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# Is it really what is on the inside that counts?

A qualitative study on shipping packaging's  
impact on brand experience

by

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# Abstract

**Title:** Is it really what is on the inside that counts? A qualitative study of shipping packaging's impact on brand experience

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**Keywords:** Brand Experience, Packaging, Shipping Packaging, E-commerce Marketing

**Background:** Online shopping is increasing steadily, resulting in more and more packages being shipped out to consumers. Although there is much literature on how packaging design has the ability to impact consumer perceptions about brands, there is close to no literature about the impact on consumer perceptions of the packaging that is used when shipping products from online retailers to consumers.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research is to examine if shipping packaging can play a role in brand experience, specifically in the form of acting as stimuli. This study aims to contribute to previous research and make anchored assumptions of shipping packaging's impact on consumers.

**Methodology:** The methodological choices made to fulfill the research purpose were to use relativist ontology, constructionist epistemology and abductive approach which results in qualitative research. The data collection method was focus group interviews where participants were exposed to cases of shipping packaging as discussion points.

**Theoretical perspective:** This study applies a theoretical framework combining literature about packaging with theory on brand experience and its brand experience dimensions; sensory, affective, behavioral and intellectual.

**Conclusion:** The main findings are that shipping packaging can act as stimuli to create a brand experience through the components of structure, graphics, information and free samples and gifts.

**Practical implications:** This research provides valuable insights of how shipping packaging can contribute to a brand experience which further can result in brand loyalty.

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# 1. Introduction

*The first chapter of this thesis presents a background to the research topic of e-commerce and shipping packaging as well as previous research within the field of packaging. Lastly the research purpose, question to serve the purpose, aimed contributions of the research and the thesis outline are presented.*

## 1.1 Background

Living through a pandemic has changed many of our normal habits. Habits that steer the way we greet each other, where we work and how we decide to purchase the things we want. Earlier in the pandemic the closures of physical stores drove consumers online (Ang, 2021). Now, it seems as many consumers have grown accustomed to ordering products online, rather than leaving the house and having to face the pandemic and other annoyances in brick and mortar stores. However, the increase in e-commerce sales does not only come from the pandemic, this ongoing trend has also been shaped by increased digitalization. Nevertheless, the pandemic has created an immense boost in online sales that has led to the fact that internet shopping today is bigger than ever and an increased proportion of retail sales have been moved online (Handelsfakta, n.d).

In 2021 Swedish e-commerce had a turnover of 146 billion SEK. This corresponds to 16 percent of the retail market, an increase of 5 percent compared to the previous year. On average, 80 percent of Swedish consumers in Stockholm's county bought something online in 2021 (Handelsfakta, n.d). Initially, this growth of e-commerce came from new consumers starting to shop online, but in recent years the growth is also explained by an increased spend from already existing online customers. The product-categories in which consumers decide to purchase online varies depending on region, but the factors affecting the decisions are both supply and competitiveness of the local trade and the local conditions for e-commerce.

With this growth of e-commerce, millions of packages are sent out to be delivered daily worldwide (Zhou, Zhao, Kong, Campy, Xu, Zhu, Cao & Wang, 2020). Since most consumers prefer speedy deliveries, options that enable short delivery times are preferred (Buldeo Rai, Verline & Macharis, 2019; Bierwirth, Kirschstein & Sackmann, 2019). In larger cities, companies can often offer many different delivery methods which can speed up the delivery

time (Handelsfakta, n.d). More often than not short delivery times include shipments to parcel lockers or postal boxes and although efficient for consumers' shipment of products bought online, known as last-mile-delivery, it is one of the largest supply costs for retailers, ranging between 13 and 75 percent of total costs for online retailers (Gevaers, Van de Voorde & Vanelslander, 2009). So while companies have reason to prioritize fast shipments the resources needed for this can at times be daunting, both because of financial and sustainability issues related to last mile delivery. To decrease costs one factor online retailers can alter without sacrificing much delivery time is the shipping packaging. Smaller sized packages created from cheaper materials might save the online retailer money and delivery time, leading to satisfied consumers and less money spent. However, there are some issues to take into account while altering shipping packaging. Firstly, the products need to be protected during the last mile. Secondly, the package weight and size required for fast delivery options, like parcel lockers and parcel boxes, are dictated by external stakeholders. Lastly, since consumer responses to brand stimuli can be created every time the consumer comes in contact with the brand, delivery of products during the last mile might be one of those contact points.

The number of e-commerce companies offering consumers products worldwide are countless and create a universal supply in various sectors. One sector that recently has shifted towards a stronger online presence, both in the form of a multichannel approach and in some cases even fully online, is the beauty sector (Marchessou & Spagnuolo, 2021). The beauty sector consists of fast-moving consumer goods in product categories fragrance, body care, skin care, hair care and color cosmetics, more commonly known as makeup (Marchessou & Spagnuolo, 2021). The shift to online might not seem odd in itself, as previously described online retail is increasing in most sectors and markets. However, the speed at which the shift happened is what makes beauty special.

Beauty, unlike other product categories, largely was purchased in brick-and-mortar stores before the pandemic. Even customer groups likely to purchase other products online like Millennials and Generation Z made 60 percent of their beauty purchases in store before covid (Gerstell, Marchessou, Schmidt & Spagnuolo, 2020). This might partly be due to the nature of beauty products being very individual, like makeup needing to be matched to the consumer's skin tone. Subsequently, a majority of asked US and UK women state that they prefer to purchase beauty products in store (Wright, 2019; Segmanta, n.d). Despite this, and because of quarantines, in store beauty sales decreased during the pandemic (Gerstell et al., 2020).

Additionally, Gerstell et al.'s (2020) studies of China post quarantine showed that the beauty sales in stores have not increased to the same level it was before the pandemic. Despite this bleak outlook for the beauty sector, some believe a beauty-boom is incoming after the pandemic when consumers want to spend more time and money on their looks after being at home for years (Marchessou & Spagnuolo, 2021).

As more and more products are bought online, and that trend does not show any signs of subsiding, e-commerce is a topic of interest for managers and scholars alike. Because of the resources required for the last mile delivery of e-commerce goods, there is managerial need for more knowledge about what consumers value, and thus where money is best spent. Additionally, the delivery process of e-commerce goods adds new areas of contact and consumer impression which have not been studied to an extent that mirrors the large increase in online sales. Previous research has shown that packaging has the possibility to affect consumer brand perceptions, which makes the study of new packaging forms interesting. Especially because without shipping packaging, last mile delivery of online purchases cannot be performed. As this is a non-replaceable praxis that affects a large amount of purchases in the marketplace today, research on the topic of shipping packaging can add new insights needed to understand modern consumption.

## 1.2 Problematization

Recent research examines three types of packaging, consisting of primary packaging, describing the packaging of the actual product, secondary package, which consists of the cardboard box surrounding the primary packages, and shipping packaging, which is described as the corrugated box containing several products being delivered to the retailer (Kotler & Keller, 2016). We suggest that with the rise of e-commerce, shipping packaging can also be delivered to consumers' households directly and not only retailers. However, no scholars have defined the different forms of packaging with this in mind, which is quite curious considering the relevance of shipping packaging that reaches consumers.

Ilich and Hardey (2020) produced one of few research articles on the packaging that reaches consumers as a result of online shopping, what they dubbed secondary packaging, and its effects of marketing. The authors researched the phenomenon of unboxing images posted on social media and through a netnography it could be concluded that motivations, intentions, and



marketing implications followed the unboxing through self-identity by consumption and social media (Ilich & Hardey, 2020). The study is one of very few that examines the packaging from e-commerce retailers from a consumer perspective but fails to examine the effect the shipping packaging may have on brands. Generally, the importance of primary, secondary and shipping packaging are not being evaluated separately, and the literature is also lacking the perspective of the shipping packaging used from a business to consumer point of view, which states the need for research on the topic. It is evident that scholars need to consider more than just the packaging of the product itself within retail marketing.

To contrast this, primary packaging has been studied in detail. Kottler and Keller (2016) state the importance of packaging as it is the customers' first encounter with a product and because it affects the customers' product experience when they open the package to see what is inside. In the case of e-commerce, there is a significant chance that the shipping packaging is the first physical encounter a consumer ever has had with the brand as a whole, not just the product. As packaging encapsulates many areas of design such as shapes and materials that only can be fully appreciated through a tactile experience, there is a need to examine shipping packaging more closely. Additionally, research following this notion has examined how packaging, and its design, has the ability to impact the brand image (Underwood, 2003). This finding is supported by literature showcasing a correlation between focusing on design, effective visual stimuli and strong financial performance within companies (Hertenstein & Platt, 2001; Henderson, Cote, Leong & Schmidt, 2003). Additionally, primary packaging and its components has the ability to affect brand choice (Pieters & Warlop, 1999), consumer attention (Schoorsman, Robben & Henry, 1997), product quality perceptions (Rigaux-Bricmont, 1982) and brand communication efforts (Underwood & Ozanne, 1998). If primary packaging is known to affect the brand, other forms of packaging that comes in contact with consumers could possibly affect brand image as well. Researching shipping packaging could therefore broaden knowledge of how consumers' opinions on different forms of packaging can impact what they think of the brand as a whole.

Although there may be some similarities between primary packaging and shipping packaging there are some differences as well. With shipping packaging, there are a certain amount of constraints in the design that makes it unique. Rundh (2016) highlights the importance of not forgetting the functional purpose of packaging, which includes protecting the item from damage, assisting with necessary information and shaping the package for the prevailing need.

When packages need to be shipped and go through several steps in the journey towards the end consumer, they probably are constructed to be more protective. Additionally, restrictions to the design of the shipping package might create similarities in some design aspects, like shape, which makes research of how brands can be affected by the other design aspects interesting. Research on primary product design therefore cannot be completely mirrored on shipping packaging and thus it could be interesting to examine in its own right.

Moreau (2020) studied shipping packaging and argued that many brands have an opportunity to create brand experiences when they deliver packages to consumers. The author suggested how these experiences can be formed through a number of factors and presented real case examples that showcased these factors. Although the study delved into shipping packaging and how this can affect the brand who sent the package, it only performed a “proof of concept” study on the influence of shipping packaging on brand equity. Additionally, the study did not use branded shipping packaging but examined what Moreau (2020) considered “superior” versus “standard” packaging, which only differed in *how* the product was packaged, i.e. the tape and packing materials used inside the shipping box. Although these factors might be of importance, much of the previous literature examined on primary packaging researched consumer responses to design, which in turn is formed as a result of the branding. Therefore, leaving this element out of Moreau’s (2020) study might have missed important factors behind the shipping packaging brand experience.

### 1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this research is to examine one way in which shipping packaging can impact branding to extend and advance multi-channel marketing knowledge from a consumer perspective. Specifically, this research aims to examine shipping packaging and if it can create brand experiences. This study aims to contribute to previous research and make anchored assumptions of shipping packaging’s impact on consumers.

### 1.4 Research Question

To fulfill the purpose of this thesis the following research question is examined and answered:

How can shipping packaging act as stimuli to influence brand experiences of e-commerce brands in the beauty sector?

## 1.5 Aimed Contributions of Research

By conducting this study we aim to fill the research gap concerning the phenomena of shipping packaging and the impact it might have on consumers, since this has not been evaluated in previous research. The research develops existing theories of brand experience by applying them to the relatively unexplored and growing phenomenon of shipping packaging linked to last mile delivery. Further, this research is examined from a consumer perspective, to be able to explore what attributes consumers perceive as appealing and prefer. By developing well-established marketing theories, this study assists with theoretical contributions of how e-commerce can affect consumers' brand experience. Furthermore, the study also provides new consumer insights of consumers preferences of shipping packaging in the beauty sector, which contributes to practical insights. Additionally, we aim to contribute with a concise definition of the packaging system with a new inclusion of shipping packaging.

## 1.6 Delimitations

This thesis will limit itself to focus on cases from the beauty sector. This decision was made to narrow the research scope and limit ourselves to one example of shipping packaging. By doing so, we can prioritize the research purpose of examining brand experiences and shipping packaging. Beauty can be considered a good choice because of the need to protect the products that often are small, glass packages containing liquid or powder. Having the need of an element of protection present, which is characteristic for shipping packaging compared to primary packaging that is most commonly researched, makes the category suitable as a research subject. Shipping packaging for beauty also often fits in mailboxes or parcel locker stations which is an additional unique need for shipping packaging as opposed to primary packaging. If another sector was examined, for example shipping packaging from online fashion retailers, the packaging size could vary greatly between the different cases, skewing the opinions of the consumers whose perception we are examining. Additionally, this thesis does not strive to research packaging as a process but rather packaging as a physical object.

A delimitation is also made to examine Swedish consumer perceptions. This delimitation was partly made due to the prevalence of online shopping in the country, 89 percent of Swedish consumers and 94 percent of internet users stated that they had bought something online in 2021 (Internetstiftelsen, n.d). Additionally, the delimitation was made because of the need to

perform the research in person, as consumer perceptions of packaging is largely based on tactile interpretations and opinions on factors such as material and size. Performing the research online to be able to include other nationalities and countries therefore is not ideal when fulfilling the research purpose.

The participants chosen for the research are born between the years 1991 and 2002. The delimitation to primarily examine this age group was made due to the fact that people born in the 1990's were among those that purchased products online the most according to Internetstiftelsen (n.d). The decision to only examine consumers that are accustomed to online shopping was made so that negative opinions about buying makeup online would not be prevalent as opinions of this kind could affect consumer perceptions of the brands examined through the cases negatively. Therefore, this limitation is necessary for the research to be objective and in turn to fulfill the research purpose.

## 1.7 Thesis Outline

In this introductory chapter the background and inspiration that lead to the subject being researched is presented as well as the research question that guides the study going forward. In the thesis' second chapter literature that further explains the topic of brand experience and packaging is examined to create a clear overview of the research topic. Here, the literature is summarized into a theoretical framework. In the third chapter the chosen methodological outlook for the study is presented and the research approach explained. Additionally, the research quality is evaluated in this chapter. In the fourth chapter the empirical findings from the research are presented. Next, the findings are examined and analyzed using the theoretical framework in the fifth chapter. Lastly, the thesis ends with a discussion of the findings previously presented, followed by a conclusion to the research question, and managerial implications.

## 2. Literature Review

*The second chapter of the thesis delves into previous research on topics that are useful in the inquiry of the research question. First, previous research on e-commerce and packaging is examined followed by a presentation of theories on brand experience. The chapter will then be summarized in a theoretical framework that will act as a guide for the research throughout the following chapters.*

### 2.1 E-commerce

Because the purpose of this thesis is to examine consumer perceptions of shipping packaging, it is sound to have some basic understanding of where consumers purchase these products. E-commerce refers to the digital commercial transactions between and among organizations and individuals which are enabled through the use of the internet, the web and mobile apps. The commercial transaction involves a transaction of value in return for the product or service bought (Laudon & Traver, 2021). The popularity of online retailers can be explained by their ability to offer a convenient, informative and personalized experience for the customer. By saving costs related to physical stores they are able to be price-competitive and offer low-volume products to niche markets. Online retailers can be divided into pure click companies and brick-and-click companies, where the first are companies that were founded online while the latter are existing companies that have added an online site. Further, competition between online retailers can be divided into three aspects of a transaction, the customer integration with the web site, the delivery and the ability to address problems when they occur (Kottler & Keller, 2016).

### 2.2 Delivery of Online Orders

In the delivery process of e-commerce goods many factors come into play. Shipping packaging has to follow certain guidelines to be able to handle the shipping process. To fulfill the purpose of the thesis it is favorable to have knowledge of these restrictions and how they can affect the design of shipping packaging. By obtaining this knowledge we can better discern what design attributes are a choice from the brand and which are not. With this, we can also understand which consumer perceptions that we do not have to pay attention to as they most likely will be the same across all cases of shipping packaging.

Swedish online retailers offer various delivery methods when purchasing goods online. In terms of volume Postnord is the largest player in the last mile delivery in Sweden and is available throughout the country (Antonsson, 2021). Postnord (n.d.) divides their deliveries into mailbox delivery, package and pallet, where the first two are commonly used in customer purchases. Mailbox deliveries are limited to the maximum size of 34x24x7 cm which matches the standard dimensions of property boxes and have a maximum weight of 2 kilos (Postnord, 2020). Package aims to be used for larger items with the largest size allowed is 150x60x115 and with an upper limit to 35 kilos (Postnord n.d). Other well-established players in the delivery market are DHL, Schenker, Best Transport, Bring and UPS. New companies such as Instabox, Budbee and Earlybird have grown in recent years challenging the traditional last mile deliveries by offering different niches in delivery methods (Antonsson, 2021). Instabox is the largest player of parcel boxes, offering fast delivery and smooth pick up to parcel boxes installed in selected stores, supermarkets and convenience stores (Instabox, n.d). Budbee offers fossil free deliveries, both to home address and parcel boxes in different sizes of parcel boxes with the smallest being 24x39x7 cm and the largest 40x60x30 cm, similar to Instabox whose largest box is 40x60x40 cm (Budbee, n.d; Instabox, n.d). Earlybird (n.d.) delivers lighter parcels nighttime through newspaper courier to the customers home address, and if the parcel does not fit in the mailbox the parcel is put outside the door.

Thus, the smallest sized parcel boxes and at home mailboxes are similar in size from all delivery services. Retailers are often aiming to use the smallest sized shipping packaging possible because smaller packages permit the use of alternative vehicles such as cargo bikes and alternative package collection points such as central parcel locker stations. This results in decreased costs and emissions for the retailer sending out the package (Jaller & Pahwa, 2021). Keeping this in mind will aid in understanding of the design of the shipping packaging going forward.

## 2.3 Packaging Systems

Packaging can be described as a system containing several forms of packaging (Pålsson & Hellström, 2016). Kotler and Keller (2016) defines three forms of packaging described through the example of perfume as following; liquid perfume comes in a glass bottle (primary packaging), which is sold and stored in a cardboard box in the retail store (secondary packaging) and shipped in a palette box with several cardboard boxes of perfume (shipping packaging).

Rundh (2016) defines the three forms slightly differently where primary packaging is the sales packaging and secondary packaging is defined as “packaging used to group and protect goods during distribution in the supply chain” (Rundh, 2016, p. 2492). Lastly, Rundh (2016) defines tertiary packaging as packaging necessary for export. Pålsson and Hellström (2016) has a similar definition for primary packaging but states that secondary packaging contains more than one primary package and is used as retail packaging and that tertiary packaging in turn contains more than one secondary package to distribute and transport products, this can be in form of a pallet. Although slightly different, all of these definitions of packaging systems only take the packaging forms needed for physical retail stores into account.

Ilch and Hardy examined unboxing images of shipping boxes from online retailers and described the packages as secondary, defining secondary packaging as “carrier bags, shipping boxes, and delivery parcels” (2020, p. 4). When shipping products directly to consumers the need for export and transport is present, much like in the aforementioned definitions of tertiary packaging (Rundh, 2016; Pålsson & Hellström, 2016) and shipping packaging (Kotler & Keller, 2016). However, packaging containing products bought by consumers online also have similarities to the definitions of secondary packaging as the packaging may be used to group together several products. Nonetheless, packaging used to ship online orders to consumers is not only a cardboard box to hold the secondary packaging, like Kotler and Keller (2016) defined it, because the packaging is used for transportation purposes.

### 2.3.1 Shipping Packaging Definition

As none of the definitions made previously in the literature describes the complete packaging system used by online retailers shipping directly to consumers, a proposed new definition that is used in this thesis is: Primary packaging is the consumer packaging containing the product. Secondary packaging is the packaging used to protect the products and its primary packaging in retail environments. Tertiary packaging is the packaging used to transport several products to distributors or retailers, this through distributing many secondary packages at once. Shipping packaging is the packaging used to ship out products bought online directly to consumers through last mile delivery practices.

This definition is used to research shipping packaging throughout the thesis. Through the usage of the definition we can facilitate easy understanding of the research presented. Additionally, the definition limits the scope of the research to aid in answering the research question.

## 2.4 Packaging Purposes

Within the packaging system several purposes need to be served simultaneously. Prendergast and Pitt (1996) defines these purposes as logistically focused, marketing focused or a mix of the two. Understanding the purposes of packaging can aid in the understanding of consumer responses to it. Therefore, to serve the purpose of the thesis, previous research on the purposes of packaging is examined. Regarding logistics, Prendergast and Pitt (1996) believes packaging should protect the product from leakage, damage, spoilage et cetera. Moreover, packaging can be utilized to increase productivity through, for example, easy stacking of packages in warehouses (Prendergast & Pitt, 1996).

According to Prendergast and Pitt (1996) the marketing function of packaging entails the possibility to attract consumers and communicate product and brand information. The marketing possibilities attached to primary packaging has been discussed in previous literature to a large extent (Bloch, 1995; Holbrook, 1980; Underwood, 2003; Schoorsman, Robben & Henry, 1997). For instance in an article examining package design holistically Orth & Malkewitzkey (2008) found that discerning design factors are linked with consumer brand impressions and established relations between brand personality aspects and design factors. Henderson et al. (2003) and Hutton (1997) similarly have found that visual stimuli is an essential factor in brand strategies that has the possibility to impact the brand through factors such as loyalty creation, premium price point setting and competition protection. Research has found that attractive product design creates competitive advantages through differentiation (Berkowitz, 1987; Dumaine, 1991). Additionally, primary packaging and its components has the ability to affect brand choice (Pieters & Warlop, 1999), consumer attention (Schoorsman, Robben & Henry, 1997), product quality perceptions (Rigaux-Bricmont, 1982) and brand communication efforts (Underwood & Ozanne, 1998).

Lastly, the combined purpose discussed by Prendergast and Pitt (1996) is the convenience packaging can add in package handling by retailers and consumers as packaging makes it easier to store, and in some cases, use the product. Rundh (2016) believes there should be a balance



between the visual effects and functional message in packaging design. The author also highlights aspects of communication, including the fact that the message communicated must be meaningful to draw attention and create engagement from the customer. Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman and Hansen (2019) similarly state that packaging can fulfill several purposes which they divide into six objectives. These are: identify the brand in an attractive way, convey descriptive and persuasive information, provide protection to facilitate transportation, assist at-home storage, aid product consumption and be environmentally friendly on disposal. In order to achieve these objectives, Kotler et al. (2019) attest that brands have to combine functional and aesthetic components of packaging successfully. Functionality includes having packaging designed for a specific purpose, for example innovations in food packaging has resulted in more convenient packaging such as resealable, easy to open, squeezable packaging.

The aesthetic components of packaging can be divided into two components; graphics and structure (Hine, 1995). Previous research has shown that consumers to a larger extent make their decision based on graphics and to a lesser extent based on information and form of the product (Borgman, Mulder-Nijkamp & Koeijer, 2018). In our research aiming to examine consumers' responses to shipping packaging it is important to be able to differentiate the visual packaging components, and most importantly to categorize factors that influence consumer opinions.

#### 2.4.1 Graphic Components of Packaging

Graphic components are the packaging colors, the typeface used and logotypes on the packaging (Hine, 1995). Similarly, Rundh (2016) discusses that designers can increase visibility of a package through its material, color, shape and graphics. Underwood (2003) states that color not only has the possibility to identify the brand but may also elicit emotional responses that fortifies the brand's communicated benefit. Additionally, packaging color can make consumers recognize which category the product is in, be a code for different product versions and communicate product positioning (Underwood, 2003). Silayoi and Speece (2007) also attest that unique packaging color can generate strong brand associations with the brand using them. Similarly, Rundh (2016) states that color is one of the most important tools when it comes to packaging design because of its strong impact on consumers' minds. Colors have the ability to draw attention, mediate the nature of the product and can give an indication of the intended target group. When deciding on brand colors Rundh (2016) states that managers have

to consider the meaning colors have in different cultures to make sure that the right message is mediated. The use of desaturated light colors are often seen as friendly while saturated colors catch the viewers attention and are interpreted as exciting and dynamic (Poulin, 2018). Silayoi and Speece (2007) state that graphics components do not necessarily need to be intentionally placed by the marketer, but nevertheless their placement affects consumers.

#### 2.4.2 Structural Components of Packaging

The structural components are the size, material and shape of the packaging (Hine, 1995). According to Underwood (2003) the structure of package design has the ability to communicate function and symbolic utility of the product. Visual cues, such as elongated packages, can also create judgments on the volume of product making consumers believe there to be more or less product depending on the size of the packaging (Silayoi & Speece, 2007). Judgements of materials however are, according to Klatzky, Lederman and Matula (1993), more commonly made through haptic exploration. The authors additionally state that the material's texture largely is examined through haptics. Texture of packaging can have an impact on product perceptions which became evident in Marckhgott and Kamleitner's (2019) study. The authors found that products with a matte texture were considered more natural than ones with glossy texture. Because of the area of use, Kotler et al. (2019) state that there is only a limited number of alternatives of materials suitable for shipping packaging. The most common materials used today are plastic and cardboard which can be used for lightweight and compact packages (Kotler et al., 2019).

### 2.5 Buying Decision Process

As previously stated, shipping packaging and primary packaging differs in many ways, one such way is when consumers are faced with it. Consumers often can make judgments on primary packaging before they purchase the product and shipping packaging after they have purchased the product. This results in the different types of packaging reaching consumers at different points in the buying decision process. The buying decision process is a model that aims to capture the different stages a customer passes in the decision making when buying a product. According to Kotler and Keller (2016) the model is additionally used to understand the experiences customers have when they are experiencing a need for a product, how they proceed when choosing, using and disposing of the product. The buying decision process consists of five steps which are problem recognition, information search, evaluation of

alternatives, purchase decision and postpurchase behavior (Kotler & Keller, 2019). Further, it is important to note that consumers do not always pass all five steps of the process and that the process can appear as more dynamic where steps can be reversed (Kotler & Keller, 2019). To fulfill the research purpose, it is important to acknowledge that shipping packaging reaches consumers after evaluations and subsequent purchase which also will affect how it influences consumers' post purchase behavior. Knowledge of the buying decision process will also contribute to further understanding on what could affect consumers' perceptions of shipping packaging that constitute the brand experience. We will only briefly examine the first four steps of the buying decision process and go into depth in the fifth step, postpurchase behavior, since it is after the purchase consumers' evaluation of the shipping packaging occurs.

Kotler and Keller (2019) describe the first step, problem recognition as referring to when a consumer recognizes a problem or need, which is triggered by an internal or external stimulus. Information search is the second step and the process when consumers are seeking information about the product or service. Depending on the purchase consumers put varying levels of engagement into the information search. The third step is evaluation of alternatives, where the consumers evaluate which product will best satisfy their needs. The fourth step, purchase decision summarizes the consumers choice of product as well as choice of buying channel. Lastly, the postpurchase behavior evaluates what consumers do after purchase.

### 2.5.1 Postpurchase Behavior

Postpurchase behavior can be divided into postpurchase satisfaction, actions, use and disposal. Postpurchase satisfaction describes the closeness between a consumer's expectations and the perceived performance of a product. Kotler and Keller (2016) state that if the performance does not live up to the expectations the consumer will experience disappointment, while if the performance goes beyond expectations it will generate a feeling of delightedness. Customer satisfaction is often examined on service and employees but can also pertain to a purchase as a whole. Szymanski and Henard (2001) state that consumers adapt to brand's performances and form their expectations accordingly to avoid dissonance. Therefore, consumers will set a standard depending on their reference points. Additionally, the authors explain that satisfaction is not purely cognitive and that affective judgements also determine perceived satisfaction.

Kotler and Keller (2016) describe postpurchase actions as including customer's response to experienced postpurchase satisfaction. If the customer is happy with their product they are more likely to purchase the product again and pursue word-of-mouth marketing and recommend the brand and product to others. Kotler et al. (2019) additionally state that dissatisfied customers may instead return the product, complain publicly, go to a lawyer or abandon the company. Postpurchase communication has proved to decrease the numbers of returns and increased customer satisfaction. Levitt (1983) states that good postpurchase communication creates a relationship between the brand and the consumers. However, different brands do not need to have the same closeness in their relationship with consumers. Important however for the post purchase communication to create a somewhat positive experience is the notion that the brand owes the consumer something as a result of the purchase. Therefore Levitt (1983) proposes that communication should express gratitude, talk about a common future, make recommendations and make service suggestions among other things.

Postpurchase use and disposal highlights the importance of monitoring how customers should use and dispose of the product (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Use is of importance since more frequent use leads to shorter repurchasing time. According to Kotler and Keller (2016) strategy to increase the usage is to find customer segments that use the product less than recommended, to be able to communicate to them the benefits that come with more frequent use. Understanding how customers dispose of a product is of special importance if the product can lead to environmental damage, such as medicines and products containing batteries (Kotler et al., 2019).

## 2.8 Brand Experiences

Brand experience can be defined as “subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments.” (Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2009, p. 53). We believe that shipping packaging can be one such stimulus that has the ability to affect the consumer responses. Especially because, as previously stated, the shipping packaging might be the first physical encounter a consumer has with an online retailer. Loureiro (2020) attests that the brand experience carries resemblance to the buying decision process with the brand experience starting when the consumer searches for a branded product and ending with the product disposal. Similarly, Hoch (2002) states that the

product experience starts in the search and evaluation stages, in other words the first steps in the buying decision process. When the experience starts, research has found that for a brand experience to form it is vital that it is extraordinary in some way beyond the practical benefits associated with the product (Kim & Chao, 2019; Huang, 2017). But the consumer does not need to have a particularly close relationship with the brand for this to happen as strong brand experiences can stem from low involvement brands (Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2009).

Schmitt (1999) states, that in contrast to branding which rose in popularity in marketing literature during the 1990's, experiential marketing dazzles the senses. Additionally, the author states that as markets mature and develop, a positive brand image is something consumers are used to and therefore take for granted which develops the need for experiential marketing. However, Kim and Chao (2019) found that brand experiences actually build brand image and that brand experiences can have a positive impact on the brand image. This in turn can develop purchase intention which Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009) suggests that brand experience is a strong predictor to. In fact, Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009) mean that brand experience is a better predictor for this than brand personality. However, brand personality is a part of brand image according to Patterson (1999). These brand constructs therefore impact each other interchangeably, as previous research both makes it evident that brand experiences impact brand image and that brand related stimuli creates brand experiences. Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009) state that the brand stimuli are a part of a brand's identity. Consumer responses to the stimuli can therefore be compared to brand image which is the consumer perceptions of brand identity (Patterson, 1999). Important to keep in mind however, is the distinction between brand image, which is largely related to what consumers think about the brand, and brand experience, what the brand makes consumers think, act and feel. These reactions are what we strive to examine to fulfill our research topic.

### 2.8.1 The Experience Concept

Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009) explains that the brand experience concept is constructed through product experiences, shopping experiences and consumption experiences. Hoch (2002) states that the product experience starts in the search and evaluation stages, in other words the first steps in the buying decision process. The product experience is created through physical contact with the product or other forms of contact such as visual representations.

Similarly, the purchase in itself can be an experience when consumers interact with the physical retail space and service personnel (Kerin, Ambuj and Howard, 1992; Arnold, Reynolds, Ponder & Lueg, 2005). The shopping experience as defined by Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello (2009) is therefore hard to achieve when the purchase is made through online retailers. Similarly, Moreau (2020) believes this concept is not accounted for in e-commerce. The experiential aspects of consumption as a motivation for consumers beyond problem solving has been examined by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982). As Levy (1959) states, all products carry symbolic meanings relating to the brands. Therefore, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) rationalized that the consumption experience is built upon hedonistic values such as fun, play, variety seeking, aesthetics and multisensory enjoyment.

As evident by the literature, the brand experience entails many concepts which allows for an all-encompassing theory. Thus, it is only rational that the delivery of online orders can be considered a part of the consumption experience. The brand experience as a whole however, is made up of more than just one instance. Therefore, the most appropriate approach to shipping packaging in the brand experience is to consider it a stimulus that has the possibility to impact the brand experience perceived by consumers, which results in this thesis' research purpose.

### 2.8.2 Brand Experience Dimensions

To examine how the shipping packaging stimuli can impact brand experience the dimensions of brand experience has to be examined. According to Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009) brand experience consists of four dimensions: sensory, affective, behavioral and intellectual which could be evoked differently depending on the brand. The dimensions are inspired by previous literature and most importantly Schmitts (1999) research of experiential marketing introducing the experimental marketing framework bringing up five types of customer experiences which are sense, feel, think, act and relate.

The sensory experience dimension relates to when marketing activities appeal to the senses through sight, touch, sound, smell and taste. This is used to differentiate companies and their products from competitors, motivate consumers to purchase and add extra value to products (Schmitt, 1999). Bloch, Brunel and Arnold (2003) found that the different senses may vary in importance depending on the product category but visual appearance is essential in almost all

goods. Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009) similarly emphasizes impressions and appeal to the visual senses. In relation to the sensory dimension Schmitt (1999) presents that a brand expression is constructed in three levels, which are primary elements, styles and themes. Primary elements are related to the five senses, for example the color, typeface, shape, material and texture. Color is seen as the most important primary element due to its ability to attract attention and mediate senses. The primary elements are seen as the building blocks for style, which further summarize the quality of a sensory expression. Style is further divided into different style dimensions such as movement (dynamic versus static), complexity (minimalism versus ornamentalism) and potency (soft/weak versus loud/strong). The third level, themes, relates to the message that is communicated by a corporation to increase meaning and content. Themes aim to provide with reference points, mental anchors and memory cues and can appear as visual symbols, jingles, verbal slogans to arouse sensory imagery (Schmitt, 1999).

The affective experience dimension addresses consumers' emotions and inner feelings, which can be achieved by creating an affective marketing experience that makes the consumer experience emotions of joy linked to the consumption (Schmitt, 1999). Richins (1997) found that consumption is associated with both positive and negative feelings for consumers, but positive feelings outweigh the negative. The most common positive feelings expressed by the examined consumers were "happiness, relief and excitement" and the most common negative feelings were "worry, sadness and guilt" (Richins, 1997, p. 130). Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello (2009) encapsulates these varying feelings and examines the affective dimension through if consumers perceive the brand as a whole as being emotional or able to induce feelings. Schmitt (1999) states that feelings can be generated through product design, communicated message and surrounding environment of the product being sold. The author additionally states that emotional marketing is effective due to consumers' core principle of seeking pleasure and avoiding feeling bad. A successful linkage between a product and a good memory or feeling will foster strong and durable brand loyalty.

The behavioral experience dimension includes marketing activities that affect consumer's lifestyles and interpersonal activities (Schmitt, 1999). According to Helman and De Chernatony (1999) consumption guides consumer behavior through aiding consumers to fulfill an ideal behavior set. Similarly, Schmitt (1999) attests that marketing can show consumers alternative ways of performing physical tasks. Consumers can co-create these tasks and therefore brand experiences because they are not completely passive through the consumption (Kozinets,

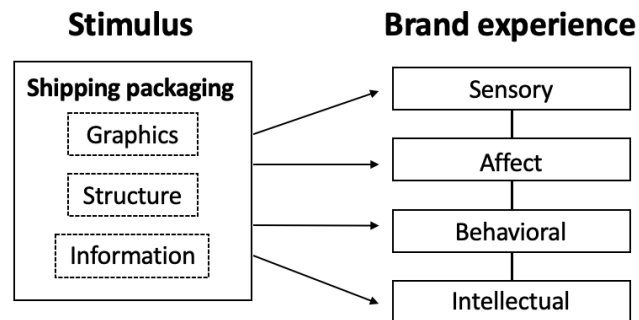
Sherry, Storm, Duhachek, Nuttavuthisit & Spence, 2004). Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009) also adds that this dimension of brand experience is formed by instances when a brand encourages consumers to engage in physical actions and if consumers perceive the brand to be action oriented.

The intellectual experience dimension is made up of marketing activities that build cognitive experiences (Schmitt, 1999). Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009) simply compromises intellectual brand experiences to instances where a brand makes you think, something that Schmitt (1999) means is not only confined to brands in complex industries such as tech but can be possible for all brands through communication and design. However, Schmitt (1999) also delves a bit deeper to understand the building blocks of intellectual brand experiences.

Guilford (1950, cited in Schmitt, 1999) states that two types of thinking make up the intellect; convergent and divergent thinking. Convergent thinking is analytical in nature and used to solve defined problems. Divergent thinking on the other hand, is more flexible and unique (Schmitt, 1999). In marketing, divergent thinking can be triggered through humor, fantasy and originality (Smith & Yang, 2004). Both ways of thinking however creates creativity which is the building ground for intellectual brand experiences. Schmitt (1999) states that the ways brands can create intellectual brand experiences are: problem solving, surprise, intrigue and provocation. Problem solving stimulates convergent thinking. Surprise occurs “... when you depart from a common expectation” and to create a brand experience the surprise has to be positive which results in delight Schmitt (1999, p. 388). Intrigue takes surprise a step further through fascinating consumers. Schmitt (1999) attest that intrigue is subjective and depends on the knowledge a consumer has but large philosophical issues tend to be better at creating intrigue. Lastly, provocation through marketing can create brand experiences through creating discussion (Schmitt, 1999).



## 2.9 Theoretical Framework



*Figure 1 Theoretical framework*

To fulfill the research purpose a theoretical framework has been constructed, presented in figure 1. The theoretical framework aims to summarize the main points brought up in previous literature and theories presented that might be useful in the development of an answer to the proposed research question. The points we believe are important to answer the research question pertains to shipping packaging and the components that make it up. We believe that shipping packaging, much like other forms of packaging, is made up of graphic components, structural components and informational components. This belief stems from previous research on other packaging formats which include these components.

We propose through this theoretical framework that shipping packaging could possibly act as a stimulus to create responses which may result in a brand experience. As stated by Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009), Schmitt (1999), Kim and Chao (2019) and Huang (2017) for a brand to form the experience in itself has to exceed expectations by being positive and extraordinary. Therefore, we cannot yet confirm if shipping packaging can act as a stimulus as consumer perceptions of shipping packaging has to be examined to understand this. Their perceptions, in the form of feelings and cognitions, will show if the stimuli can create something positive or extraordinary, which will determine if shipping packaging can be a brand experience stimulus or not. Nevertheless, the literature examined in this chapter proves that there is good reason to think so.

Not included in the visual representation of the framework is the scope within which the framework lies. As shipping packaging reaches consumers post purchase the impact of shipping

packaging can only be made at this time. Meaning, shipping packaging cannot act as a brand experience inducing stimulus earlier in the buying decision process. This concurs with shipping packaging influencing the consumption experience concept as previously stated. Additionally, the knowledge that brand image both impacts the shipping packaging and can be impacted by the brand experience shipping packaging might produce is important to keep in mind when fulfilling the research purpose.

## 3. Method

*In this chapter we describe the methodological choices that were made to answer our research question. Starting with the research approach followed by the data collection method including the sampling selection to the focus groups we conducted. Lastly, we go into some research quality concerns and how they have been accounted for throughout the research process.*

### 3.1 Research Philosophy

According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) the relation between data and theory is well discussed by philosophers, raising concern of how philosophical factors and implications are affecting the creation and outcomes of research. Researchers have to have a grasp of philosophical issues to get a basic understanding for epistemology and to be able to understand the impact of his or her reflexive role in the research method. It will also contribute to insights for the construction of the research design and knowledge to identify which research design fits best for the research purpose and how the choice will influence the result (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

The philosophical debate discussing research approaches is centered around concerns on ontology and epistemology. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) describe that ontology explains the nature of existence and reality and discusses the perspectives realism, relativism and nominalism. Realism is the viewpoint that there exists one single truth, relativism describes how reality is perceived differently depending on personal conditions which results in no single truth and nominalism argues for that there is no truth. Epistemology is the theory of knowledge and is used to understand the best way to inquire into the nature of the world. The perspectives used in epistemology are nuances of positivism and social-constructionism, where the first assumes that the social world exists independently and can be measured through objective methods while the latter believes that people make sense of the world through verbally sharing their experiences with others (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). This research aims to understand how shipping packaging can act as stimuli for brand experience and since opinions and preferences of aesthetic and functional features are most likely to vary depending on the participants viewpoint, this research is based on a relativist perspective. Further, this research has taken a constructionist viewpoint accepting that many different realities exist regarding how people perceive packaging and what they find favorable. The choices of relativist ontology

and a constructionist epistemology results in a qualitative approach to data which will enable research that can go in depth to understand multiple perspectives of the phenomenon of shipping packaging and its effects on brand experience.

### 3.2 Research Approach

As brand experience is built on consumer responses and behavioral responses, utilizing research design that allows for understanding of consumer responses is essential to answer the research question. Qualitative research emphasizes the importance of an individual's perception and interpretation of reality through the analysis of words (Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019). Therefore, Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) believe that qualitative research can be used to discern how consumers see their own world and with that understand their behaviors. As this study aims to explore the phenomena of consumer response to shipping packaging to generate new theories, gaining consumer insights is paramount. Additionally, Saunder, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) state that qualitative research allows the inquiry into the theme at hand to be flexible when needed which Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) say is because the researcher uses a creative and reflective process. Since we were researching a novel topic with little previous academic literature we believed some flexibility in the research is favorable so that we can fulfill the research purpose.

Research can be based on a deductive or inductive approach. With an inductive approach, researchers start by collecting empirical material, and when a substantial amount has been collected, the researcher attempts to analyze patterns to create reasoning and valid theories (Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019). A deductive approach is contrastingly built on the basis of an existing premise that can be stated to be true and based on these draws logical conclusions of what should be stated as true in general cases. Deductive research approach has a strong link to positivist epistemology and is commonly used in quantitative research while inductive is more popular in qualitative research (Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019). Generally in research, these two approaches are often viewed as ideals that become hard to achieve in its original form, and are instead combined slightly, where the deductive process often involves some induction as well as the other way around (Alvehus, 2013; Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019). In recent years, use of the abductive approach has grown in popularity, which is described as a combination of deductive and inductive approach. Abductive approach means to alternately start from the empirical data and use theories during the research process. This approach is used to make

logical inferences and theory creation and is proposed to overcome the weaknesses of linked to strict procedure of inductive and deductive (Bryman, Bell & Harley 2019).

This research has taken an abductive approach. The data collection was initiated by conducting a literature review and when a broad understanding of the subject and its premises was established, empirical data collection was initiated. During the data collection, the participants were asked questions discussing both brand experience and brand image so that we could examine how the shipping packaging affected their opinions in these two fields. The data collection proved brand experience to be more significant than brand image, which resulted in a narrowed focus, examining only brand experience. Additionally, the use of cases as discussion points proved that free samples and gifts were something prevalent in shipping packaging. As this was not something found in the literature overview we wanted to alter the topic selection guide for the focus groups to include these components. Using an abductive approach allowed us to reconsider perspectives which enhanced our understanding and enabled us to consider, observe and recognize factors that are influencing consumers' responses. Thereby, using an abductive approach resulted in the creation of our theoretical framework and thus the extension on the previous research within brand experiences.

### 3.3 Data Collection Method

The primary data for this research was collected through interviews in the form of focus groups. Focus groups are a popular research method that examines people's opinions and how they can develop in discussion with other participants. Bryman, Bell and Harley (2019) state that the group dynamic enables debate between the participants which can result in interesting discussion and innovative solutions. Compared to having individual interviews, the use of focus groups often involves lively discussions which can contribute to deeper insights about how and why people feel in certain ways as well as it can give a wide variety of angles about a specific issue since people can listen to others or argue for their opinion depending on how discussion develops (Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019). Since the influence of shipping packaging might not be something people have reflected deeply on before, the empirical data collection was fostered by having focus groups instead of individual interviews.

We have conducted two focus groups where we invited six participants to each group, which is in line with the recommended number of participants by Morgan (1979 cited in Bryman, Bell

& Harley, 2019). The focus group interviews were semi structured to be able to ask follow-up questions for better understanding of the individual opinions raised (Carson, Gilmore, Perry & Gronhaug, 2011). In the focus groups we first asked the participants general questions about their preferences regarding shipping packaging and afterwards used cases as discussion prompts. Through the cases we could physically show the focus groups shipping packaging, hopefully eliciting more discussion and sensory stimulation in line with a real shipping packaging experience, as if the participants had ordered the package themselves. The focus group process, topics and sample will be discussed throughout this chapter in detail.

### 3.4 Participant Selection

The sampling design used for this research was non-probability sampling and was conducted through purposive sampling. This sampling method is performed by the researcher approaching potential participants to make sure that they meet eligibility criteria. This is beneficial when the researcher has a clear vision of which sample units are required to fulfill the purpose of the study (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Since this research is examining if shipping packaging from online beauty retailers can act as a stimulus to create brand experiences it was important that the participants were representative of people buying beauty products online. To ensure this, we had three criterias when selecting interview participants. First, all participants should have bought beauty products online at least one time and secondly, all participants should use beauty products regularly and lastly the participants should speak Swedish.

Globally, men are responsible for 1 percent of annual beauty sales (Khatib, 2020). Although a trend of increased consumption by male consumers has started, it is thought that this largely is due to men buying more male grooming products such as razors and trimmers (Allgaier, n.d). As men make up a small number of consumers that have bought beauty products in general we did not put extra time in finding one in our area during the purposive sampling. Partly because one male participant would be an overrepresentation in the study that aims to reflect the larger populations preferences but also because only including one could lead to power dynamics within the focus group that skews the responses. According to Carson et al. (2001) homogeneous participants may get along easier than heterogeneous which can lead to them feeling more familiar and therefore being able to answer the questions more efficiently.

To ensure that the participants felt comfortable with expressing their opinions they were offered pseudonyms. This is proposed by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) who state that granting anonymity is used to establish trust and increases the probability that the participants will express their way of thinking. To ensure that the pseudonyms used are neutral they are selected from the top 20 most popular Swedish female names (SCB, 2022). The focus group participants consisted of females born between 1992 and 2002. As explained previously in section 1.6 Delimitations, the choice to use people in this age range stems from the prevalence to shop online. Additionally, Powell and Single (1996) believes that it is ideal if focus group participants and moderators share characteristics such as age, gender and language. Therefore, choosing female respondents within a similar age range to ours that spoke Swedish matched our characteristics as moderator and note-taker which facilitates uninhibited dialogue (Powell & Single, 1996). More information about the focus group sample can be found in table 1.

*Table 1: Focus group participant information*

<b>Fokus group</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
1	Maria	24	Lund	Sales manager
1	Elisabeth	24	Lund	Master student in Business Administration
1	Kristina	25	Lund	Master student in Business Administration
1	Margareta	26	Malmö	Medicine student
1	Eva	26	Lund	Law student
1	Linnea	26	Lund	Engineering student
2	Emma	19	Malmö	Cashier
2	Marie	25	Malmö	Landscape architecture student
2	Ingrid	26	Lund	Risk management consultant
2	Sofia	26	Malmö	Supply chain coordinator

2	Johanna	26	Malmö	Nursing student
2	Lena	30	Malmö	Nurse

### 3.5 Case Selection

During the focus groups three cases were used to act as discussion points. We believed that using cases as discussion points would be beneficial when fulfilling the research purpose as showing examples of shipping packaging might create more input than if the participants had to give opinions based solely on recall of previous experiences. Yin (1994, cited in Carson, Gilmore, Perry & Gronhaug, 2001, p. 93) states that case-based research is appropriate to conduct when examining a “contemporary phenomenon within its dynamically changing, real-life context”. Although our research is not based on cases primarily, we believe that the phenomenon of shipping packaging can be considered contemporary as few scholars have studied it despite the prevalence of gray literature and managerial interest, which makes cases appropriate to use within the setting of the focus groups. We decided to use three brands to serve as discussion points. These cases were chosen because they have three different price points, clearly distinct communication on their websites as well as their own online retail spaces. From each brand we ordered two small liquid beauty products. At check-out we added all free additions to the package. These free additions were either samples of the product’s brand’s offer or other gifts. No cases had options to choose the shipping packaging size. We will now briefly present the cases chosen Clarins, Glossier and Yves Rocher.

Clarins is a European, family founded beauty brand that carries skincare, fragrance, body care and makeup products. The brand is considered prestigious with innovative formulas that are used by spas around the world (Clarins, n.da). Clarins is the most expensive brand of the cases with lip glosses ranging in price from 195 to 230 SEK (Clarins, n.db). When purchasing from clarins.se we could add three free samples at checkout. These samples were decided by us as shoppers from a list of 222 products within all product categories Clarins carries. The free samples were sunscreen, perfume and eye-cream in small plastic packaging. In addition to the products we ordered and the samples, the shipping packaging contained a return form, white packing paper and white tissue paper with the Clarins logo.





*Figure 2 Clarins shipping packaging and content*

Glossier is an American beauty brand which originated from the beauty blog of founder Emily Weiss. Glossier believes that beauty is about having fun and wants to democratize beauty through co-creation with the brand’s users and have products in the categories skincare, fragrance, body care and makeup (Glossier, n.da). Glossier is in the middle price range of the selected cases and their lipgloss costs 130 SEK (Glossier, n.db). When purchasing from Glossier we could add one free sample at checkout from a selection of four products, one from each category they carry. We selected a perfume sample that was packaged in a small plastic bottle. There was also a possibility to add a free “pink pouch” at checkout that the products were delivered in. In addition to the sample and the pink pouch the shipping packaging contained a sticker with the brands name.



*Figure 3 Glossier shipping packaging and content*

Yves Rocher is a french brand with the goal to sell affordable beauty for every woman. They do this by providing the best of powerful active ingredients of botanicals from Bretagne and by every step in the production process (Yves Rocher, n.da). Yves Rocher is the cheapest brand of the cases with lip gloss costing 109 SEK (Yves Rocher, n.db). When purchasing from Yves

Rocher we could not add any free samples to the order at checkout. However, when receiving the shipping packaging it contained a small decorated paper bag with two free samples and a thank you note for purchasing from the brand for the first time. These samples were a leave-in conditioner and face serum in small plastic tubes. In addition to this the shipping packaging contained a note with product information about the samples and a 20 percent discount code.



*Figure 4 Yves Rocher shipping packaging and content*

### 3.6 Preparation and Conduction Process for Focus Group Interviews

To ensure research quality we will now in detail describe how we conducted the focus group interviews. After gathering our sample and background information on the topics of e-commerce, packaging and brand experience we thoroughly planned our data collection to ensure that we get the most valuable information to answer our research question. In the following sections we will go through the focus group preparation and process.

#### 3.6.1 Focus Group Topic Selection

The topic selection was made from the theoretical framework presented in section 2.9. This framework describes how shipping packaging can act as a stimulus for a brand experience post purchase. To fulfill the research purpose, we therefore believed that building the topics for the semi structured focus group interviews on this framework was fitting. To get responses on all components of the theoretical framework we needed participants' responses that show their opinions on graphics and structure of shipping packaging and other postpurchase communication such as information and free samples. Lastly, the possible impact the shipping packaging might have on consumer brand perceptions needed to be examined to understand if a brand experience has been created. Most important within all components is the consumer perceptions, which is why the topics of the focus group should probe the participants for their opinions. Through the selection of cases we found that all cases had free samples or gifts

included in the purchase. These free samples and gifts were included as a result of performing the purchase online. Therefore, we propose that these free samples and gifts were a part of the shipping packaging experience, and therefore important to include in the research. Because of our use of an abductive research approach we could add the topic of free samples and gifts to our study at this point. Consequently, the focus group topics therefore can be summarized as *graphics, structure, samples, postpurchase communication* and *brand image*.

In the theoretical framework we propose that *graphics, structure, samples* and *information* can lead to *brand experience*. Therefore, we first covered these topics through using the cases to serve as discussion points. This resulted in questions such as “What do you think about the graphic elements on the packaging?”. After examining this we could ask questions about the *brand image* topic such as “Do you believe that the packaging from this brand aligns with your expectations on what packaging from this brand would look like?”. We also wanted to present more information about the brands to elicit additional information about the brand image perceptions and if they are affected by the website. For example: might someone who was very positive towards packaging from a certain brand be turned off by a dissonance in the communication style in the packaging and on the website as a whole? Our aim was to avoid asking questions that make the participants focus too much on the products, as we know that the style of products vary between each case brand. Our aim was also to not directly ask the participants questions relating to the brand experience dimensions as we do not want to lead them too much. Our hope with this was that the questions we asked would facilitate open discussion of the shipping packaging presented to gauge if the opinions presented can be considered to be a brand experience.

When creating the focus group topic guide we did so with the goal to examine the topics through the same questions on multiple cases. Meaning that questions that covered the topics were asked more than once. We did this to find nuances in the focus group participant responses and to see the similarities and differences in the responses to the cases. Lastly, all topics were covered again at the end of the focus group when participants were able to openly answer questions about shipping packaging not tied to the cases and compare all cases they had been exposed to. Here we wanted to examine positive experiences consumers have had with shipping packaging that might not have been expressed through our chosen cases. In total the topics were examined through 33 questions and five segments; before the cases, case one, case two, case three, and after the cases. A full translated version of our topic guide can be found in appendix 1.

### 3.6.2 Focus Group Moderation

During the focus groups we acted as moderator and note taker. Denscombe (2000) states that if the moderator aims to help the participants in a focus group interview they could add a degree of personal engagement. As we wanted to make the participants comfortable and aid them to be confident in their responses to retain as much information as possible from them we consciously added a certain degree of personal engagement through nodding, smiling and saying “mhm” after all statements. We also believed that this would enable us to conduct the semi structured interview with more confidence as moderators and note-takers. Additionally, Denscombe (2000) proposes that there is less need for the moderator to be neutral in focus group interviews than in other forms of interviews. Similarly, Carson et al. (2001) states that it is important for a moderator to show interest in listening to the participants thoughts and feelings and personal engagement. In relation to this Carson et al. (2001) also states that the moderator’s role is to act as a catalyst for discussion between participants of the focus group, and with this there might be a need to adapt to the different personality types of the participants. As moderators we had this in mind and paid extra attention to if any participant seemed shy and, in that case, made sure to address them by name and ask them questions again after a discussion if they could not express their opinion during it.

### 3.6.3 Focus Group Process

The two focus groups were held physically the 3rd and 5th of May 2022, 17.30 both times. Carson et al. (2001) attest that late afternoon or early evening is the best time to conduct a focus group because they have found that is the time where participants enjoy the focus group the most and stimulate each other’s thoughts. The focus groups were held in our living rooms, the reason for this being that the location was neutral without connections to the subjects discussed which, according to Powell and Single (1996), will allow critical discussion of the subject. Sitting comfortably is also important for participants to participate in off the cuff discussion (Carson et al., 2001).

The focus group began with introductions and informal communication where participants could sit down and enjoy a light snack and something to drink. We were purposeful in the creation of a laid-back atmosphere as Powell and Single (1996) believes this paramount in eliciting frank conversation later on in the focus group. Thereafter, we informed the participants about the nature of our study through asking them to sign a consent form, which can be found

in a translated version in appendix 2. The focus group interview started with a brief background and definition of shipping packaging to differentiate it from primary packaging and avoid confusion about what we asked their opinions on.

As previously mentioned, the participants were asked 33 questions divided into five segments. In each segment we prompted the participants to clearly state their opinion, even if it was that they had none. The first segment consisted of questions regarding the participants' demands and desires linked to the packaging and shipping when buying beauty products online. We also asked about general expectations on shipping packaging at this point in line with recommendations by Carson et al. (1996) who believe that this is the best way to start a case-based interview. In the second segment, the participants were introduced to the shipping packaging of the selected cases, which were introduced one by one in randomized order. In the first focus group they were introduced in the order Clarins, Glossier and lastly Yves Rocher. In the second focus group they were presented Yves Rocher, Clarins and lastly Glossier. First, the participants examined the shipping packaging thoroughly one by one and were instructed to look through all elements in the shipping packaging. We did not include the products ordered but everything else, samples, return forms et cetera, was included. After examining the shipping packaging the participants got to discuss what they liked and disliked about the shipping packaging and what their thoughts of the company was and if they had purchased from the brand before. Second, they were introduced to a short description of the brand written by the brand itself and showed a powerpoint consisting of the website's landing page, "about us" page, the page for skincare and the checkout. These pages are presented in appendix 3. After the presentation the participants were asked again about their attitudes towards the brand and if they thought that the packaging corresponded to their expectations of the certain brand. This was repeated for all three brands. In the third segment of the interview the participants were asked to compare the different packages and discuss their overall impressions and if there was any category all the cases were lacking in. Whenever asked for it the participants could examine the shipping packaging again.

### 3.7 Data Analysis

The analysis of our qualitative data was aligned with Rennstam and Westerfors (2018) and Alvehus (2013) into three different steps: sorting, reducing and arguing. We have performed a thematic sorting, which is a process aiming to find recurring elements or content. This process

started off with transcribing the empirical data collection to be able to code the data properly. Since the interview questions were representing different themes, the sorting process mainly involved interpreting which theme the material was most relevant to. It is important that the researcher does not interpret the material based on favorite angles but instead go through the material thoroughly and sort the material in multiple ways to avoid taking categories for granted (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). After going through the material a few times, identifying the different perceptions and perspectives brought up and linking them to relevant themes, we continued with the process of reducing the data.

It is necessary to reduce the collected material to manage the analysis process. After the sorting, the researcher has a good overview of the material, but this often enables too many analysis paths. Therefore, the researcher has to choose among the categories selected regarding which best fits the purpose. This process includes both reducing the number of themes as well as the content within the themes (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). We started off deciding what themes we found most important and interesting for the aim of this research. After conducting the focus groups, we decided to sort according to the shipping packaging components listed in the theoretical framework as *graphics*, *structure*, *information* and *free samples and gifts*. Thereafter, we went through the quotes again to map resembling and contradictory opinions presented about the components. In cases where there were many arguments illustrating similar ideas we only kept the most figurative example. This step determines the direction of the study and exemplifies the researchers' subjective impact in the outcome findings. Therefore, assuming that other researchers analyzed the same empirical data, they are likely to end up with other findings.

The last step, arguing, is vital for the research in order to say something and draw conclusions. Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) state that a decisive part of the analytical task here is theorizing. This contains the work of making argumentation based on the empirical facts found to summarize the researchers findings. To accomplish this, we have in line with Alvehus (2013) looked into many established concepts of the field to ensure our understanding of these in order to connect our chosen themes to our compiled theoretical framework. Building arguments in this way can strengthen the theoretical framework, but also question the theory and supplement the knowledge gaps that exist with new relevant material. Once the theory and data collection were analyzed, we were able to further develop our theoretical framework in order to answer the research question.

## 3.8 Research Quality

Ensuring research quality was of utmost importance while striving to fulfill the research purpose. According to Bryman, Bell and Harley (2019) high quality research should be accurate and have integrity in the results of the research. This is most commonly known as the research having validity, a practice used in quantitative studies that can assess the adequacy of measures. Because of this Bryman, Bell and Harley (2019) states that researchers that perform qualitative studies need other assessment criteria, since qualitative research is not measurable in the same way quantitative research is. Lincoln and Guba (1985, cited in Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019) advocate for trustworthiness to be used as a criterion instead, which can be divided into credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. We have decided to examine our research practices through this criterion as the research we have conducted is qualitative.

### 3.8.1 Credibility

Denscombe (2000) states that credibility entails the researchers ability to ensure the validity and accuracy of the findings, in other words the researcher's confidence in the research (Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019). Nowell, Norris, White and Moules (2017) mean that credibility occurs when readers and co-researchers recognize the same things in the research, which in turn is affected by the researchers ability to discern the intended meaning behind the responses. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, cited in Korstjens & Moser, 2017) there are several methods to give qualitative research credibility; these are prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation and member check.

We aimed to create credibility firstly through investigator triangulation, which means using more than one researcher to perform the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). By making sure to take advantage of the fact that we were two authors, both of us worked closely together through background research, focus group interviews, coding and analysis. By doing so we could ask questions when needed for clarification and bring forth different interpretations if they ever arose and rethink any information presented when needed. Additionally, we performed member checks when necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the statements provided and to make sure that our understanding of their statement was correct. The member checking was conducted through brief non-structured interviews. Because the focus groups interviews were semi-structured, we asked for clarification on statements during the focus groups if needed.

Adding to this the focus group participants also could ask us and other participants to clarify any statements.

Bryman, Bell and Harley (2019) also believe that qualitative research can be established as valid if good research practices are performed throughout the research. At every point during our research we strived towards using the best research practices we could guided by literature within the field. This concerns both data collection and analysis.

### 3.8.2 Transferability

According to Bryman, Bell and Harley (2019) transferability involves the research findings' ability to be transferred to other contexts than the one studied. Wibeck (2000) states that generalizability, which means that the results of the study can be seen as general for a larger population, is not the goal of focus group studies. Instead, transferability is to be examined by the reader of the study. Meaning if someone wants to apply the findings from this study, they have to first decide if the findings are applicable (Wibeck, 2000).

We ensured transferability by providing thick information about how we conducted our research and explaining the context the research was conducted in. Special care was put into describing the focus group interview process. By informing about the focus group participant selection and topic guide we ensured that anyone who is deciding if the research is transferable to their context knows the background that led to our results. We are aware that our research results will not be generalizable in all fields but through thoroughly detailing the research process we believe that the research could be replicated in the same setting with very similar results.

However, we are aware that the number of focus groups performed can impact the transferability of the research findings. If we performed more focus groups it would likely increase the complexity of analysis and decrease the likelihood of data being impacted by socio-economic factors (Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019). However, Calder (1977, cited in Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019) states that saturation can be considered to be met when the moderator can predict what the participants will say in the next group. As moderators, we felt like the second group repeated the sentiments brought forward in the first focus group. Adding information about the participants, age, occupation and location will hopefully still provide the necessary



information for anyone examining the research to make their decision whether or not to transfer it.

### 3.8.3 Dependability

Dependability describes how stable the research findings are, meaning if they can be repeated in the future (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Through providing information about all steps made within this research we aimed to ensure dependability. According to Nowell et. al (2017) this is best done through audit trails, in which the researcher describes both methodological and theoretical choices they made with reasoning. Throughout this research we have argued for the decisions made which will ensure comparable conclusions if the study is replicated. The reason why a replicated version of the study will not harbor the exact conclusions we came to in this thesis is because social situations cannot be replicated perfectly (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982, cited in Bryman, Bell & Hyder, 2019). In a replicated version of this research, the researcher should therefore aim to replicate the social situation, i.e. the focus groups, as described previously in detail. As we have described our role as moderators in the research, a replication of the study could aim to at least create similar power dynamics as the ones in our focus group interviews which will lead to better replicability (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

### 3.8.4 Conformability

The last part of trustworthiness is confirmability which is achieved when the other parts of trustworthiness are met (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Because complete objectivity is impossible in qualitative research, confirmability is concerned with the researcher's aim to act in good faith during the research process. (Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019). Confirmability also is concerned with whether or not the findings are derived from the data (Nowell et al., 2017). Through objectivity towards our findings and results we aimed to ensure confirmability. As the purpose of the research, examining consumer brand perceptions as a result of shipping packaging, is not something that carries great personal implications for us making sure that we did not favor any answers in the focus groups was easy. Additionally, the use of theory anchored our analysis on something other than personal opinion, which helped create conformity in sorting, reducing and arguing.

However, we are aware that the social setting that is a focus group can be implicated by any and all reactions we have as moderators may have affected the answers provided by the

participants. We aimed to alleviate this issue with conformability by going into the moderation of the focus group with the goal to give favorable responses to all participants, no matter what they said. This because we believed a need for positive responses to facilitate a nice atmosphere that made the focus group participants feel comfortable. This resulted in small actions such as nodding and smiling to all respondents. But as we have not undergone any extensive training as moderators previously it is important to be aware of this possible impact in conformability.

## 4. Empirical Findings and Analysis

*In this chapter we present the empirical findings from the two focus groups. When presenting the findings we will also weave in the theories presented in chapter two, mainly the theoretical framework. This results in an analysis of the possible impact shipping packaging can have on brand experiences.*

### 4.1 Shipping Packaging's Effect on the Brand Experience Dimensions

Through examining the findings from the focus groups we found that several opinions were brought up by the participants in relation to the shipping packaging. Although brand experiences and the dimensions that make them up were not discussed explicitly, the participants expressed several ways in which shipping packaging, both in form of the cases presented and previous experiences, affected their senses, feelings, behaviors and thoughts. We will now present how each component of shipping packaging acted as a stimulus to create consumer responses in our focus groups.

#### 4.1.1 Structure

When the focus groups were asked about their opinions and preferences pertaining to the structure of the packaging, meaning the size, material and shape (Hine 1995), many participants held strong opinions. Especially about size, which several participants believed to be the most important aspect of shipping packaging. The participants believed that the shipping packaging should be small and several reasons for this were expressed. Firstly, one participant thought that a smaller size made the package easier to carry. Kristina expressed concerns about Clarins' shipping packaging...

“I have small fingers and then I think this packaging is a bit uncomfortable”  
(Kristina)

In regard to carrying the shipping packaging, participants also expressed concern about having to go out to fetch their shipping packaging from the post office, a task they related to receiving larger shipping packaging boxes. Because the participants were made aware of the size and type of products we ordered in the cases, they expressed further irritation at the knowledge that the product itself could fit into their apartment mailbox or pigeon hole at their front door.

“I would be annoyed if I ordered something that actually fits in my mailbox, I would be annoyed if I needed to go out and get it from somewhere just because the packaging is too big” (Elisabeth)

As stated by Silayoi and Speece (2007) assumptions on volume can be created by visual cues. This can explain why the participants did not ask us about the exact measurements or if we received the shipping packaging to a postal office or our home. The information did not seem necessary for them to still make their judgments on what size they found to be too big. When the participants perceived the packages as large some believed this also resulted in the shipping process being less sustainable.

“It doesn’t feel sustainable to send a very small product in a box. Even though the cardboard may be sustainably recycled there actually are sustainable plastic bags that can be recycled.” (Sofia)

And although several participants also expressed that they believed one important quality of shipping packaging was to protect the goods they got, the extra materials used to protect the goods could also become an annoyance in addition to creating the impression of a less sustainable shipping practice.

“When I throw away so much all the time that my trash bin constantly fills up extra paper is not something I want because I will just throw it away. And when it is a lip gloss it isn’t really something that needs real protection so then I just get annoyed with it.” (Kristina)

Extra trips to the post office, trash can and uncomfortable carrying on the way can all be considered to relate to the behavioral dimension of brand experience. As a result of the shipping packaging size, the consumers are forced to perform physical tasks. However, these tasks carry negative connotations within the focus groups and therefore the brand does not help the consumers perform an ideal behavior set as explained in the definition of the behavioral experience dimension. These negative tasks were expressed in relation to all three cases, even Yves Rocher which had the smallest shipping packaging size.

Additionally, the environmental concerns surrounding what the focus group considered to be unnecessary materials as a result of larger sized packages can be considered to create negative feelings in the consumers. This in turn can relate to the affective brand experience dimension that corresponds with the feelings a brand can evoke. However, this dimension relates to positive feelings consumers seek out to feel pleasure. As Schmitt (1999) stated, consumers seek out positive experiences to avoid bad ones. In this case the feelings evoked by the sizes and extra materials to protect the products were unanimously negative in the focus groups. Feelings of guilt associated with the last mile delivery seem to be very strong in the focus groups and make the last steps of the e-commerce shopping experience a bad one. Interestingly, all focus groups participants had purchased beauty online with some expressing this to be a habit when purchasing beauty, meaning they rather purchase online than in store. Therefore, the negative experience does not seem to be so strong that the participating consumers would seek out other consumption experiences to alleviate the negative feelings associated with purchasing online.

Nevertheless, the focus groups did not only express negative sentiments as a response to the shipping packaging. One participant stated that the Glossier shipping packaging structure was designed, or shaped, in a way that allowed for easy return which they considered to be positive.

“I think it is functional. If I were to send it back you just have to “swoosh” [swiftly closes the box]. It’s easy to close and open.” (Kristina)

Similarly, both Emma and Linnea expressed that they liked shipping packaging that were shaped to easily be resealed. Linnea stated about Clarins’ shipping packaging...

“...What I am thinking about that I liked was the adhesive return band because I think it is annoying when I have to fix it and tape it myself.” (Linnea)

Thus, a shipping packaging structure that allows for easy returns can be considered to affect the behavioral experience dimension through easing the return process, a process which can be assumed to be a negative experience. The ideal behavior set related to the behavioral experience dimension in this case is an easy return process, which the adhesive return band on Clarins shipping packaging, and the easy re-sealing of the Glossier shipping packaging facilitated. Emma and Ingrid also stated that they prefer packages that have a strip which can be pulled to open the package. Thus easy opening of shipping packaging could also be seen as an ideal

behavior set similar to easy return as explained by Margareta in relation to Clarins shipping packaging...

“I like that it opens all the way. Like, now it is hard to see if it [Clarins shipping packaging] is easy or hard to open but it looks like a package that is very easy to open” (Margareta)

The structure component also entails the material of the shipping packaging. In respect to the material, the focus group participants expressed that they thought that Glossier’s shipping packaging felt cheaper than the other cases presented. This can be assumed to affect the sensory dimension negatively as the texture was not something they liked. Similarly, participants in both groups expressed that they thought that the tissue paper included in the Clarins packaging was a nice luxurious touch, but the texture was too rough making the shipping packaging appear less fancy.

Another factor mentioned pertaining to the structural components of shipping packaging is Schmitts (1999) movement style dimension. Here, Eva stated that she liked the opening process of shipping packaging to feel like opening a boxed-up gift. She stated...

“I don’t think it [Clarins shipping packaging] was very aesthetically pleasing in the way it opened. It feels fun when it [the packaging] feels like a birthday present, this feels more like a milk carton.” (Eva)

It can be assumed that the movement of the package opening up did not live up to previous experience of opening gifts, and that Eva believed that shipping packaging could be executed in this way. Eva additionally stated that one thing she has liked with other shipping packaging she has received is if the product is wrapped in tissue paper and sealed with a sticker, an opinion which all members of the focus group shared. This can also be considered to be a factor in creating sensory experience responses as the tissue paper and sticker combination look luxurious. Concurrently, the “gift experience” also can be considered to make consumers feel good and happy, impacting the affective dimension positively.

To conclude, the empirical result from our focus groups showed that the structure of the shipping packaging could have a positive sensory impact by mediating a luxurious look as well

as having a shape that allows for easy sealing. However, our empirical findings show that structure also to a greater extent caused a negative impact for the focus group participants, with the possibility of causing a negative sensory, affective and behavioral experience as a result of the size, shape and material of the shipping packaging.

#### 4.1.2 Graphics

When the focus groups were asked about the graphic components of the packaging it became clear that the participants had different views on what graphics they found appealing and desirable. The strongest attitudes shown in the focus group were preferences towards aesthetically pleasing packaging and environmentally conscious packaging. However, the opinions and preferences on what was perceived as what depended strongly between the participants.

When discussing what the participants perceived as aesthetically pleasing, Eva, Sofia and Emma all three brought up a desire for colored shipping packaging. These opinions confirm the findings from Underwood (2003) and Silayoi and Speece (2007) who state that color is an important tool of packaging design. Emma preferred simplicity, wanting a stylistically monochrome colored packaging while Sofia appreciated a shipping packaging visually communicating what brand the products were bought from. Eva had the desire for something more spectacular.

“I would want a lacquered package with a lot of color and a bow. It would have suited me, I think. It would have felt like Christmas” (Eva)

Emma’s, Sofia’s and Eva’s preferences are expressing a sensory desire, in line with Schmitts (1999) description of sensory marketing from sight using the elements color, balance and material. Regarding style, which summarizes the quality of a sensory expression, the participants clearly had different preferences of what they found appealing. The third level of brand expression discussed by Schmitt (1999), themes, was acknowledged by Sofia expressing a desire of communication confirming what brand the packaging belongs to. Furthermore, Eva’s quote, comparing the experience with a christmas gift, indicates that she is describing an affective brand experience, which links the consumption to emotions such as joy.

In contrast with the participants above, Lena and Linnea specifically brought up that they preferred uncolored wellpap packaging. Their motives for this were environmental reasons, as they believed that the shipping packaging could be recycled easier if the wellpap was not colored. The discussion showed that for Linnea colored shipping packaging was not only something she did not prefer, it was something that she clearly dislikes stating that the graphics of the Yves Rocher packaging illustrating a stamp and address line was “grotesquely ugly”. This made her feel irritated provoking a negative emotion, which indicates that the shipping packaging stimuli created a response which generated a negative affective experience. Eva also agreed with the unpleasant feeling towards Yves Rochers shipping packaging

“I do not feel anything positive at all. It is ugly. It is not beautiful at all and does not appeal to me at all.” (Eva)

Sofia, however, commented that she thought the shipping packaging from Yves Rocher was pretty. A number of the participants brought up that the green color of the visual elements on Yves Rocher’s and Clarins shipping packaging made them believe that the brands were environmentally friendly.

“Yeah, like, I think it is green here and then it feels more sustainable” (Kristina)

Environmental concerns and sustainability beliefs of the brands can be assumed to, in these cases, to be a response to the thematic level of sensory marketing presented by Schmitt (1999). Meaning, that the stimuli of the graphic elements on the shipping packaging created a response which elicited a sensory marketing experience, in which the participants could access reference points that made them perceive the brand as more or less sustainable. The perception that a brand is, or is not, sustainable could possibly also in turn form a response which impacts the affective experience dimension, as for some consumers the belief that they are purchasing products from a sustainable brand brings them joy. However, in relation to this some focus group participants raised the opinion that the other components of the shipping packaging from Yves Rocher, like the large packaging size and giving away samples felt incongruous with being environmentally friendly, making the green color instead for these participants signalize greenwashing. Some of these participants expressed a concern for the environmental impact of ordering products online, which indicates that the belief that a brand is performing



greenwashing creates negative emotions resulting in a negative impact on the affective experience dimension.

The participants of the focus groups also expressed other opinions pertaining to the graphics of shipping packaging. Shipping packaging which had an anonymous outside, meaning little to no visual characteristics associated with the brand, with print on the inside was appreciated by some participants who described experiencing positive feelings associated with the moment of surprise.

“I didn’t react on the outside of the package, but when you opened it, you got a positive feeling of what you were met by.” (Sofia)

“My dream shipping packaging would be very neutral on the outside with a little surprise on the inside” (Margareta)

The comments above imply that the participants could to some extent experience emotions of joy linked to opening the package. Therefore, the element of surprise created by the use of color and visual elements have created a positive response resulting in the shipping packaging impacting the affective dimension. Likewise, as described by Schmitt (1999), surprise that results in delight also affects the intellectual dimension of brand experience which in this case, the shipping packaging does.

The smiley in the bottom of Glossier’s packaging created differing opinions regarding if it was contributing to a brand experience or not. Johanna expressed that the smiley did not add any value while Kristina thought that the smiley was funny. This aligns with Levitt’s (1983) opinion that postpurchase communication should be fun to perform well. Additionally, this shows that the participants’ experience of the graphical elements varied much. Some felt certain graphical elements did not add any value while others experienced them as fun, creative or pretty. This indicates that the graphical elements for some created a positive response resulting in a sensory experience, and for one participant to some extent resulted in an affective experience. However, no one had a lyrical impression of the shipping packaging they were shown.

To sum up, the empirical result from our focus groups showed that the graphics of the shipping packaging mainly affected the participants’ sensory experience. However, for consumers who

value sustainability colored shipping packaging resulted in a negative affective experience. Further, for those who interpreted the green graphics of Yves Rocher as contradictory to the rest of the shipping packaging, this resulted in a negative affective experience.

#### 4.1.3 Information

When the participants were asked about what information they requested to be included in a shipping packaging, their opinions differed greatly. Some thought the majority of the information was superfluous while others appreciated content. However, an opinion that was shared among all twelve participants was that it should be easy to return products ordered online.

“I am strongly against companies that do not send a return slip” (Maria)

“...it should be easy to return with a return slip, the most annoying thing is when you need to borrow someone’s printer to print yourself. Usually you cannot return beauty, but if there is something wrong with the product, you want it to be smooth. If an e-retailer has it [easy returns], I am more inclined to shop there because then you know that it will be easy” (Sofia)

These opinions were formed since the participants believed that the work of printing out a return blanket was time consuming and inaccessible. Sofia even admitted that if she bought a lipgloss and wanted to return it and the return label was not included in the shipping packaging she would probably keep the product because the effort of fulfilling the return would be more time consuming than she thinks the lipgloss is worth. This is similar to the negative behavioral experience described in section 4.1.1 Structure, because the participants agreed that the lack of a return label created a need to perform a negative behavior set which influenced their postpurchase perception negatively.

Also similar to the negative behaviors explored in section 4.1.1 Structure, Kristina and Sofia both expressed the opinion that they usually consider printed information included in shipping packaging, such as the promotional messages in the Yves Rocher case, as an extra walk to the garbage room. Eva emphasized that she strongly dislikes when a lot of information is included in the shipping packaging.

“...there is a lot of paper that I will not read and once I do, I will not understand anything” (Eva)

She further explained that she does not have any interest in reading any additional information about the products she bought or the company she ordered from. Contradictory to Eva’s opinion, Marie emphasized that she enjoys when information you can read is included. Marie also expressed that she appreciates getting printed discount offers, which is the opposite of Kristina’s viewpoint.

“I do not want this 20% off because I will throw it away, but I would like to have the return slip” (Kristina)

Marie’s opinion of enjoying additional information to read implies that she is amenable for an intellectual brand experience, however this is nothing she describes being fulfilled through the case examples. Remaining participants did not uphold this preference which might imply that the majority are not seeking an intellectual experience when ordering things online. Instead, many confirm Kristina’s behavior of not reading through the information included.

Johanna reflected that a problem with making shipping packaging visually appealing is that they get covered in post stickers and numbers during the distribution, which complicates the possibilities and might lower your expectations as a customer. This was briefly discussed by Eva and Maria from the other focus group as well.

“The numbers on the packaging are extremely ugly” (Eva)

“It’s probably from the post office” (Maria)

“They should be able to solve it” (Eva)

This implies that the participants had knowledge of the informational requirements shipping packaging has to fulfill to go through the postal journey. However, this knowledge does not seem to have adjusted the expectations the participants had on the shipping packaging. Thus resulting in negative opinions on the visual elements of the packaging, resulting in little or no impact on the sensory dimension.

Summarizing the key outcomes, the empirical result from our focus groups showed that information included in the shipping packaging has the possibility to lead to an intellectual brand experience but that hardly any of the participants were receptive to this. Further, a negative behavioral experience can be the result of not including a return slip as this created a need to perform an undesired behavior set. Additionally, the informational elements required when shipping packages can create a negative influence on the sensory experience dimension.

#### 4.1.4 Free Samples and Gifts

When discussing if the participants found samples desirable it became clear that their opinions varied regarding this topic as well. The majority of the participants appreciated getting samples for free if the choice was between getting samples and not getting samples.

“But if you can decide between getting to pick or not pick [the sample] then I would decide to pick. But if you are choosing between getting something and not getting something, then I would decide to get something” (Elisabeth)

When discussing if the participants would rather select samples by choice or get surprised when the packaging arrived the majority of the participants agreed that it was favorable to have the possibility to select your samples. The Clarins case included three samples and a large selection of products to choose from which was perceived as positive to several participants.

“I liked the samples because you can choose things you really want to test.” (Marie)

“Yes, but it is not [favorable to get free samples] if the product does not fit at all, if you have dry skin, but now you get to choose which I thought was very positive.”  
(Kristina)

The positive feelings associated with free samples can be argued to induce an affective experience as the products, which consumers through their own decisions know are suitable for their preferences and skin, seem to excite the participants of the focus groups. When consumers use sample's they also engage in physical actions which in turn forms a behavioral brand experience. However, when the participants were aware of the sample or gift they would receive this could also lead to disappointment. This became evident through the Glossier case

which included a pink pouch, as seen in figure 3. Many participants held negative opinions on the material of the bag and the zipper, stating that it looked cheap, ugly and like a zip lock bag. This can be believed to affect the sensory dimension negatively. Interestingly, a couple participants also expressed that their negative opinions were a result of having too high expectations about what the pink pouch would be.

“If the pouch would just have shown up without me knowing that I would receive a pouch I would probably have been better than now when I knew that I was going to get it.” (Elisabeth)

Because the design of the pouch was not specified, the surprise that was how the pouch was executed became a negative one. This results in the surprise not qualifying as an intellectual experience. Additionally, the pouch design made the participants disappointed, which could influence the affective dimension negatively. But all surprises were not considered to be negative. Although most of the participants expressed that they preferred knowing which samples they would receive, they also held positive opinions regarding getting surprise samples and gifts. This can be exemplified in the Yves Rocher case, in which the shipping packaging came with a gift without knowledge of the fact that it was included. The gift was presented in a small paper bag, see figure 4 for picture, which some participants expressed that they enjoyed.

“... the bag, I do not like the print on it but I think it feels like a present and I love presents” (Linnea)

“I would have kept it [the Yves Rocher bag]. This is the best one yet!” (Kristina)

It was evident from participants' comments that they did not care much for the samples included without their knowledge in the bag but the bag itself made them happy. Much like the surprise element discussed in 4.1.2 Graphics, the surprise bag seemed to both evoke positive feelings resulting in an impact on the affective dimension and impact the intellectual dimension through the element of surprise. What seemed to be important in the case of the Yves Rocher gift was the paper bag that the samples came in. This elevated the consumer experience through the previously mentioned dimensions. Similarly, the Glossier case included a freebie in form of a sticker but this was not at all perceived in the same positive way. Regarding the colorful sticker featuring the brand name, as seen in figure 3, some participants expressed that they didn't

understand the purpose and would throw it in the trash directly. Eva was the only participant who appreciated it and thought it added an element of fun, which can be associated as having an impact on the affective dimension. Therefore, it can be analyzed that the opinions on surprise samples and gifts can vary greatly depending on the case and what the free sample and gift is.

However, not all participants shared the same opinions on samples. Three of the participants, Lena, Sofia and Linnea described that they in most situations did not appreciate getting free samples and therefore they found it important that you have the possibility to deselect free gifts during online purchases.

“Even though it looks nice, you know it will not be used and probably thrown away. The only thing I wanted was my lipstick and now it’s a lap down to the garbage room.” (Sofia)

“For me, it is important that you can opt out of products, I order a lot of skin care products and get so incredibly much shit that I do not use. Does it have any effect or not? I do not know when I tested so little so I am not so interested in it.” (Lena)

Common for Lena, Sofia and Linnea was that they did not have an interest in free products, and all three explained this with that they regularly bought products that they have either used before or researched. In addition to this reason, Sofia described that she got annoyed by the increased time spent on recycling things and products she had not asked for, implying that she wants to avoid a negative behavioral experience similar to what is described in section 4.1.1 Structure and 4.1.3 Information. Further, Linnea describes environmental concern as an additional reason for wanting to deselect products online, which can lead to a negative impact on the affective experience dimension, as being discussed on page 46 in section 4.1.2 Graphics. However, despite their general resistance for samples, they all three describe situations when they would appreciate getting samples. Sofia said that she would appreciate choosing samples of products that she have had an interest in, Linnea expressed that would appreciate getting the pink pouch from Glossier and Lena described that she appreciates when getting totebags and toilet bags since this is something she finds usable.

To summarize, the empirical findings from our focus groups showed that samples included in the shipping packaging have the possibility to generate positive feelings leading to an affective

brand experience. When the consumers use the products this results in a behavioral experience. Lastly, if the samples or gifts resulted in a moment of surprise it could trigger an intellectual experience.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

*In this section we will summarize the most vital findings to answer the research question. We will also add insights found along the way of the research. Furthermore, we will use the discussion to update the theoretical framework, altering it to include the findings and thus answering our research question. Lastly, we will end the thesis with theoretical and practical contributions that are a result of the thesis and suggest how future research on the topics discussed can be executed.*

### 5.1 Discussion

The analysis performed on the empirical findings highlight that some components of the shipping packaging acted as stronger stimulus to create a brand experience than others. As previously stated, structure can be separated into size, material and shape. The findings suggest that the size of shipping packaging unanimously acts as a negative stimulus through affecting the behavioral dimension and affective dimension negatively. This because the larger size results in the need to perform a negative behavioral set as well as creating adverse feelings in response to environmental concerns. The material of shipping packaging can act as both a positive and negative stimulus, affecting the sensory dimension. Here, the outcome of the stimuli varies depending on how luxurious the material feels. Lastly, the shape of shipping packaging has the opportunity to at large act as a positive stimulus affecting the sensory, behavioral and affective dimensions positively. This through having a shape that allows for easy re-sealing and opening as well as through the possibility of creating a “gift opening” feeling.

For graphics the outcome of the stimuli varies more greatly. This may be a result of the varying taste between consumers, where graphic elements create different opinions depending on the consumer in question. This is exemplified through color, which could act as a positive stimulus on the sensory and affective dimensions for consumers that enjoys it and as a negative stimulus on the sensory dimension and affective dimension for those who dislike it. Additionally, graphics can act as a stimulus to the intellectual dimension when graphic elements create a surprise.



The shipping packaging’s information sources found to have acted as stimuli for brand experiences was return forms, postal information, and promotional content. The empirical findings showed that including a return form unanimously acts as a positive stimulus due to the consumers being able to avoid the negative behavioral set linked to printing out a form yourself. Postal information on the outside of the shipping package such as postal stickers and numbers from distribution act as a mildly negative stimulus on the sensory dimensions. Last, promotion content can act as a positive stimulus for an intellectual brand experience or as a negative stimulus for those disinterested in additional information which instead are triggering a negative behavioral experience.

Lastly, the findings suggest that free samples and gifts, which sometimes are included in shipping packaging, acts as positive stimuli by impacting the affective dimension positively. This, because consumers like receiving what they consider to be gifts. The behavioral dimension can also be affected positively in instances where the free samples or gifts are used and the intellectual dimension could be affected positively if the free sample or gift is a surprise. The findings make it evident that although some consumers may not like the free sample and gifts in certain cases, overall they do like receiving things and want to avoid the risk of not getting anything. Therefore, the findings highlight that free samples and gifts never create such strong negative reactions that they can be a negative stimulus. The findings and analysis that showcase which shipping packaging components can act as stimuli to the brand image dimensions are summarized in table 2.

*Table 2 Impact of the shipping packaging stimuli on brand experience dimensions*

		Shipping Packaging Components			
		Structure	Graphics	Information	Free samples / gifts
Brand Experience Dimensions	Sensory	X	X	X	
	Affective	X	X		X
	Behavioral	X		X	X
	Intellectual		X	X	X

Evident from these findings is the fact that the impact of shipping packaging as stimuli often is negative. Meaning that the brand experience dimensions are impacted by the stimulus in an alternative, adverse way compared to how previous literature describes the impact needed for a brand experience. Because previous literature solely focuses on a positive impact as a response to the brand stimuli, the possibility of a negative impact is not described. With the previous literature in mind negative impact can be thought to result in no brand experience at all. However, our research suggests that although shipping packaging as a whole may be a negative stimulus its components can affect consumers as separate stimuli, in this case through structure, graphics et cetera, which can both create positive and negative impact on the brand experience dimensions. The result of the shipping packaging components' impact can depend on the brand's execution of the stimulus and the consumers' reactions to the stimulus, which can vary according to taste, preferences and previous experiences.

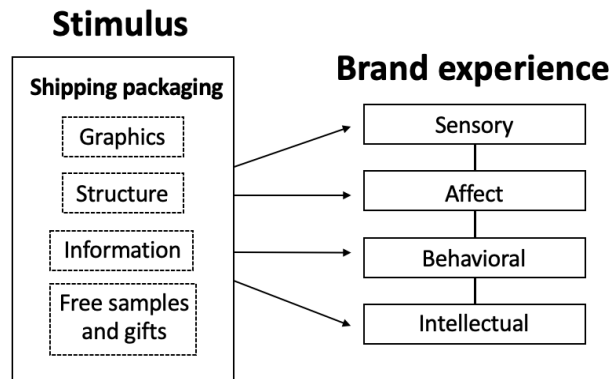
This aligns with the earlier examined literature on postpurchase behavior which states that consumers adapt their expectations to ensure postpurchase satisfaction. This adaption is based upon reference points which are formed from previous experiences and brand performance. In the case of shipping packaging acting as a stimulus, the stimuli reaches consumers after purchase. At this point it can be assumed that consumers' sensations, feelings, and cognitions are influenced by the desire to avoid postpurchase dissonance. In this study this is exemplified by the fact that the negative shipping packaging stimuli did not alter consumer's opinions about buying products from e-commerce retailers.

## 5.2 Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis is to examine shipping packaging and if it can create brand experiences to gain insights and knowledge on shipping packaging's impact on consumers and brand experience theory. We aimed to fulfill this purpose by researching the question: *How can shipping packaging act as stimuli to influence brand experiences of e-commerce brands in the beauty sector?*

Summarizing the findings, which are illustrated in the adapted framework in figure 5, shipping packaging can act as stimuli through the components of structure, graphics, information and free samples and gifts. Moreover, the shipping packaging components act as stimuli in all brand dimensions, i.e the sensory, affective, behavioral and intellectual dimensions. Through these

components and dimensions, shipping packaging can influence brand experience both positively and negatively.



*Figure 5 Adapted theoretical framework*

### 5.3 Theoretical Contributions

The findings of this study contribute to the very limited existing research of how shipping packages can influence brand experience. This study shows one way in which branded shipping packaging affects consumers, which has not previously been detailed in an academic setting. By offering new insights in how brand experience can be reached and what stimulus that affects, we are contributing to the academic discussion with an extended perspective of the structural and graphical components of shipping packaging, adding the dimension of samples which proved to have a considerable impact on the brand experience. Moreover, the findings of this research broaden the current view of brand experience by implying that the stimuli can affect the dimensions of brand experience negatively and positively depending on different factors.

Lastly, by separating and differentiating shipping packaging from other types of packaging, this study is examining aspects that are unique for shipping packaging. As e-commerce is a steadily growing market and the shipping packages can be the first physical encounter between a brand and its consumer there is an importance of increased knowledge. One thing that is particular for shipping packaging is that it reaches the consumer's post purchase. By applying the buying decision process we were able to comprehend how shipping packaging can impact consumers post purchase behavior which has not been examined before.

## 5.4 Practical Contributions

The analysis and conclusion from this thesis can, in addition to the theoretical contributions, also be of practical use. As brand experiences can lead to brand loyalty, knowledge on how to create brand experiences is useful for marketers to have. Our research suggests that one way to create brand experiences is through shipping packaging. As shipping packaging is an integral element for any e-commerce retailer, knowledge on how it can affect brand loyalty is helpful. Especially currently with e-commerce increasing in relevance for consumers, which might lead to more companies entering online.

The thesis does not only inform that shipping packaging can act as stimuli for brand experience but also *how* it stimulates consumers. This knowledge can aid brands that strive to create a brand experience in the design process of their shipping packaging. To exemplify, the analysis and discussion suggests that a larger size generally stimulates brand experience negatively. Therefore, our research suggests that brands should aim to create as small packages as possible. Additionally, the mostly positive impact of free samples and gifts informs brands that this is something worthwhile to include. Furthermore, our research also found that return information can act as a positive stimulus while postal information acts as a negative stimulus. However, our research suggests that the impacts of graphics as a stimulus is dependent on consumer taste, and therefore more volatile. Thus, brands wanting to create a brand experience through the use of shipping packaging should use the largest amount of resources to make packaging smaller, easier to reseal, return and include free samples or gifts. Less resources and energy can be spent on graphics, as the uncertainty of the consumer response to the graphic components might possibly not benefit the brand much. Other possibilities to create brand experiences through shipping packaging exist, like through the use of surprise.

Furthermore, we believe that the study can be transferable to other product categories. However, as the study examined beauty the conclusion might be best transferred to e-commerce retailers selling small products that are not technically complex. These categories carry resemblance to beauty in ways which were most commonly commented on in the focus groups.

## 5.5 Suggestions for Future Research

As this study examines a topic that largely has not been researched before, there are several possibilities to expand on the knowledge gained from our analysis and conclusions. As this thesis' background and problematization highlights, there is good reason to research the topic of shipping packaging academically. Therefore, we suggest that any research exploring brand building and marketing opportunities which shipping packaging may result in, is valuable. Both to expand research on the packaging system and postpurchase behaviors as well as to increase knowledge about marketing in the age of e-commerce.

Moreover, our study solely focuses on the beauty sector. To be able to draw more general conclusions on how brand experiences are affected by shipping packaging it is vital to also evaluate the impact in other product categories. Other product categories may include the shipping packaging components in ways which are not represented in beauty, which can generate stimulus that affect consumers differently. For example, a technically complicated product might require more information than less technically complex products, which creates incentives for researching such a category.

The research is also limited to only examining Swedish consumers' perceptions, having the participants for the empirical data collection consisting of Swedish females born 1991 to 2002. Another interesting angle when further investigating shipping packaging as a stimulus for brand experience would be to remake the empirical data collection using participants from other geographical areas. This may generate findings different from the ones presented in our thesis as a result of different postal service quality or attitudes towards e-commerce. Additionally, the Swedish participants placed emphasis on recycling and disposal of the shipping packaging, often resulting in a negative effect on the brand experience dimensions. Here, we believe that other cultures and geographical areas can vary in their shipping packaging stimulus response since it may be harder or easier to dispose of the shipping packaging than in Sweden. The responses may therefore vary, additionally in what examined consumers consider to be aesthetically pleasing, altering the stimuli response in the sensory and affective brand dimension.

Furthermore, it can also be interesting to examine whether the age of consumers and gender affects their perception of brand experience. Since e-commerce often limits purchases for

people under 18, we are suggesting conducting a similar study of people in older generations. These generations might not be as accustomed to e-commerce shopping which may make their responses to shipping packaging differ from the ones we found. Similar to examining the responses from people of other cultural backgrounds, taste and preferences about aesthetics may vary from the ones we found. Similarly, conducting a study with participants identifying as male could showcase possible differences in preferences based on gender.

Another direction for future research is to examine consumer behaviors, instead of their opinions. As this study's findings rely fully on what the participants said during the focus groups, we only gained knowledge on their initial opinions on shipping packaging. As the participants often described positive and negative opinions about shipping which formed as a result of behaviors, these may be of interest to examine. Especially as there might be a risk that the shipping packaging brand experience changes as the behaviors are carried out. This can for example be researched through longitudinal studies where consumers are interviewed after they received shipping packaging and also after they had to carry out the behavior sets. This process can take longer time and perhaps showcase altered effects as a result of the shipping packaging stimulus which our study could not bring forth.

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uwYm8d7YOf7U5-v7dT94\\_O1yvBV-z1AUUnYnvrscsWj2pBexHSplAnFhUR5](https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/09600039610125206/full/html#idm46242827851872) [Accessed 17  
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# Appendix 1 - Focus Group Topic Guide

## Introduction for focus group participants

### 1. Questions before showing any shipping packaging

- Have you ever ordered beauty products online?
- What do you think is important linked to the packaging and delivery?
  - a. What are your expectations?
  - b. Is there anything that you appreciate that makes your purchase experience better?
- What are your attitudes towards buying beauty products online?

**\* Show the shipping packaging one by one and repeat the questions for each case. Start with giving out the shipping packaging to the participants and then ask questions.**

### 2. Questions after showing the shipping packaging

- What do you think about the shipping packaging you have seen? Give it a 1-5 score and motivate!
- What do you think about the box in itself and the visual elements on it?
- What do you think about the tissue paper/free samples or gifts in the packaging?
- Do you think this affects what you think of the brand?
- Do you recognize the brand [Clarins/Glossier/Yves Rocher]?
- Has anyone purchased anything from the brand [Clarins/Glossier/Yves Rocher]? Online or offline?

**\*Show pictures from the brands websites and providing participants with brief information about the brands\***

- Here you can see the landing page of the website. What are your opinions of this brand?

- If you would imagine this brand as a person, who would that be? [What personality traits? Where would the person live? What would the person have talked about at a party?]
- Do you feel that the packaging you have seen corresponds to your expectations for what shipping packaging from this brand [Clarins / Glossier / Yves Rocher] would look like?

### **3. After all cases have been shown and discussed**

- Is there any shipping packaging you prefer more than the other ones? Why?
- Is there any shipping packaging that changed your opinion of the brand the packaging is from? Why?
- Is there anything you wished the shipping packaging would have, but none of them did?

# Appendix 2 - Consent Form

Elsa Bergendal & Hanna Welander  
Lund, Sverige  
3 / 5 - 2022

## Focus Group Consent Form

I have received information about my participation in a focus group from which the data will act as research material for Elsa Bergendal's & Hanna Welander's study on the topic of brand management. I understand that this data will be used in a thesis in the course BUSN39 which will be published in Lund University's database.

I am aware that my signature confirms that I voluntarily am participating in the aforementioned study through a focus group which will require around 1,5 hours of my time. I am also aware of the possibility to quit the process whenever as well as ask for my statements to be removed from the thesis whenever before publication.

Name: .....  
E-mail: .....  
Signature: .....

# Appendix 3 - Case Web Pages

YVES ROCHER Skönhetsexperter

#GREENHEROES ANSIKTSVÅRD HÅR SMINK PARFYM KROPP MAN ERBJUDANDEN VARUMÄRKET

LIMITED EDITION  
**FLOWERS  
IN THE CITY**  
PRIS  
**59:-**

SKOPPA NU

VÅRENS  
MAKEUP-NYHETER

Skönhetsexperter  
online

Återkoppla till  
*naturen*

#VårtEngagemang #Skönhetstips #Lifestyle

Skönhetsexperter  
online

YVES ROCHER Skönhetsexperter

#GREENHEROES ANSIKTSVÅRD HÅR SMINK PARFYM KROPP MAN ERBJUDANDEN VARUMÄRKET

Hem > ANSIKTSVÅRD

## ANSIKTSVÅRD

129 produkter | funnen/funna

Rengöra, exfoliera, återfukta eller boosta? Upptäck vårda ansiktsprodukter för alla hudtyper och behov, med effektiva ingredienser från växtriket.

SORTERA EFTER

**Filtera  
resultat**

Pris

BÄSTSÄLJARE

BÄSTSÄLJARE

Skönhetsexperter  
online