand relationships – the contradictions – cause the woke message of woke brands to reach (or not reach) the consumers in different ways. This entails the discussion of the wokeness' non-centrality. Consumers seem more focused on seeing through the “tricks” of marketers and are in that sense woke about branding and marketing strategies. It is another type of woke consumers than the authors expected to find. This finding indicates that it might not be postmodern consumers' unattached nature that makes a woke consumer brand relationship troublesome to establish, because these relationships evidently exist. Rather, a new question surfaces – how, if at all, will the woke message reach consumers?

### 6.1 Empirical Contributions

The performed study of life history cases revealed consumers' life themes and projects against which the woke consumer brand relationships could be understood. The cross-case analysis made evident what characterizes woke consumer brand relationships. This type of relationship is saturated with, defined by, its contradictions. It is in the contradictions the characteristics are found, contradictions both in the woke consumer brand relationships and within the respondents themselves. This consolidates the authors' initial observation of the seemingly contradictory relationship between postmodern consumers and woke brands.

## 6.2 Theoretical Contributions

The findings of the study contribute to the research field of consumer brand relationship theory. By proving current theory cannot fully explain the contradictory character of woke consumer brand relationships, Fournier's framework of brand relationships has been developed. There could be a 16<sup>th</sup> relationship form titled *Bad Romance*. Another alternative would be that the theoretical knowledge this study contributes with can be seen outside of Fournier's framework. The conceptual framework of woke CBR provided (section 4.4) is in its own a useful model to describe and to further study woke consumer brand relationships. This is a meaningful contribution since current brand relationship theory cannot explain the specificity of woke consumer brand relationships. This because the umbrella metaphor the authors have provided includes the contradictions and duality of woke consumer brand relationships. The study further contributes with insights of the behaviors of contemporary, postmodern, consumers whose fragmentation and liquidity form the base of woke consumer brand relationships' contradictions.

## 6.3 Managerial Implications

Lastly, managerial implications have increased the understanding of branding towards millennials and fragmented consumers. By knowing the key characteristics of woke CBR, managers could possess valuable knowledge to improve their branding and consequently relationship towards consumers in today's market, making them culturally relevant. Consequently, the aim of contributing with information helpful to marketers and brand managers seeking more effective marketing and managing of woke brands, as the aim of providing findings that will grant professionals with better insight into the lives consumers lead with woke brands should be seen as fulfilled.

## 6.4 Future Research

The rise of the corporate brand presents a shift in the field of marketing facing new issues and challenges for brands. This is reflected in the market offerings by the growth of brands taking a woke approach, which on the contrary is greatly absent in academic research. The authors urge more academic research within the field of woke brands in relation to the values and beliefs of consumers, making the brands not only part of the consumer's life and the stories which help explain postmodern life, but also as a metaphor for consumer identity. Information which is needed in order for marketers to achieve more effective marketing and building consumer brand relationships in the right sociocultural context. Achieving that is also dependent on the reception and processing of messages by consumers. Part of the study's finding indicates this and is formulated in the concluding question. Consumers' processing or relating to woke messages therefore constitute an interesting research topic the authors leave for future researchers to

investigate. With the background in increased competition and a boom of brands, more research within the field of consumer brand relationships is of high relevance for future research.

Further, since this study has been focusing on woke brands within the product category of FMCG, it is quite niched. Thus, it would be interesting to explore and describe the research phenomena in other contexts and conditions. This would have formed the basis for conclusions about how woke consumer brand relations could be more or less effective for certain companies within a specific industry and towards a specific consumer group. The authors further believe it would be interesting to put the theoretical framework in relation and comparison to consumers in different countries to get a broader perspective. The authors have further chosen to look at the consumer brand relationship theory from a consumer perspective, hence, the authors believe that it would be interesting to study the phenomena from a corporate perspective as it would result in other insights and perspectives of consumer brand relationship. An additional proposal for further research would be to supplement the study's phenomena with a quantitative study that captures aspects which a qualitative study does not cover of logical reasons. This would create a wider perspective and new insights which further would increase understanding of the consumer brand relationship theory.



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## Figures

Figure 1: *Outline of the thesis*, created by authors.

Figure 2: *CBR dimensions*, adapted from Fournier, S. (1998). Consumers and Their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research, *The Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 24, no. 4, pp.343–373.

Figure 3: *Life theme and life projects within an individual*, adapted from Mick, D., & Buhl, C. (1992). A Meaning-Based Model of Advertising Experiences, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 19 (December), 317–338.

Figure 4: *Theoretical framework of the thesis*, created by authors.

Figure 5: *Eric and his woke CBR*, created by authors.

Figure 6: *Sarah and her woke CBR*, created by authors.

Figure 7: *Rebecka and her woke CBR*, created by authors.

Figure 8: *An illustration of the ways respondents receive the messages of woke brands*, created by authors.

Figure 9: *A conceptual framework of woke CBR*, created by authors.

## Tables

Table 1: *CBR forms*, adapted from Fournier, S. (1998). Consumers and Their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research, *The Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 24, no. 4, pp.343–373.

Table 2: *Dissolution models*, adapted from Fournier, S. (1998). Consumers and Their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research, *The Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 24, no. 4, pp.343–373.

Table 3: *Selected respondents*, created by authors.

Table 4: *Woke CBR in relation to respondents' life themes and life projects*, created by authors.

## Images

Image 1: Gillette. (2019). The Best Men Can Be, 2019, Available Online: <https://gillette.com/en-us/the-best-men-can-be> [Accessed 8 May 2019]

Image 2: Gillette. (2019). The Best Men Can Be, 2019, Available Online: <https://gillette.com/en-us/the-best-men-can-be> [Accessed 8 May 2019]

Image 3: Always. (2019). Always [Youtube]. Available Online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjQBJWYDTs> [Accessed 8 May 2019]

Image 4: Always. (2019). Always [Youtube]. Available Online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjQBJWYDTs> [Accessed 8 May 2019]

Image 5: Bbc.co.uk. (2017). Kendall Jenner 'feels bad' after Pepsi Black Lives Matter advert controversy, Available Online: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/41465222/kendall-jenner-feels-bad-after-pepsi-black-lives-matter-advert-controversy> [Accessed 28 May 2019].

Image 6: Victor, D. (2017). Pepsi Pulls Ad Accused of Trivializing Black Lives Matter. *Nytimes.com*, Available Online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/05/business/kendall-jenner-pepsi-ad.html> [Accessed 28 May 2019].

# Appendix

## Appendix 1

### *Information about selected brands*

#### *Gillette*

Gillette is a global company founded by King, C. Gillette for over 115 years ago with the aim to “bring the barber’s chair to the home of the consumers” (Gillette, 2019). Today, Gillette produces products for men and also for women via their sister brand (Gillette Venus). Gillette is today owned by the mega marketer Procter & Gamble to whom they were acquired in 2005 for \$57 billion (Tylor, 2019). Gillette is especially known for their razor innovation and ad technology advancements, however, they are also well known for a rich heritage of sports marketing from the early 1900s (Gillette, 2019).

#### *Always*

Always is a menstrual pad brand with the aim to create possibilities for all girls and women to live to their fullest potential (Always UK 2019b). As Gillette, Always is also owned by Procter & Gamble with innovation as one of its main areas of focus, for example inventing the first pad with wings as well as the first foam pad absorbing 10x its weight (Always UK 2019b).

#### *Pepsi*

Pepsi is a soft drink originally developed back in 1893 by Caleb Bradham, but was renamed in 1898 as Pepsi-Cola and later, in 1961, changed to Pepsi. Today, Pepsi is a part of the PepsiCo Inc., a result of a merge between the original company Pepsi-Cola Frito-Lay, Inc. in 1965 (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019). PepsiCo Inc. is an American multinational food and beverage manufacturer (Web.archive.org., 2019). PepsiCo has 22 brands which yearly generate \$1 billion in sales (Sure Dividend, 2019).

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## Appendix 2

*Tributes and critique towards Gillette's commercial - the best a man can be*

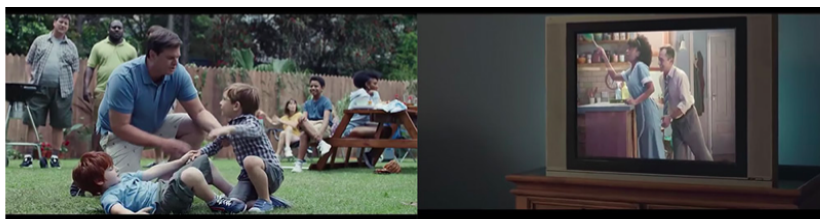
### Gillette #MeToo razors ad on 'toxic masculinity' gets praise - and abuse

**Backlash includes call for boycott of P&G, complaining commercial 'emasculates men'**



▲ Gillette's 'We believe: the best men can be' razors commercial takes on toxic masculinity - video

Topping, A., Lyons, K. & Weaver, M. (2019). Gillette #MeToo razors ad on 'toxic masculinity' gets praise – and abuse. *the Guardian*, Available Online: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/15/gillette-metoo-ad-on-toxic-masculinity-cuts-deep-with-mens-rights-activists> [Accessed 28 May 2019].



### Gillette ifrågasätter mansrollen – 30 år efter den ikoniska reklamfilmen

Publicerat den 15 januari 2019

**REKLAM** Den klassiska reklamfilmen "The best a man can get" firar 30 år och Gillette lanserar kampanjen 'We believe' – sprungen ur #metoo som ber män att ta ansvar för sitt beteende. Nu uppmanar kritiska män till bojkott mot varumärket i sociala medier.

Rågsjö Thorell, A. (2019). Gillette ifrågasätter mansrollen – 30 år efter den ikoniska reklamfilmen. Resume.se, Available Online: <https://www.resume.se/nyheter/artiklar/2019/01/15/gillettes-klassiska-reklamfilm-firar-30-ar--ifragasatter-mansrollen-efter-metoo/> [Accessed 28 May 2019].



**Jessica Chastain** ✓  
@jes\_chastain

Thank you @Gillette for this reminder of the beauty of men. I'm so moved by your call to action #TheBestMenCanBe

**Gillette** ✓ @Gillette  
"Boys will be boys"? Isn't it time we stopped excusing bad behavior? Re-think and take action by joining us at [TheBestMenCanBe.org](http://TheBestMenCanBe.org). #TheBestMenCanBe

5 928 03:34 - 16 jan. 2019

989 personer pratar om detta

Hägström, A. (2019). Gillette-reklamen skapar ilska – får män att förstöra sina rakhyvlar. Expressen.se, Available Online: <https://www.expressen.se/dinapengar/gillette-reklamen-skapar-ilska-man-uppmanar-till-bojkott/> [Accessed 28 May 2019].



**Mollie Goodfellow** ✓  
@hansmollman

Follow

Gillette: Men, could you please be the best versions of yourselves and care for yourself and others

Men: I beg your pardon

1:41 AM - 15 Jan 2019

3,618 Retweets 15,700 Likes

166 3.6K 16K

Morton, J. (2019). Gillette: The Best a Non-Binary Gender Can Get. Webstarsltd.com, Available Online:: <https://www.webstarsltd.com/blog/gillette-the-best-a-non-binary-gender-can-get> [Accessed 28 May 2019].



**Joe Pags Pagliarulo** ✓  
@JoeTalkShow

Follow

Hey @Gillette, I have an idea, stay out of politics. Real men already stop other guys from acting badly. A razor company should want me to shave with your product. And, btw, I'm extremely masculine. And there's nothing wrong with that.

[#TheBestMenCanBe](#)

5:45 PM - 14 Jan 2019

1,458 Retweets 7,422 Likes



Morton, J. (2019). Gillette: The Best a Non-Binary Gender Can Get. Webstarsltd.com, Available Online:: <https://www.webstarsltd.com/blog/gillette-the-best-a-non-binary-gender-can-get> [Accessed 28 May 2019].

## Appendix 3

*A picture of when Jenner hands the police a Pepsi versus the Black Lives Matter movement with the famous photography of the moment when Ieshia Evans peacefully offers her hands to three police officers in riot gear.*



Viktor, D. (2017). Pepsi Pulls Ad Accused of Trivializing Black Lives Matter. Nytimes.com, Available Online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/05/business/kendall-jenner-pepsi-ad.html> [Accessed 28 May 2019].

## Appendix 4

### *Tweets regarding Pepsi commercial*



**Be A King**   
@BerniceKing 

If only Daddy would have known about the power of #Pepsi.

♥ 276K 6:15 PM - Apr 5, 2017

🗨 148K people are talking about this >

Viktor, D. (2017). Pepsi Pulls Ad Accused of Trivializing Black Lives Matter. Nytimes.com, Available Online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/05/business/kendall-jenner-pepsi-ad.html> [Accessed 28 May 2019].

**Willy**  
@YeahItsWilly

We did this in Baltimore. Nothing changed @pepsi  
<pic.twitter.com/YveSvmpYu>

♥ 41.2K 3:27 AM - Apr 5, 2017



🗨 22.5K people are talking about this >

Viktor, D. (2017). Pepsi Pulls Ad Accused of Trivializing Black Lives Matter. Nytimes.com, Available Online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/05/business/kendall-jenner-pepsi-ad.html> [Accessed 28 May 2019].



**Karen Civil**   
@KarenCivil 

If they only would have given the cops a Pepsi..

♡ 2,763 12:43 AM - Apr 5, 2017

🗨 2,495 people are talking about this >

Solon, O. (2017). Kendall Jenner's Pepsi ad criticized for co-opting protest movements for profit, The Guardian. Available Online: <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2017/apr/04/kendall-jenner-pepsi-ad-protest-black-lives-matter> [Accessed 28 May 2019].



**Zito**   
@\_Zeets 

"Kendall please! Give him a Pepsi!"

♡ 119K 1:21 AM - Apr 5, 2017

🗨 63K people are talking about this >

Solon, O. (2017). Kendall Jenner's Pepsi ad criticized for co-opting protest movements for profit, The Guardian. Available Online: <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2017/apr/04/kendall-jenner-pepsi-ad-protest-black-lives-matter> [Accessed 28 May 2019].

# Appendix 5

## *Brand Survey*

### **Brand Survey**

- Name
- Age
- Identified gender
- Marital status
- Occupation
- City of residence
- Native language

### **Razors**

- Do you consume razors? If not, answer no and jump to the following section/page
- If yes, do you care about which brand of razors you buy?
- Is there any specific brand you prefer in the category of razors and if so, which one?
- If you favour a specific brand over others, what is the reason for this?

### **Menstrual pads**

- Do you consume pads? If not, answer no and jump to the following section/page
- If yes, you care about which brand of pads you buy?
- Is there any specific brand you prefer in the category of menstrual pads and if so, which one?
- If you favour a specific brand over others, what is the reason for this?

### **Soft Drinks**

- Do you consume soft drinks? If not, answer no and hand in survey
- If yes, do you care about which brand of soft drinks you buy?
- Is there any specific brand you prefer in the category of soft drinks and if so, which one?
- If you favour a specific brand over others, what is the reason for this?



# Appendix 6

## Interview Guide

### 1. An understanding of who the respondent is and his/her life.

- *What is in the picture. Can you describe the event/the thing etc.*
- *How does this picture represent you?*
  
- Could you tell us a bit about yourself and your life → from start? When were you born and where?
  - How did your childhood look like?
    - Do you have any particular memories from your childhood?
    - What was it like growing up where you grew up?
  - Could you tell us a bit about your memories from school during younger years?
  - What earlier work experiences do you have and what do you think about it?
  - What was your social surrounding?
  
- What is does your life look like today?
  - Describe a normal day for us, routines etc.
  - Who are your friends, what do you do?
  - Which interest do you have?
  - Who do your family consist of?
  - How important is your nationality for you and how is that reflected in your life?

### 2. Usage of the brand in respondent's life, changes and behaviour over time.

- *Can you describe the pictures for us?*
- *How come that you chose these pictures?*
- *What do they represent?*
  
- Stories describing the genesis, evolution, and usage of brand
  - When did you first use Gillette? Do you remember? Can you describe the event and what it was like.
  - Why do you use Gillette?
  - How do you use it, when do you use it? In what situations?
  - Was there a time when you did not buy/use Gillette? What triggered that?
    - Was there a time when you used other brands such as for example Bic or others? Describe the experiences with those.
  - What does the brand mean to you? Can you describe a moment when you felt that way with the brand?

### 3. Explaining the respondents' brand relationships.

*\*Showing commercial for the respondents\**

- Have you seen it before? Can you describe when that happened?
  - What do you think about this?
  - What does it make you feel?
  - Did you expect this from Gillette?
  - What do you think about your consumption of the brand going forward from here?
  - What does the brand mean to you now? Can you describe a moment when you felt that way with the brand?
  
- If Gillette disappeared from your life, how would that make you feel?
  - What would it take for you to voluntarily exclude Gillette from your life?
  - Do you think that you will always use Gillette?

*Thank you so much for your anticipation!*