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SLOW HERITAGE FASHION

Exploring the concept of Slow Heritage Fashion in a Swedish Context

by

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Abstract

Title:	<i>Slow Heritage Fashion</i> : Exploring the concept of Slow Heritage Fashion in a Swedish context
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Keywords:	heritage brands, slow fashion, brand positioning, country of origin
Overall Aim:	To contribute to literature of slow fashion, heritage, positioning and country of origin by exploring and developing the concept of Slow Heritage Fashion within the context of Swedish fashion heritage brands.
Purpose:	To investigate the phenomenon of Slow Heritage Fashion in a Swedish context. The three guiding research questions are: What is Slow Heritage Fashion; How does Slow Heritage Fashion emerge; Why do brands pursue Slow Heritage Fashion.
Methodology:	Through a qualitative, abductive multiple case study, we analyze three Swedish fashion heritage brands using semi-structured interviews with brand representatives and experts.
Theoretical perspective:	The literature review draws on four key domains: fashion, heritage, brand positioning, and country of origin, with a particular focus on Sweden.
Empirical Data:	The empirical data consists of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with representatives of three Swedish heritage fashion brands. The empirical findings are based on the 3-W framework (The What, How and Why), investigating what Slow Heritage Fashion is, how it emerges and why companies pursue it.
Conclusions:	We contribute by outlining how Slow Heritage Fashion may be understood as a distinct form of brand positioning shaped by heritage and legacy, and by providing a foundation for its further conceptual development on a global scale. We contribute to research on slow fashion by moving beyond the motivator of sustainability.

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Lund, 31st of May 2026

A stylized, cursive handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Christina-Maria Rems'.

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1. Introduction

In this chapter, we introduce the research topic of Slow Heritage Fashion with the Swedish context. The chapter starts by setting the background of fast fashion and its counter-phenomenon of slow fashion. This is followed by a problematization, the overall aim, purpose and the research questions. Furthermore, the chapter presents the thesis' limitations and finally the outline of the thesis.

1.1. Background & Introduction

Today's society is defined by acceleration. Within industries, everything from production to consumption is accelerating and is driven by innovation. History shows that whenever this speed becomes the main characteristic of the business logic, counter-movements start to emerge. For instance, the Slow Food Movement was founded by Carlo Petrini to fight against McDonalds arriving in Italy (BBC The Newsroom, 2026). This is perhaps the most well-known example of this dynamic and Carlo Petrini coined the word of slowness in this context (Simonetti, 2012). By promoting the diversity around artisanal practices and consuming clean and fair food, the movement works against the promoted standardization. In earlier research Carl Honoré (2009) already discussed society's obsession with speed, which the slow movements in various industries try to challenge.

Similarly, this tension is also prominent within the fashion industry. Nowadays it displays one of the world's most significant industries but also the most accelerated. New business models such as the fast and ultra-fast fashion models emerged and shortened both product and trend lifecycles, with retailers largely focusing on speed to market and low costs (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). Additionally, social media and digitalization opened the market to consumers, who are now able to engage and co-create trends within seconds. Garments are disposed of just after a few uses and consumers often no longer prioritize craftsmanship and quality of fashion pieces. The competitive advantage of the industry has shifted towards price and speed.

As a response to this, the slow fashion movement emerged and can be understood as a counter-phenomenon. As it is inspired by the slow food movement, it promotes mindful production and consumption focusing on quality, timeless design and a close relationship between consumers and producers (Clark, 2008; Fletcher, 2010). Consumer groups and brands often criticize that fashion is largely moving away from creativity and design and feel the urgency to change something in the industry.

Yet not all brands are following along with this increasing speed of the industry. Some brands continue to revolve around craftsmanship and timelessness, strikingly exemplified by heritage brands, which are defined as companies that actively make use of their history and long-standing identity (Urde et al., 2007) and often these brands share values with the principles of slow fashion. It is interesting to research if these brands position themselves within slow fashion strategically or if this connection happened organically due to their values and history. This means that slowness can either be understood as conscious or natural, which shows an important consideration in the fast-paced industry.

1.2. Problematization

The fashion industry shows a paradoxical dynamic. On the one side, fast and ultra-fast fashion brands compete on price and novelty, on the other side, both slow fashion and heritage brands revolve around the values of craftsmanship and long-term value.

Existing slow fashion literature predominately focuses on sustainability-related motives. Slow fashion, in this context, is a resistance against the fast production and overconsumption (Fletcher, 2010; Jung & Jin, 2014). Therefore, Fletcher (2010) argues that slow fashion is about producing, designing and consuming better. However, research has not fully captured all notions and an important question emerges. Could slowness in fashion emerge not as a choice, but as a natural condition due to a brand's heritage and long-standing values?

Within existing heritage literature, Urde, Greyser & Balmer (2007) introduce the Heritage Quotient framework, which shows how brands can use their longevity, track record, core values,

symbols and belief that history is important to their identity, to build their credibility and differentiation within the market. Heritage can also create emotional and symbolic value that can contribute to a brand's identity (Balmer, 2011). In this understanding, heritage is a strategic resource as brands actively discover, manage and communicate it.

What slow fashion and heritage literature have not yet examined is the space between them. Heritage brands embody values that overlap with slow fashion principles. However, if this alignment is strategic, rooted in heritage, shaped by culture or a combination remains an open question. How and why heritage brands come to the slow positioning and what this means for both research fields has not yet been fully addressed.

Particularly interesting is the view on this gap in a Swedish context. Cultural norms may shape how heritage brands communicate and show values, based on their origin. Further, Sweden is highly renowned for its timeless, durable design and connection to nature but is also home to some of the world's most influential fast fashion retailers (Barinaga, 1999; Lazëri et al., 2024; Persson, 2008). It demonstrated that it is both connected to accelerated and slower dynamics. Focusing on Swedish heritage brands offers interesting insights for the intersection of slow fashion and heritage branding.

The thesis closes the space by introducing the concept of Slow Heritage Fashion, which is positioned within the literature streams of slow fashion, heritage branding, positioning, and country of origin. The study seeks to capture what this intersection means, how it emerges within heritage brands and why brands might pursue such a positioning.

Studying Slow Heritage Fashion is relevant and moves beyond theoretical contributions. Heritage brands feel increasingly pressured to show their value proposition in a market that is characterized by speed. Also, younger generations become more critical towards the overconsumption but at the same time were raised in an already fast paced society. In this environment, heritage brands have a unique position as they do not follow along with the speed and low-cost focus and strongly align with values based on long-standing history and traditions, which opens opportunities on today's market.

Proposing the concept of Slow Heritage Fashion provides direct implications for such brands and how they can manage their identity and remain credible in the industry.

From a theoretical perspective, slow fashion has often been connected to sustainability and heritage branding actively focused on the strategic activation of a company's heritage. The concept of Slow Heritage Fashion tries to capture the relationship between both topics by researching the space where they influence each other. This is particularly interesting as the fashion industry currently offers two extremes. On the one hand, ultra-fast fashion business models emerge, on the other hand slow fashion promotes the conscious choice of slowness in consumption and production. The concept is a theoretical tool that connects two relevant literatures and understands how and why slowness might be central to heritage brands.

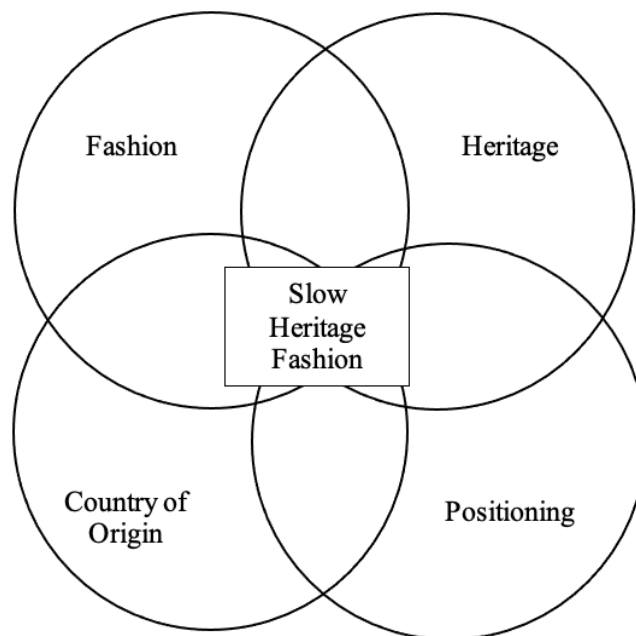


Figure 1_Problematization of overall literature stream

1.3. Overall Aim

The thesis aims to explore Slow Heritage Fashion as a new phenomenon at the intersection of slow fashion, heritage branding, positioning and country of origin. By studying this concept within Swedish heritage fashion brands, we want to understand what Slow Heritage Fashion is, how it emerges, and why brands pursue this position of slowness in an accelerated industry. The thesis expands the existing understanding of slow fashion by exploring how heritage and slowness may intersect through shared dimensions and what this implies for a heritage brand's position.

The research adopts a problematization approach introduced by Alvesson and Sandberg (2011). The proposed concept is not given and is introduced within the study as a result of literature review and empirical data. Slow Heritage Fashion is positioned at the intersection of both research fields and aims to capture how slowness may emerge in heritage brands.

With the study we aim to contribute to existing literature within the fields of our four defined literature streams. By investigating the slower positioning of heritage brands and how this may relate to their long-standing values, we seek to expand theoretical understanding on how slowness aligns with heritage brands. We investigate Slow Heritage Fashion from a managerial perspective and connect insights from case companies with existing literature. The three cases are formed through interviews with experts of Swedish heritage fashion brands, Stenströms, a premium shirt maker founded in 1883 in Helsingborg, Eton a premium menswear brand founded in Borås in 1928; and Polarn O. Pyret, a childrenswear brand founded in 1976. Further, two company experts that intensely worked with heritage brands and the fashion industry offer their insights and help us construct the understanding of Slow Heritage Fashion. This thesis aims to contribute to academic literature and tries to offer practical considerations for managers operating in the accelerated fashion industry.

1.4. Research Purpose

The purpose is to investigate the phenomenon of Slow Heritage Fashion in a Swedish Context.

Utilizing a qualitative approach, we conduct interviews with brand experts to understand how the brands demonstrate and understand slow fashion and heritage branding and how they co-create the understanding of Slow Heritage Fashion. Further, the study examines the Swedish origin and its influence on the concept, as the country's image may shape the emergence and communication of Slow Heritage Fashion. The following research questions guide this thesis:

RQ1) What is Slow Heritage Fashion?

RQ2) How does Slow Heritage Fashion emerge?

RQ3) Why do brands pursue Slow Heritage Fashion?

The research questions are interconnected and build on each other. RQ1 establishes the concept, RQ2 explores how it emerges within heritage brands and RQ3 tries to capture the motivations behind it. Together, the three questions guide the thesis and contribute to the empirical structure and the understanding of the concept.

1.5. Delimitations

The study is subject to several delimitations that define the scope and focus before the research was conducted. First, we limited the scope to *heritage brands*. This is because we want to look at the intersection of slow fashion and heritage branding. In this regard it makes sense to develop this phenomenon with the understanding of brands working within this context. Further, we focus on the *fashion industry* even though other industries are also accelerated and have the notion of slowness developing as a counter-phenomenon. As the study revolves around the principles of the slow fashion movement, we decided to research fashion brands to get the best insights. Also, the thesis focuses on a *Swedish context*, due to its country associations, which aligns with both literature streams of slow fashion and heritage branding. Also, the idea emerged through the observation of clothing brands within the Swedish society. Beyond the study's theoretical contributions, the aim is for a *management perspective*. We do not capture direct consumer perspective, as the focus lies on how heritage brands construct slowness within their brand.

1.6. Thesis Outline

The study is presented within seven chapters, each chapter presenting a different part of the thesis:

Chapter 1	Provide a background of the fashion industry and problematization of the thesis, followed by the overall aim, purpose and research questions. Finally, the delimitations are presented.
Chapter 2	Presents the literature review on fashion, country of origin, heritage brands and positioning.
Chapter 3	Explains choices regarding methodology and motivates the research design, strategy, sampling, data collection, reliability and validity and ethical considerations.
Chapter 4	Presents the case companies, Polarn O. Pyret, Stenströms and Eton and presents the empirical findings accessed through interviews and observations
Chapter 5	Analyzes the empirical material and presents the main findings of the thesis; Slow Heritage Fashion
Chapter 6	Discusses and expands on the findings and the framework within a broader context, while connecting them to the literature review
Chapter 7	Concludes the thesis by returning to the overall aim, purpose and research question. Presents the theoretical and managerial implications, as well as limitations and suggestions for future research.

Table 1_Chapter Overview

2. Literature Review

This chapter reviews and critically discusses existing literature related to the study. It covers the four literature streams of fashion, heritage branding, positioning and country of origin, with a focus on Swedishness. The chapter identifies gaps in existing literature, particularly regarding the intersection of slow fashion and heritage branding, and lays the foundation for the conceptual development of Slow Heritage Fashion.

2.1 Fashion

2.1.1 The Change within the Fashion Industry

The fashion industry is an important player in today's economy, as it is valued at around USD 1.7 trillion in 2023 and over 300 million people work along the supply chain (McKinsey & Company, 2025). At the same time, the sector has a massive impact on the environment, as it is one of the largest contributors to global CO2 emissions (European Parliament, 2020). This highlights that the industry on one side is important for the economy but on the other harms the environment (Ikram, 2022).

The fashion industry has a dynamic nature, caused by seasonal shifts and evolving style. However, over the past 20 years the speed increased, with the industry trying to meet constant design and demand changes. This ultimately led to a transformation within the whole industry, where manufacturers and retailers now prioritize low costs and a quick market launch (Backs et al, 2021).

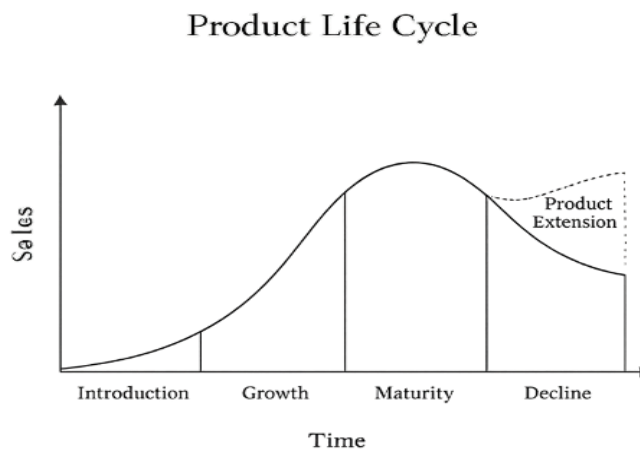


Figure 2_Fashion Life Cycle (Stella McCartney, 2023)

Fashion trends follow a lifecycle. As Sproles (1981) elaborated in his study and shown in **Figure 2**, this cycle starts with the *introduction*, where trends emerge through fashion leaders, which then leads to *growth* and *maturity* by the audience and ultimately to a *decline* or a *product extension* of the trend to new preferences. The sector is constantly changing due to cultural, economic and social drivers (Sproles, 1981).

Historically, the fashion system showed a slower, more predictable logic. Retailers and designers launched two to four collections per year, oriented around the seasons such as Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter. Production relied on long forecasting cycles and collections were planned long in advance (Guercini, 2001). During this time, the industry emphasized craftsmanship and durability of garments. Products were mainly standardized, for example the white t-shirt or the classic Levi's 501 jeans, later functioning as an iconic asset of a brand, and made out of long-lasting materials (Brooks, 1979). Also, consumers purchased less frequently and owned pieces for a longer time (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010).

The transformation can be particularly highlighted through the changing role of fashion shows. Earlier, fashion shows were exclusive to the industry and trends were brought from designers to audiences. This changed as fashion started to become accessible to the public through media, followed by the internet and social media, where consumers could directly engage with trends. This democratization of fashion led to increased consumer awareness and demand for constant novelty (Rudniy et al., 2023)

At the same time, globalization led to the expansion of mass production and outsourcing to low-cost countries. Society is highly interconnected and is able to spot trends from all over the world. Consequently, the fashion industry shifted from a product-driven towards a demand-driven system, in which firms increasingly respond to changing consumer preferences (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006; Gereffi, 1994).

Because of the speed new business models emerge and companies need to respond even faster to demand and affordability of garments. Global Fashion Agenda & Boston Consulting Group (2017) predict that the consumption of garments will rise up to 63% by 2030 compared to the base year.

2.1.2. Fast Fashion

Changes in the fashion landscape led to a transformation of the industry, where fast fashion emerged as the dominant business logic. Within fast fashion production cycles are relatively short and trends are quickly launched to the market. Garments are sold at a low price, and consumers can buy the latest fashion trends on a regular basis (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010; Cachon et al., 2011). The fast fashion business model shows a fast product turnover and collections are introduced within a short timeframe (Gwozdz et al., 2017). As a consequence, retailers adapt their supply chains to become agile and demand-driven and outsource their production to low-cost countries (Backs et al., 2021; Arrigo, 2021). With quick response (QR) and just-in-time (JIT) systems they are able to reduce the lead time and response quickly to trends (Wallington et al., 2021, Cachon & Swinney, 2011). Therefore, retailers and manufacturers do not plan products and collections long in advance anymore (Dos Santos et al., 2021).

Nowadays, fashion trends are quickly adapted from the runway to the store. For instance, Zara and H&M launch multiple times within a season and offer constant novelty to their customers (Gwozdz et al., 2017). This leads to a change in consumer behavior, as consumers visit stores frequently and shopping becomes more impulse-driven. The need to always follow and purchase the latest trends increases, due to the “here today, gone tomorrow” logic (Sang-Eun & Sternquist, 2012). Due to increasing speed, quality becomes less central for production. Consumers do not see clothing as an investment in high quality or durability, and more is bought than actually used (Joy et al., 2012; Oxfam, 2025).

The transformation of the fashion industry leads to increased competition and puts pressure on brands as they need to operate at high speed. This created opportunities for even more accelerated business models.

2.1.3. Ultra-Fast Fashion

More recently, ultra-fast fashion emerged and intensified the dynamics within the industry. Especially e-commerce giants such as the Chinese brand Shein, who already surpassed H&M by having a revenue of USD 48.5 billion in 2024, can be understood as an extension of the fast fashion logic (Garfield et al., 2026; Lu & Mullen, 2025). Corporations sell products only online without operating actual stores and show extreme speed in their market launch. The COVID-19 pandemic

supported the acceleration, as lockdowns forced traditional retailers to close their stores, while online-only corporations could still reach consumers through digital spaces (Uchańska-Bieniusiewicz & Obłój, 2023). Ultra-fast fashion brands, therefore, rely heavily on social media, AI and algorithm-driven design processes, which enable them to rapidly introduce new items to the market (Niyompatama & Lapatoura, 2025).

Ultra-fast fashion corporations engage with real-time data for their production decisions and do not rely on forecasting cycles. By directly monitoring emerging trends and online consumer behavior they are able to serve the demand of customers in a short time (Camargo et al., 2020). Retailers launch thousands of new designs each week (Uchańska-Bieniusiewicz & Obłój, 2023) and products are already available to be purchased before they are produced, while advertisements and product photos are AI-generated (Niyompatama & Lapatoura, 2025). The digital-only model gives them the opportunity to directly reach customers all over the world and bypass traditional retail models (BBC, 2026). Even though they do not have real touchpoints with customers anymore, they manage to attract many users online with their large selection and speed (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Competition is intensified because the traditional retailers feel pressured and need to adapt. At the same time, consumer expectations change as they become accustomed to the constant novelty. Therefore, consumption gets frequent and impulse-driven, while the emotional attachment to products is further reduced (BBC, 2026).

2.1.4. Slow Fashion

Responding to this acceleration, slow fashion has emerged as a counter-phenomenon within the industry. Inspired by the Slow Food Movement, which acts as an anti-fast food organization and brings back artisanal food practices, slow fashion follows similar motives (Simonetti, 2012). Slow fashion promotes a mindful and conscious approach to production and consumption of clothing (Clark, 2008; Fletcher, 2010). Rather than only focusing on reducing speed, slow fashion aims to redefine the values and goals of the fashion industry consisting of economic, social and ecological consideration across the entire value chain (Fletcher, 2010).

A feature defining slow fashion is the value that is put on the quality and durability of garments. Clothing should last longer and over more than one season, therefore, it prioritizes quality materials, natural colors and timeless design. This has the ultimate goal of extending product

lifecycles and reducing the need of frequent purchase, which highlights a strong contrast to the fast fashion business model (Goldsworthy, 2017). Fletcher, (2010) argues that slow fashion is “not time-based, but about producing, designing, and consuming better,” and highlights a shift from quantity to quality.

Compared to fast fashion, slow fashion focuses on smaller production volumes and regional manufacturing under fair labor conditions. These practices enable supply chains to be more transparent and understandable for the end user (Clark, 2008; Fletcher, 2010). Literature describes this as a “farmer’s market approach to clothing”, as it emphasizes the relationship between the producer and consumer and draws them closer together (Johansson, 2010). Consumers attach emotional meaning and connect deeply to their products, as the decision of purchase is actively made and not because of a trend (Poikonen, 2022).

Second-hand shopping and tailoring garments are part of slow fashion. Consumers extend the lifecycle through resale, reuse, or repair. Also, some brands, for example, already incorporated these practices by offering repair programs or second-hand platforms, contributing to the extension of products. These practices attach emotional value to clothing, as research highlights that consumers show stronger bonds to products that are repaired or reused (Fletcher, 2010; Machado et al., 2019). Platforms such as Vinted, Vestiaire or Depop gain popularity especially among younger generations and consumers value the authentic and unique design of garments and see it as a form to express their identity (Cervellon et al., 2012).

Slow fashion can also be linked to the principles of slow design, which focuses on rediscovering forgotten materials and processes, reusing products, and integrating and educating the end-user throughout the supply chain (Strauss & Fuad-Luke, 2008). The design principles, as proposed by Strauss and Fuad-Luke (2008) suggest the long-term view on fashion, where resources should be used in a meaningful and sustainable way.

Research frequently links slow fashion to dimensions such as sustainability, and its impact on social and ethical considerations (Fletcher, 2010). Therefore, slow fashion challenges society’s obsession with speed and the constant novelty and disposal of products (Honoré, 2009). According to Jung & Jin (2014) slow fashion further developed five dimensions that relate to slow fashion. Authenticity is the transparent production, localism refers to a local production, exclusivity to a

premium and limited production, equity to fair labor conditions and functionality to the longevity and practicality of garments. Further studies investigate how slow fashion is able to construct and express individuals' identity (Legere & Kang, 2020). Slow fashion touched upon other dimensions but dimensions that are not connected to sustainability have largely been unexplored, especially in the context of heritage brands.

2.2. Heritage Brands

2.2.1. Defining Heritage in Branding

Heritage brands have become an important area within corporate branding research. A firm's history is not only a background element but a central component of its identity and value proposition (Balmer, 2011). According to Urde et al. (2007), brand heritage refers to dimensions of track record, longevity, core values, use of symbols and the organizational belief that its history matters, and all five of them have to be given to be considered a heritage brand. Together, these dimensions create consistency within the brand over time (Urde et al., 2007).

Heritage brands are characterized by the active integration of historical elements into their positioning and strategic orientation (Urde et al., 2007). Within the premium sector, heritage-related attributes are often associated with perceptions of authenticity and stability (Balmer, 2011). By drawing on their heritage, brands may create emotional and symbolic value that moves beyond functional product attributes (Balmer, 2011). According to Urde et al. (2007), heritage must not only be seen as a historical concept, but more as a strategic asset for building brand identity and differentiation. Urde et al. (2007) argue that heritage brands operate across three different time dimensions, past, present, and future, which means that they must stay connected to their roots, while still evolving to meet the demands of consumers.



Exhibit 1_ Royal Warrant Barbour (Cahill's 2026)



Exhibit 2_ Royal Warrant of Swedish Court (Stenströms, 2026)

Another way in which heritage can be communicated is through Royal Warrants. Companies holding a Royal Warrant supply goods or services to a royal household and only the Royal Court determines which businesses can receive this title. To be eligible for a Royal Court in Sweden, the company has to have been in the business for at least 5 years, supply goods or services to the royal family and manage its finances in an irreproachable manner (Hovlev, 2026). As the Swedish Royal Court grants the title “Royal Court Supplier” only to selected companies, it strengthens the heritage image of a brand and is commonly associated with quality and trust. As a result, some heritage brands use the Royal Warrant as part of their marketing strategy. For example, Barbour, an English heritage brand integrates the British Royal Warrants in their clothing and branding as a way of heritage communication (Barbour, 2026). Similarly, there are also numerous Swedish heritage brands, such as Stenströms (Stenströms, 2026) that use the Royal Warrant on their website to display this recognition (The Royal Court of Sweden, n.d.).

Therefore, having a heritage is not only about the company’s age, but rather about integrating and communicating historical elements within the brand's identity and positioning (Urde et al., 2007).

2.2.2. Heritage Brands vs. Brands with a Heritage

According to Urde et al. (2007), it is important to acknowledge the difference between a brand with a heritage and a heritage brand. Although numerous brands hold a long history, not all actively integrate their past into their strategic positioning (Mollerup, 1999; Urde et al., 2007). While a

brand with a heritage may have a long tradition and history, this past is not integrated into its identity. In such cases, heritage remains passive and does not significantly influence how the brand presents itself to consumers (Balmer, 2011).

A heritage brand, on the other hand, explicitly draws on its history as a key part of its identity (Urde et al., 2007). It actively incorporates its historical background into its branding and communication activities, making its legacy part of the overall brand identity and positioning (Urde et al., 2007). Heritage should therefore not only be understood as a historical element, but also as a strategic resource within branding (Balmer, 2011).

This distinction can be illustrated through examples from the luxury watch industry, with Patek Philippe being a relevant example. The brand communicates heritage-related attributes, particularly intergenerational value. This is reflected in the company's famous statement: "You never actually own a Patek Philippe. You merely look after it for the next generation" (Patek Philippe, 2026). Through this statement, Patek Philippe strategically links its history to its identity, which makes it a heritage brand (Patek Philippe, 2026).

By contrast, TAG Heuer serves as a good example of a brand with a heritage. This indicates that although TAG Heuer has existed for a long time it focuses more on innovation and performance (TAG Heuer, 2026). This demonstrates that merely having a long history does not necessarily make a company a heritage brand (Urde et al., 2007).

2.2.3. The Heritage Quotient Framework

The Heritage Quotient (HQ) framework refers to a set of key characteristics that determine the strength and relevance of a brand's heritage. It includes elements such as longevity, core values, symbols, track record, and the integration of history into brand identity (Urde et al., 2007; Greyser & Urde, 2019). Rather than representing a fixed measure, the HQ can be seen as a tool that helps analyze how organizations draw on their past as part of their strategic positioning. According to Urde et al. (2007), only certain brands use heritage as an essential part of their value proposition and positioning. When a brand actively integrates heritage into its overall strategy, heritage can become a valuable, rare, and inimitable asset that forms part of the brand core (D'Oria et al., 2021).

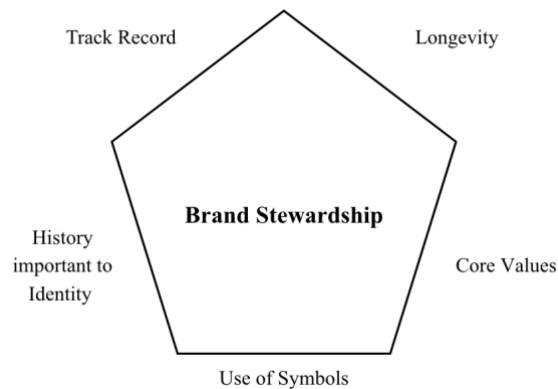


Figure 3_HQ Framework (Urde et al., 2007)

Building on this framework, the following section outlines the key dimensions of brand heritage in more detail.

The first element is *track record*, referring to the company’s established reputation and historical performance over time. A strong track record can increase consumer trust and strengthen perceptions of credibility (Urde et al., 2007).

The second dimension is *longevity*, which describes the brand’s long-term existence. However, Urde et al. (2007) argue that longevity alone is not sufficient, as heritage must also be strategically integrated into the brand.

The third element consists of *core values* that remain stable over time. These values create consistency within the brand identity and help maintain a recognizable brand character despite market changes (Urde et al., 2007).

The fourth dimension involves the *use of symbols*, such as logos, products, designs, or visual elements connected to the company’s historical identity. Such symbols make heritage more visible and tangible for consumers (Urde et al., 2007). An example of how visual symbols can express continuity and historical identity is represented by Jaguar’s “Leaper” symbol and how these symbols can further support brands to become recognizable and different (Jaguar Heritage, 2026).

Finally, *organizational belief describes the significance companies attach to their own history*. Within heritage brands, the preservation and valuation of the historical background are reflected in branding and strategic decision-making processes (Urde et al., 2007). Urde et al. (2007) further argue that the interaction of these five elements defines a heritage brand and that a company can only qualify as one if all five dimensions are fully incorporated into the overall brand identity. This further affects the strength of a brand's Heritage Quotient, as brands with a stronger presence of these five dimensions will tend to demonstrate a more visible expression of heritage in both organizational and market activities.

2.3. Positioning

2.3.1. Foundations of Brand Positioning

Brand positioning is a central concept in marketing strategy and refers to how a brand is perceived by customers in comparison to competing brands (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Positioning is especially important in the premium sector and heritage-oriented industries, as those industries not only compete through functional product attributes, but further through intangible brand characteristics (Kapferer, 2012; Urde et al., 2007).

Kotler & Keller (2012, p. 276) argue that *"positioning is the act of designing a company's offering and image to occupy a distinctive place in the minds of the target market"*. Similarly, Ries & Trout (2001) argue that positioning is more what it does to the mind of the consumer than what a company does to a product. In this sense, positioning can be understood as a perception-based concept, since its effectiveness ultimately depends on consumer perception (Ries & Trout, 2001).

From a marketing perspective, it is important for brands to position themselves strategically within the market. The firm's choices will be translated into a clear market offering, providing direction for all marketing activities. Brand positioning is an essential component of communicating the identity, values, mission and vision of a brand to its consumer. Urde & Koch (2014) mention two positioning approaches. The market-oriented approach takes an outside-in perspective by focusing on consumer needs and brand image, while a brand-oriented approach takes an inside-out perspective by placing the brand based on its core values and identity (Urde & Koch, 2014). Therefore, it is an ongoing strategic process and not just a one-time activity, meaning a single or isolated marketing action (Kotler & Keller, 2012).

Positioning is a part of the broader STP framework which consists of segmentation, targeting, and positioning. During this process, companies first identify different consumer segments, followed by selecting relevant target groups, and ultimately positioning themselves in the market (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Within the STP framework, positioning plays a central role, as it will provide clear evidence of the brand's profile and reputation. Thus, it links market communication with analytical market knowledge.

Furthermore, the purpose of positioning is to establish a connection between a company's internal identity and external perception. The positioning of a brand is primarily dependent on intangible characteristics of the company (Urde et al., 2007), particularly in premium or heritage industries (Kapferer, 2008). Strong brands with a clearly defined positioning generate value for both their customers and for the brand itself by developing functional and symbolic associations that lead to a unique brand identity (Aaker, 1996).

Differentiation is a key component of positioning. It is critical to understand this because when positioning products in the premium and heritage-focused markets, positioning often goes beyond just the functional attributes of the products (Kapferer, 2012; Urde et al., 2007). To help set themselves apart from their competition, premium brands often include symbolic attributes, such as craftsmanship and status, associated with the brand as a part of their differentiation strategy. Failing to successfully differentiate a brand can lead to the brand becoming replaceable or irrelevant in their marketplace (Ries & Trout, 2001).

Premium and heritage brands are often associated with higher consumer expectations, which may provide them with a competitive advantage rooted in their historical background (Balmer, 2011; Urde et al 2007). Thus, a brand's position is determined by consumer perception, the symbolic meaning of the brand, and the competitive environment in which the brand operates (Ries & Trout, 2001).

2.3.2. Positioning within the Fashion Market

Fashion brands may choose to position themselves differently within the context of the fashion industry, based on various criteria including price levels, quantity, market segments, and overall symbolic value (Kapferer, 2008). Using perceptual maps in marketing allows a visual representation of how diverse brands compete for consumers and where they are situated within

the market based on certain characteristics (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Within the fashion industry, positioning refers to brands ranging from ultra-fast and fast fashion brands to premium or luxury fashion brands. While fast fashion brands predominantly compete on factors such as price and accessibility, premium and luxury brands place greater emphasis on quality and exclusivity (Kapferer, 2012). As a result, the positioning of fashion brands supports the overall strategy and objectives of the brand and also reflects where the brand intends to meet its target audience.

Figure 4 illustrates a sample of a positioning map used to position fashion brands by price, from super low to high-end, and by levels of exclusivity, from highly accessible mass-market brands to highly exclusive luxury brands. The brands represented within the mass-market section of the map have very low levels of exclusivity and lower price levels, while remaining accessible to a wide consumer market. Luxury brands with the highest levels of exclusivity, according to their pricing level, can be found on the opposite end of the map. Finally, fashion brands that fall in between, share associations with certain luxury attributes, while still being more accessible than traditional luxury brands. Overall, the perceptual map shows different positionings within the fashion industry, emphasizing their core values that differentiate each brand segment (Kotler & Keller, 2012; Kapferer, 2012). This supports the development of a long-term brand identity that extends beyond short-term trends and broad consumer reach.

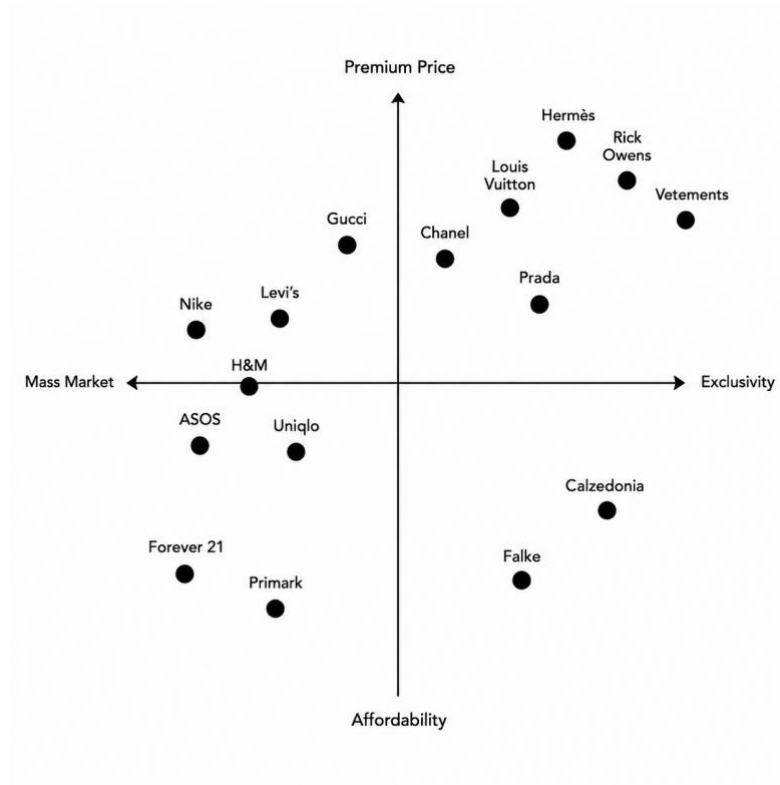


Figure 4 _Positioning Matrix (Mosigil, 2024)

2.3.3. Strategic Positioning Approaches

Functional product benefits and cultural meanings can be used to differentiate a brand. Especially in premium or heritage-oriented industries, positioning strategies often go beyond solely offering products and place a greater emphasis on intangible attributes (Kapferer, 2008; Urde et al., 2007). Functional product positioning provides the customers with a tangible benefit that they can expect from using the brand. However, this approach is not sufficient, when companies aim to differentiate themselves over the long-term, as competitors can easily replicate those features (Kapferer, 2008). Therefore, implementing functional attributes in its positioning strategy can help brands to get associated with premium quality and perceptions of exclusivity (Kapferer, 2008; Urde et al., 2007).

In contrast, the emotional positioning of a brand can develop strong emotional connections between consumers and brands through their customers' experiences. A strong emotional link to

heritage brands develop over time through their histories and also through ongoing development of meaningful brand stories.

Symbolic positioning can be used to get associated with features that reflect identity and social status. Using this approach, brands allow consumers to express who they are or aspire to be through the purchase of their products.

The focus of cultural positioning is on how brands become embedded in a societal and cultural context. Becoming cultural icons is connected to representing shared values and addressing social tensions through stories (Holt, 2004; Holt & Cameron, 2010). Brands can furthermore position themselves in Scandinavian contexts, through values such as minimalism and functionality (Skou & Munch, 2016).

Moreover, there has been a trend towards the use of an authenticity-based positioning in relation to contemporary fashion and premium brand segments. Consumers are actively searching for real and authentic brands (Holt, 2004). Traditionally, authenticity has been communicated through heritage-related attributes (Urde et al., 2007), as brands appear authentic when they share believable stories that highlight sincerity and long-term values (Beverland, 2005).

Heritage positioning refers to brands, which draw on their long history as a strategic resource and integrate the dimensions of the heritage quotient (Urde et al., 2007). Urde et al. (2007) highlight that heritage becomes a strategic positioning tool when it is actively used as part of the brand's value proposition. The brand's history can be used as a differentiating factor and a foundation for creating long-term stability rather than solely being an element of the company's history (Urde et al., 2007). When brands position themselves within premium markets, heritage-based positioning can strengthen perceptions of intangible brand attributes.

Particularly within premium and heritage-oriented industries, brands frequently combine functional, emotional, symbolic, cultural, authenticity-based, and heritage-related positioning strategies (Kapferer, 2008; Urde et al., 2007).

2.4. Country Of Origin

2.4.1. Conceptualizing Country of Origin

Country of Origin (COO) is one of the most explored concepts in the field of international business (Peterson & Jolibert, 1995). Research defines it as an extrinsic cue used by companies that influences consumers' interpretation and evaluations of brands and products, especially with regards to quality and purchasing intentions (Agrawal & Kamakura, 1999; Liefeld, 2004; Peterson & Jolibert, 1995). Early research emphasized the importance of COO, as Dichter (1962) argued that a "Made in..." label can influence product acceptance and success among target audience.

In addition, Thakor (1996) argues that "brand origin relates to the place, region, or country where customers perceive the brand to be from". This implies that it is not necessarily the place of production or manufacturing, but the place where the meaning and values are believed to be created. This brand's origin can be used strategically to make a brand more credible and attractive to customers (Thakor, 1996). COO, in this understanding, is constructed through the interpretations and associations of different countries based on their lifestyles and customs. As globalization emerges and companies can engage in commerce all over the world, this becomes relevant as positive associations of a country can help brands become relevant in other markets.

2.4.2. Country-of-Origin Effect (COE)

The country-of-origin effect (COE) is the influence that these associations have on consumers' evaluation, attitudes and purchasing behavior. Research found that COO has a significant impact on how consumers perceive and evaluate brands and what they intend to purchase (Agrawal & Kamakura, 1999). Similarly, Aichner, (2014) frames the COE as the relationship between a product's perceived origin and consumer responses.

Verlegh & Steenkamp (1999) use three key mechanisms to better understand how COE shapes consumer perception, namely cognitive, affective and normative processes. Cognitive associations are informational cues as consumers associate products with characteristics such as quality, reliability or technological advancement. Affective mechanisms focus on the emotional and symbolic meanings that society attaches to countries, including particular lifestyles or values. Normative mechanisms are connected to the social norms, identity, and personal values as

consumption decisions align with moral considerations or desired lifestyles. Overall, the mechanisms show that COE goes beyond functional evaluation and plays a role in the shaping of meaning and identity (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999).

2.4.3. COO as Strategic Branding Tool

Firms actively use COO as a strategic branding tool to enhance brand value and differentiate from competitors, which strengthens their market position (Baker & Ballington, 2002). Hence, a positive country image can lead to favorable brand evaluations and even consumers being willing to pay a price premium (Koschate-Fischer et al., 2012).

Companies, in this sense, select positive country associations that help them with their positioning. For instance, Apple Inc. labels its products with “Designed in California,” to highlight innovation and progression, despite the actual products being manufactured in China. Similarly, the US brand Häagen-Dazs adopted a European-sounding name to benefit from positive associations of European quality and heritage. This shows that COO is a symbolic resource, which is co-created by brands and consumers (Baker & Ballington, 2002; Qui et al., 2017).

As globalization further increases, the traditional understanding of COO gets challenged. Products are often designed, manufactured, assembled, and branded in different countries, therefore, they do not have one clear origin association. Aichner (2014) introduces different dimensions and distinguishes between the country of design (COD), country of manufacturing (COM), country of assembly (COA), and country of brand (COB). Often COO cannot be linked to only one country anymore, but rather a multidimensional construct, where brands strategically pick out and emphasize the positive aspects and associations of the countries they are linked to.

2.4.4. Swedishness

The definition of Swedishness is broad, and can be explained as behavior, attitude and mentality of Swedish society. It describes what Swedes regard as Swedish or what Swedes feel is Swedish (Hellström et al., 2012) and shows values and meanings of a society. Sweden shows a strong company image, as they are often associated with a progressive and well-functioning society, innovation, high quality of life and social stability (Barinaga, 1999; Lazëri et al., 2024; Persson, 2008).

Global brands with a Swedish origin often make use of these positive associations. Volvo Cars core values are safety, reliability and functionality, and IKEA aligns with simplicity, practicality and accessible design (Persson, 2008; Ranasingha Hewage & Hinidumage, 2025). Sweden also shapes the fashion and design industry with its Scandinavian or Swedish design and fashion, with values around minimalism, simplicity and functionality (Jones, 2016; Rousi, 2023). Swedish brands often emphasize timelessness and quality, where they do not depend on following every trend and focus on durable pieces. Consequently, Swedishness may align with several characteristics associated with the slow fashion movement (Fletcher, 2010; Jung & Jin, 2014).

Additionally, Swedish and Scandinavian design has historical roots. It became famous in the 1950s due to its elegant, low-key and restrained design with the use of natural materials. Later it became internationally relevant and contributed to shaping Swedishness. Companies with a Swedish origin can therefore use the positive associations of the country that have been formed over decades (Gonzalez-Rodriguez, 2019; Rousi, 2023).

Swedishness also influences the branding of companies. Communication is often said to be more subtle, more quiet and less confrontational. Brands rely on building authenticity and do not self-promote themselves loudly (Barinaga, 1999). The communication preference can be connected to the cultural norm of Jantelagen, also known as Law of Jante, which suggests an understated communication instead of bragging (Fredlund-Blomst, 2010; Sandemose, 1936). Consumers associate Swedishness therefore with aspects such as enduring, genuine and balanced.

The positive country image of Sweden offers an opportunity for premium brands. COO can function as part of their branding, as a positive country image directly influences the prestige of a brand. Therefore, it increases the customers' willingness to pay a premium price. For Swedish premium brands their COO is not only connected to the geography but signals quality and good design (Roxana-Denisa et al., 2016).

Another association being made with Sweden is its closeness to nature and outdoor-oriented lifestyle. There is a Swedish saying: "Det finns inget dåligt väder, bara dåliga kläder" (There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing) that convey the connotations of functionality, nature and practicality often connected to Swedish culture and traditions (McGurk, 2017). Furthermore,

Sweden is associated with environmental awareness, balanced lifestyle and appreciating the smaller things (Cederqvist et al., 2025; Mansson, 2016).

3. Research Method

The research method chapter outlines the methodological design of the thesis. The choice of ontology, epistemology and methodology is explained as well as the research design being a qualitative and abductive study building upon interviews and case studies. Further, we present the sampling of the research and how we collected and analyzed data. In a final step, we discuss the ethical considerations and reliability and validity of the thesis.

3.1. Research Philosophy

Research philosophy is the foundation for how a study understands reality and how knowledge about reality can be produced. Research is guided by its underlying assumptions, understood as paradigms, which shape how individuals approach the world, interpret and relate to it (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). These paradigms cannot be proven by research, rather they are accepted and guide what is meaningful to study and what falls outside the scope (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). To ensure a connection between the methodology and methods, it is beneficial to address the philosophical positioning of the study (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), research philosophy aims to answer the questions of ontology, epistemology and methodology. They do not stand alone but are interrelated, one answer influencing how the next one is approached. The researcher's view on ontology has a direct influence on the view on epistemology. These both in the next step guide the methodology of the research conducted and lastly the methods and theories that a researcher uses within a study.

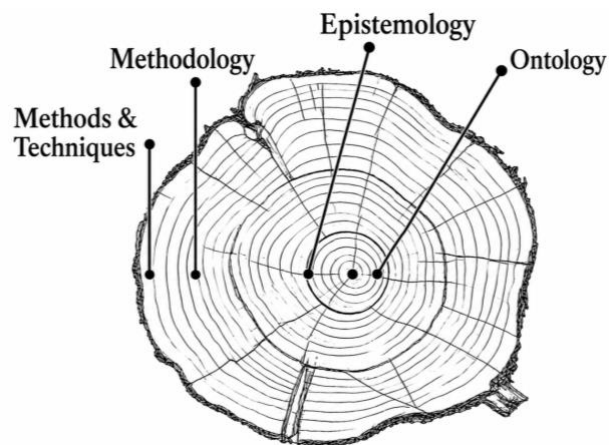


Figure 5_Tree Trunk (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021)

For better understanding, Easterby-Smith et al., (2021) proposes the illustration of the *Tree Metaphor*, providing guidance for the development of a research design. The previously mentioned questions and the methods used in the study are portrayed as a tree trunk (**Figure 5**), where ontology forms the inner ring, epistemology and methodology the middle layers, and the bark show the used methods and techniques (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). As researchers we approach the study with a relativist and social constructionist view and these philosophical considerations affect how we see and shape the phenomenon.

3.1.1. Ontology

Ontology focuses on the nature of reality and what can be known about it (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). We as researchers approach the study with a relativist ontology. This assumes that reality is not objective and not a single truth exists but is rather socially constructed and dependent on individual perspectives (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

This shapes our approach to the study and how we construct the phenomenon of Slow Heritage Fashion. We do not assume that there is only one right way to understand and define it but view it as something that is emerging through different interpretations of different actors. Realities are therefore not static but continuously shaped and formed through interaction (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This notion helps us to capture various interpretations and meanings that guide our understanding. We are aware of the subjectivity the relativist stance comes with but building on Guba & Lincoln (1994) we do not view it as something that has to be eliminated, as it characterizes social research.

3.1.2. Epistemology

Epistemology addresses the relationship between the researcher and what can be known (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). To answer this question, we build upon our ontology and lean towards a social constructionist epistemology. This assumes that knowledge is not discovered as an objective truth but rather co-created through interaction between the researcher and the participants (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021; Habermas, 1970). As researchers we do not see ourselves as neutral observers but as active participants in the construction of meaning.

This is reflected in our approach to the empirical data. The interpretations of experts that emerge during our study are not fixed truths as they are shaped through experience, individual understanding and organizational context. Our role as researchers is to make sense of how this meaning is constructed and interpreted. Knowledge is generated through dialogue with our interview partners, and the findings should be understood within the context of the study.

3.1.3. Methodological implications

The ontology and epistemology have a direct effect on the research strategy. Given our relativist and social constructionist view, it makes sense to use a qualitative approach, as this captures meanings that emerge through dialogue and interaction (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The qualitative research strategy therefore helps us to gain detailed insights into how brands position Slow Heritage Fashion and approach the empirical material through an interpretive lens. At the same time, we understand that this positioning comes with certain challenges, especially due to its interpretive nature and the potential bias of our own perspective (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). As we are aware of this limitation it helps us engage reflectively with our empirical results.

3.2. Research Strategy

Next, we outline the research strategy that guides how knowledge within the thesis is generated. Based on the research question and the overall aim, the study uses a qualitative and abductive approach.

3.2.1. Qualitative Research Approach

In line with our view on ontology and epistemology, we use a qualitative research approach that helps collect in-depth understanding of meanings, interpretations, and experiences (Bell et al., 2022; Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

We believe this to be suitable for answering our research questions as we try to get a deep understanding how different brands within the heritage fashion sector interpret and construct meaning of history, slowness and brand positioning and how this could possibly intersect. All these aspects are subjective to the context and brand, and therefore difficult to capture through quantitative methods.

Qualitative research gives us the opportunity to analyze rich, detailed data and the construction of meanings within different organizations. In contrast, quantitative research often focuses on generalizability through large datasets, while qualitative research on depth and contextual understanding (Sreejesh et al., 2014). This is helpful for our study, as a close interaction and dialogue with participants is essential to get deep understanding to co-construct the phenomenon.

3.2.2. Abductive Research Approach

In terms of the relationship between theory and data, the thesis emerged to adopt an abductive approach, which is the combination of the inductive and deductive reasoning strategy. The former starts with a specific observation and tries to identify broader themes, and the latter starts with theories which are then applied to specific cases (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Abduction allows us to move back and forth between theory and data, which opens an iterative process (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

Looking back to the starting point, our research emerged from a phenomenon we observed during our time in Lund. From habitants and our fellow students, we recognized the appreciation for brands with a long-lasting history, quality and longevity, which we saw as a strong contrast to the increasing dominance of fast and ultra-fast fashion. This observation led to our initial idea of Slow Heritage Fashion.

At this time, we leaned closer to an inductive study, as we shaped our research around our own observation. As we progressed with our work, we started to move towards an abductive process, as we looked into existing literature on topics like slow fashion, heritage branding, positioning and country of origin. This expanded our understanding of the phenomenon and helped us shape it even further. The interviews with experts co-constructed our understanding of the concept.

An abductive process is suitable for common social science studies, as our concept is not yet defined in the literature and allows us to remain open to new insights that come up during research but still being guided by the theory behind it.

3.3. Research Design

Multiple Case Study Design

Within the thesis we aim to explore the space between the literature stream of slow fashion and heritage branding and how heritage brands may position themselves within slowness. For this it makes sense using cases within the fashion industry, as insights can build and construct theory (Eisenhardt, 1989). In line with this notion, we employed a multiple case study approach as an overall research design for the thesis. Case studies are suitable for investigating phenomena that highly depend on context, especially for research questions focusing on “how” and “why” (Yin, 2009). As we explore a phenomenon that can be interpreted within different contexts, a case study approach gives us deep insights and allows us to discuss the concept with experts operating in different heritage companies.

A multiple case study design also opens the opportunity to compare different organizations and develop patterns and themes across cases. This makes the findings more robust and supports the development of theory as we can compare the cases with each other (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). A single case study gives a deep understanding of one topic or organization, and multiple cases can provide a broader perspective. This strengthens our choice for multiple cases, as we aim for different interpretations and perspectives from brands within the industry. Also, it allows us to highlight similarities and differences between respective cases providing us deeper insights (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The choice of multiple cases is in alignment with our overarching research aim. Looking into multiple Swedish heritage fashion brands, we can gather insights on how the phenomenon is constructed across different brands in the same industry. We aim for an analytical generalization, where the derived insights contribute to the development of new theory that can be transferred to similar contexts (Yin, 2009). This leads to a strengthened credibility and richness of the findings.

3.4. Sampling

The selection of cases and respondents directly contributes to the research quality, as they have a direct influence on the insights and findings of the study. Therefore, we applied purposive sampling, meaning that we selected cases and participants based on relevance and knowledge

meaningful for answering our research questions (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021; Mason, 2002). We consider this method appropriate, as our focus lies in selecting cases and respondents that are able to share relevant data for our study. Purposive sampling is beneficial for qualitative studies, when the aim is to explore a new concept in a given industry (Etikan, 2016). Therefore, we actively searched for brands that met our criteria, of a strong heritage, operating in Sweden and emphasizing quality and longevity.

3.4.1. Sampling of Cases

The cases selected for this study are Swedish fashion brands with an established and documented heritage. We consider them to be particularly suitable for exploring an intersection between slowness and heritage within the fashion industry. The choice of Swedish brands is deliberate, as our research interest started in the observation of Lunds residents and Sweden country associations aligned with the principles of slow fashion.

In the case selection, we used a purposive logic, meaning that we actively selected case companies that matched our criteria, so that we could ensure that they can provide insights into the literature streams we study. Therefore, we did not randomly select companies but actively researched and identified brands that could answer our research questions (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021) The following criteria for the cases guided our selection:

- 1) Heritage orientation:* brands with a strong history and legacy, that they make use of in their communication, and they fulfil the five dimensions of the HQ framework,
- 2) Positioning:* brands emphasizing quality, durability, and non-trend-driven design,
- 3) Contextual relevance:* brands operating within the Swedish fashion landscape, and
- 4) Conceptual relevance:* brands that potentially reflect elements of “slowness” in their positioning

For our study we selected cases that meet those criteria to make sure that we derived meaningful data and insights that can co-construct our concept. We included three cases as it allows us to compare them and generate both similarities and differences of the various brands. Mason (2002) proposes that in purposive sampling, relevance is prioritized over the number of samples. As we do not engage in quantitative research, we do not need to obtain a statistically representative

sample, therefore the sample size is allowed to be smaller, but rich with data that helps build the framework and answers the respective research questions (Mason, 2002). Saturation of cases was reached as we felt confident that our derived data can contribute to valuable insights and findings. Three cases allow for cross-case analysis to derive insights from different organizational backgrounds. By also incorporating experts from the fashion industry, we got external views that further contributed to build the framework.

The three companies selected were Stenströms, Polarn O. Pyret and Eton. All of the brands operate in the fashion industry, history is an important element of each company, and they have a Swedish origin. Also, they are perceived as heritage brands, tested against the HQ Framework (Urde et al., 2007). The selection was guided by the four criteria mentioned above and additionally we looked into the Royal Warrant of the Swedish court as an indicator for heritage. It was not a prerequisite for selection but something we considered to show that a brand has a long-standing heritage. Stenströms, for example, holds the warrant “By appointment to His Majesty the King and Queen”, and therefore confirmed the company's relevance as a case.

At the start we also considered Filippa K as a case, but after careful research we realized that they cannot be considered a heritage brand or brand with heritage as history is not important for their branding and market position. Tested against the Heritage Quotient proposed by Urde et al. (2007) it does not fulfill all five requirements important for being a heritage brand. Therefore, we concluded that we will not use Filippa K as a case company. We opted instead to include the former brand strategist as an expert within the fashion industry.

3.4.2. Sampling of Respondents

Besides finding relevant cases, it is equally important to interview the right respondents who can offer meaningful insights and experience. We also applied purposive sampling for the selection of respondents and based it on their knowledge and involvement in brand strategy and positioning (Mason, 2002).

The respondents primarily consist of individuals in strategic roles in the case companies. We consider this particularly suitable, as they are involved in shaping and communicating the identity,

positioning and strategic direction and have knowledge about the brands heritage, quality and core values.

As we believe that it is more valuable to find relevant and knowledgeable participants, we follow the principles of information power proposed by Malterud et al. (2016). They suggest that if the participants can offer rich insights for answering the research questions, fewer interviews are required. As we focus on a relatively narrow and specific phenomenon within the heritage fashion industry, we consider a smaller number of experienced respondents sufficient to generate meaningful contributions. Saturation of respondents was reached as the interview partners started to confirm patterns that other experts already highlighted. This indicated that enough material was conducted to derive findings, and additional experts would not change the core outcome of the thesis.

As noted, we did not include Filippa K as a case but conducted an interview with the former brand strategist and brought him in as an expert, as his insights on slow fashion and heritage brands still remain valuable for our study. As he also worked within other organizations, one being IKEA, he has high knowledge of heritage, as IKEA can be considered a heritage brand and a holder of the royal warrant (IKEA, 2023). Furthermore, we included a second industry expert within the fashion and textile industry. The interviewee is a long-term professional, working at FOV Fabrics, which is a vertical manufacturing company responsible for the production, coating and laminating of textiles. As he worked with various fashion brands over many years, his views offer valuable insights and an external perspective on the topic. His insights complement and back up the interviews with case companies by offering a broader context on the research field.

In the following table, the case companies and interviewees are listed. The three brands were selected due to their relevance as they are Swedish heritage fashion brands, and the two experts were included to show a broader industry perspective.

Company	Polarn O. Pyret	Stenströms	Eton	Filippa K (expert)	FOV (expert)
Type	Heritage brand	Heritage brand	Heritage brand	Industry expert	Industry expert
Founded	1976	1883	1928	-	-
Country	Sweden	Sweden	Sweden	Sweden	Sweden
Product Category	Children's clothing	Shirts/ blouses	Shirts/ menswear	Premium fashion	Textile manufacture
Interviewee role	- Former CEO	- E-commerce Manager	- Buying and Production Director	- Former Brand Strategist	- Sales Expert
Years in Company	- 5 years	- 7 months	-16 years	- 25 years	- 32 years
Royal Warrant	No	Yes	No	-	-
Relevance to study	Slow fashion Heritage COO	Slow fashion Heritage COO	Slow fashion Heritage COO	Expert Perspective	Cross- brand perspective

Table 2_Case Companies

Purposive sampling entails certain implications. The selection of cases and respondents is not random, hence the findings cannot be statistically generalized to a broader context. In line with the qualitative and abductive approach, the thesis does not aim for statistical generalization, but rather analytical generalization (Yin, 2009). By carefully selecting cases and respondents we ensure that the empirical findings are meaningful and can contribute to relevant theoretical insights to form the concept of Slow Heritage Fashion.

3.5. Data Collection

It is recommended to use multiple sources in order to strengthen the validity and credibility of the findings (Denzin, 2017; Yin, 2014). In accordance with this recommendation, our study uses semi-structured interviews with representatives of Swedish heritage fashion brands. Applying this method allowed us to explore a potential relationship between heritage branding and slow fashion in a Swedish context. Furthermore, the study aims to understand whether heritage brands position themselves within a slow context, how this emerges and why they pursue it.

Due to the exploratory nature of these research questions, we believe that a qualitative data collection approach is appropriate, as this also enables us to generate in-depth insights into the topic and better understand the underlying dynamics (Eisenhardt, 1989).

3.5.1. Qualitative Interviews

Qualitative interviews are especially useful when the aim of the research is to understand the perspectives, interpretations, and reasoning of participants (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Interviews allow us to explore how individuals, in our case experts in heritage brands, make sense of complex phenomena. Furthermore, through interviews we have the possibility of gaining several different insights that would be difficult to obtain through quantitative methods (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

For our study, we conducted five semi-structured interviews with experts currently working for or previously employed at heritage fashion brands within Sweden. We identified participants mainly through the professional platform LinkedIn. In the first step, we searched for the company we considered as a case and further we connected with professionals working in relevant roles within the company and asked them for an interview. Through this process three connections led to an interview, namely FOV Fabrics, Eton and Stenströms. As a next step, we reached out to PO.P through a contact established during a guest lecture from university and were able to schedule a meeting with the expert from Filippa K through our professional network.

The study used semi-structured interviews, as they provide a balance of structure while still being flexible. Moreover, we created an interview guide with open-ended questions, which we sent in a modified version to the experts beforehand if they requested it. We intentionally held back key

questions to ensure that the interviewees were not biased and led by the direction of the study. The interview guide therefore enabled us to cover the main topics, while the participants were still able to elaborate freely and explain additional relevant insights (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Due to this flexibility in exploratory research, it is possible to identify new themes and relationships that may have not been discovered (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

Depending on the preference of the participant, we carried out the interviews either online or in person, for example at their office in Sweden or Denmark. The interviews lasted between 30 to 60 minutes and followed a conversational approach, which allowed for a flexible and open conversation and to maintain a natural flow, without forgetting about the main questions. Furthermore, the interviews took place between April and May 2026, which was the data collection period.

3.5.2. Methodological Justification

Since the potential link between heritage branding and slow fashion represents a relatively under-researched topic, with no existing literature defining this relationship, it is suitable to adopt an exploratory qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews (Eisenhardt, 1989). In addition, our study follows an abductive reasoning approach, as existing concepts, like brand heritage, brand positioning, slow fashion, and country of origin, provide theoretical guidance. At the same time, the analysis remains open to new topics that emerge from the empirical data. By combining these approaches, we are able to generate a theory-informed analysis while also developing new insights grounded in the data (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

3.6. Data Analysis

3.6.1. Structure of Empirical Findings

The empirical findings of this study are structured in line with the research questions. The analysis focuses on understanding what Slow Heritage Fashion is, how it emerges, and why heritage brands pursue this type of positioning. As we structure the findings around the research questions it is possible to connect the empirical material closely to the purpose of the study, which allows us to present the findings clearly and logically.

Moreover, the objective of this research is exploratory, so the intention was not to impose a fixed analytical framework from the beginning, but instead to permit patterns and themes to emerge gradually from the empirical material (Glaser and Strauss, 2017). Existing theoretical concepts related to heritage branding, positioning, slow fashion, and country of origin helped guide the analysis throughout the research process. It has also been highlighted by Easterby-Smith et al. (2021), that combining theory-driven and data-driven analysis is a common feature of qualitative research.

In this study, after the interviews were conducted, the transcribed data was systematically organized in an Excel spreadsheet. A key benefit of organizing qualitative data is that themes can be easier identified and localized (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Additionally, the use of Excel allowed the ongoing review of the empirical data and the comparison of recurring patterns and themes.

3.6.2. Thematic Analysis

Analyzing data in qualitative research can be quite complex, given the large amount of data gathered. As Miles and Huberman (1984, p. 16) already stated: *“One cannot ordinarily follow how a researcher got from 3600 pages of field notes to the final conclusions, sprinkled with vivid quotes though they may be.”* Therefore, following a well-structured analysis process increases transparency in demonstrating how the study moved from transcription to final themes (Eisenhardt, 1989).

As this research follows a case-study design, we chose to analyze the empirical material through a thematic case analysis, inspired by Eisenhardt's (1989) approach and by Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis principles. The analysis followed five steps:

1. Within-case analysis: Directly after each interview, we reflected on the gathered insights and transcribed the material using the Sunet Scribe program. Examining each interview separately allowed us to become familiar with each participant's perspective and their professional experiences before starting a cross-case comparison. Eisenhardt (1989) describes this as a crucial step for becoming familiar with the empirical material and early theory generation.

2. Cross-case comparison: In line with the recommendations of Eisenhardt (1989) for case study research, the cross-case comparison started after the within-case analysis. In doing so, we were

able to identify central perspectives related to heritage branding and slow fashion positioning and furthermore to understand the unique characteristics of each company better.

3. Coding: After conducting all five interviews, we started with coding the statements. To get an organized structure, the interview material was organized and coded in different colors, where quotations were categorized according to our three guiding research questions. The traditional five W's framework (Pöttker, 2003) inspired the analysis which we further compressed to three dimensions of "What?", "How?", and "Why?". We adapted the framework to those three dimensions as we considered them to be most relevant for examining the concept of Slow Heritage Fashion and aligned most closely with the research questions. Furthermore, these guiding dimensions helped us to identify and categorize recurring patterns and quotations across all interviews.

4. Theme development: Out of the codes, we identified broader themes. Those themes were not fixed from the beginning but adapted during the analyzing process. The first step of the analysis involved identifying repeatedly occurring ideas, followed by narrowing them down to the most relevant categories, and then finally to link them back to the theoretical framework of the study (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

5. Iterative refinement: This comparison was intended not only to demonstrate the perceptions of each brand but also to acknowledge and identify patterns and similarities across all case companies. This helped to move beyond initial perceptions and examine the empirical data through multiple lenses (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Furthermore, it also assisted in developing an analytical understanding of the positioning of heritage fashion brands in relation to Slow Heritage Fashion.

3.7. Research Quality

Throughout the entire research process, we considered validity, reliability, authenticity, and ethical issues in order to ensure the research is of quality and credible as qualitative research. Compared to quantitative research, these concepts are interpreted differently, as the objective is to develop a deeper contextual understanding and interpretation (Bryman et al., 2022; Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Since our study follows an exploratory qualitative approach, we placed the focus on

transparency, credibility, reflexivity, and trustworthiness throughout the research design and analysis process.

3.7.1. Validity and Authenticity

In qualitative research, validity is primarily concerned with the credibility and authenticity of interpretations rather than statistical generalizability (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). In our study, validity was strengthened through semi-structured interviews, which allowed the interviewees to explain their experiences and perspectives in depth while having a structure in the interviews. We structured the interview guide around our four literature streams. The questions however remained open-ended in order to avoid guiding respondents too strongly and to allow new perspectives and insights (Bryman and Bell, 2015). To strengthen the authenticity of the findings, the concept of Slow Heritage Fashion was intentionally not introduced at the beginning of the interviews, instead, we encouraged the respondents to first discuss each topic independently. Only towards the end of the interviews, we explained the concept and discussed it with our interview partners, to intentionally reduce the risk of influencing their answers too early and to support a more authentic exploration of whether they see a connection between heritage branding and slow fashion.

Furthermore, authenticity was strengthened by the use of direct quotations from the interviews throughout the empirical findings. This allowed their perspectives to remain visible within the analysis rather than being reduced only to our interpretations (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

3.7.2. Reliability

Reliability is often discussed in terms of dependability and transparency throughout the research process (Bryman et al., 2022). To improve reliability, we documented the research process systematically from interview design to transcription and analysis. Through the entire process of data collection, we audio-recorded all interviews and asked for verbal consent from each interview's participant. After completing the interviews, we transcribed them with Sunet Scribe. In doing so, we made sure that transcriptions were captured in detail and did not misinterpret what was said. In addition, we used an interview guide, which provided more consistency across all interviews, but still allowed flexibility for follow-up questions. The collected material was organized in Microsoft Excel so that we could code and compare more easily during the analysis process, which led to an easier development of themes (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

We applied an abductive analysis approach, which enabled us to continue refining the themes and interpretations throughout the analysis process, while staying open to new ideas emerging from participants' interviews (Dubois and Gadde, 2002).

3.7.3. Transferability and Reflexivity

Instead of aiming for statistical generalizability, qualitative research focuses on transferability, indicating that the findings may also be relevant and useful in other contexts (Bryman et al., 2022). In our study, transferability was increased through the selection of three Swedish heritage fashion brands that match with our predefined criteria. Although the number of interviews is relatively limited, the selected brands provided rich and relevant perspectives connected to the explored phenomenon of Slow Heritage Fashion (Bryman et al., 2022).

Reflexivity was also a crucial part of the research by having us as researchers acknowledge our own interest in the areas of heritage branding, as well as slow fashion, and premium fashion brands. We were, however, continuously aware of any possible biases and assumptions throughout the analysis. The open question structure of the interviews and being open to unexpected results led to a more balanced reflective interpretation of the empirical data from participants' interviews.

3.7.4 Ethical Considerations

We considered ethical aspects throughout all stages of the research process. Before each interview, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and that the interviews would be used solely for academic purposes. Participants were also informed that the interviews would be recorded and transcribed, but verbal consent was given before each interview.

The interviews were conducted in a transparent and respectful manner, and the respondents had the opportunity to ask questions. Although the interview participants' names were anonymized, their position and the respective companies were mentioned, to show that the company and position is considered relevant to our study.

All interview recordings and transcriptions were stored securely on password-protected devices and additionally, we took care to avoid misrepresenting the statements of our interview partners or taking quotations out of context during the analysis and presentation of findings.

4. Empirical Results

In this chapter, the empirical findings of the study are presented. Through qualitative interviews we explored how three Swedish brands construct and understand slow fashion and heritage. Each brand operates within the fashion industry and is considered a heritage brand. The findings are structured around the 3W-Question Framework, providing insights helping us to answer our research questions. This chapter introduces the case companies and highlights the relevant insights and quotes from our data, which forms the basis for the analysis.

4.1 Company Profiles

Stenströms

AB Stenströms Skjortfabrik is a Swedish manufacturer of premium shirts and fashion garments. It was founded in 1883 by tailor August Stenströms in Helsingborg, Sweden. For over 140 years, the brand has remained committed to heritage-oriented values, which have defined its identity since its very first shirt (Stenströms, 2026).

Stenströms fulfills all five dimensions of Urde et al.'s (2007) Heritage Quotient framework. With over 140 years of existence, Stenströms' longevity is not measured in years alone, but in a commitment to the same founding values. Its track record is demonstrated by one of its most prestigious recognitions, the Royal Warrant of Appointment from the Swedish court, which was renewed in 1973 by King Carl XVI Gustav and Queen Silvia (Stenströms, 2026). It reflects a long-standing relationship with the Swedish Royal Family and confirming the brand's reputation for quality across generations. The brand's core values have remained stable since its founding, as Managing Director Fredrik Strandberg captured: *"From the very beginning, the idea has been to create long-lasting garments from both the quality and design perspectives. We are conservative without being old-fashioned"*. (Business Focus, 2024). The organizational belief that history matters is shown in how Stenströms actively frames its heritage in its communication. This is most notably in celebrating 125 years of "sustainable craftsmanship" in 2024, and in Strandberg's explicit positioning: *"Ours are not fast fashion products, the slogan 'sustainable craftsmanship' truly describes our philosophy."* (Stenströms, 2026; Business Focus, 2024) Finally, symbols are present in tangible product details such as the signature mother-of-pearl buttons, classic

silhouettes, and the Royal Warrant displayed in brand communication. All of this makes Stenströms' heritage visible and recognizable to consumers.

In this sense, Stenströms' heritage is not solely communicated but embedded in its products. As the brand representative noted: *“In the product it can be seen through the craftsmanship, classic silhouettes, high-quality materials, and attention to detail. For example, we have the mother-of-pearl buttons. I don't think it's very common for shirt makers or fashion companies to be so keen on having that kind of attention to detail”*. The craftsmanship behind their products makes Stenströms' heritage tangible and apparent to the customer.

Stenströms

Exhibit 3 _ Logo of Stenströms (Stenströms, 2026)



Exhibit 4 _ Stenströms Flagship Store Helsingborg (Stenströms, 2026)



Exhibit 5 _ Stenströms' Iconic Product (Stenströms, 2026)

Eton Shirts

Eton Shirts AB is a Swedish premium menswear brand founded in 1928 by Annie Pettersson and Febe Lidar in Gånghester, a town near Borås, which is Sweden's historic textile region. It first began as a small family business, but later grew into an internationally recognized shirt brand, while remaining rooted in the same founding principles it started with (Eton, 2026).

By fulfilling all five dimensions of Urde et al.'s (2007) Heritage Quotient framework, Eton can be recognized as a heritage brand. In terms of longevity, Eton has operated continuously for almost a century, expanding from a local workshop to stores beyond Sweden, without abandoning its core focus on shirts. Its track record is built on decades of recognized craftsmanship, from being worn by celebrities at the Oscars in 1994 to being stocked in high luxury department stores such as Harrods'. During an interview, Eton's representative confirmed this continuity: *"When customers are interviewed about Eton, they mention quality as one of the first things that comes to mind."* The brand's core values have remained stable since its founding, which is best captured in a principle by Annie Pettersson in 1945: *"Never hand over a shirt until you are completely satisfied with it."* This founding philosophy is echoed by CEO David Thorewik, who describes Eton's DNA as *"our commitment to quality, a heritage of craftsmanship and a spirit of innovation"* (BOF Studio, 2024). The organizational belief that history matters is visible in how Eton actively communicates its heritage, the brand still operates from the same headquarters in Gånghester where it was founded. This was highlighted by Eton's representative: *"We are also located in the same place where the company was founded. We're in the same building and the family who used to own us still comes to visit. So, there's a lot of heritage details."* Finally, symbols are central to Eton's identity. Its most iconic product, the white Signature shirt was introduced in 1990 and has remained unchanged. It is something *"What every man needs in his wardrobe"*, according to the company.

Eton's heritage is embedded in its product rather than only communicated through marketing. As the interviewed representative explained: *"the slow fashion and the heritage is kind of going hand in hand naturally."* Therefore, for Eton heritage is not solely a communication tool, but a maintained standard.

ETON

Exhibit 6_ Eton's Logo (Eton, 2026)



Exhibit 7_ Eton's Store Design (Eton, 2026)



Exhibit 8_ Eton's Iconic Product (Eton, 2026)

Polarn O. Pyret is a Swedish childrenswear brand founded in 1976 in Sweden and is often referred to as PO.P. Its founding principle that clothing should be made to be loved, washed, and passed on to at least three children, has the brand operating according to identical values for nearly five decades. This philosophy, which is summarized in its internal slogan: *“three children for every garment”* is not merely a marketing slogan but a description of how the company has always worked, further captured in its tagline: *“Design that lasts, since 1976”* (Polarn O. Pyret, 2026).

PO.P. fulfills all five dimensions of Urde et al.’s (2007) Heritage Quotient framework. In terms of longevity, the brand has survived nearly 50 years of market shifts, including the rise of fast and ultra-fast fashion. Its track record is reflected in a multigenerational customer base, as the former CEO noted: *“the sales have gone up steadily because actually the customers come back because they like the concept.”* The brand’s core values, functionality, durability, and timeless design, have remained unchanged since its founding and were actively strengthened when the former CEO’s first act upon joining was *“change the collections back to basics.”* The organizational belief that history matters is visible in PO.P.’s second-hand initiative, which dates to the 1970s, and in the former CEO’s articulation of how the brand balances continuity with relevance: *“You have to be careful to not become old [...] You still have to use the history, our founders defined the stripes, but adapt it to a new way. You show that it’s still new, it’s the old stripes in a new way.”*

Most visibly, PO.P.’s heritage symbol is its iconic stripe, introduced in the brand’s first collection and structurally unchanged since. The former CEO captured its intergenerational meaning: *“Many customers including myself were brought up with long johns [...] It’s the exact same stripes we have been using for 50 years.”* This continuity of design makes PO.P.’s heritage tangible, not communicated, but worn.

POLARN O. PYRET

Exhibit 9_Polarn O. Pyret's Logo (Polarn O. Pyret, 2026)



Exhibit 10_Polarn O. Pyret store in Lund (Modeplatsen, 2026)



Exhibit 11_Polarn O. Pyret Iconic Product (Polarn O. Pyret, 2026)

4.2. The Three W-Question Framework

To structure our empirical findings and identify relevant information across all interviews, we were guided by the “Five W’s Framework” proposed by Pöttker (2003). However, as we do not work in a journalistic form, we adapted the guiding questions to what, how, and why to align with our research questions. As the concept of Slow Heritage Fashion is not yet defined by existing literature, answering the question helps the exploration and construction of the phenomenon.

The empirical findings are structured around the following themes representing our research question:

RQ1) What Slow Heritage Fashion is,

RQ2) How Slow Heritage Fashion emerges, and

RQ3) Why do brands pursue Slow Heritage Fashion?

4.2.1 What is Slow Heritage Fashion?

The question of “what” explores the link between the concepts of slow fashion and heritage branding. The quotes derived from the interviews explain the individual meaning of both and how they intertwine to create the meaning of Slow Heritage Fashion. As a result, this section demonstrates how industry experts interpret the characteristics and meanings within the context of their respective company and how they perceive the phenomenon.

Exploring Slow Fashion

One central dimension that was highlighted within all interviews was the connection to **timelessness and longevity**. The respondent of Stenströms formulated slow fashion as:

“Creating products with longevity in mind rather than short-term consumption and focusing on craftsmanship, timeless design, high-quality material, because I would say it’s connected to a more conscious relationship with clothing where a garment often carries an emotional value and is not treated as disposable items such as fast fashion can be sometimes.”

Similarly, the former CEO of Polarn O. Pyret connected this to the brands collections:

“It needs to be in colors and forms that are lasting for a longer period of time. The spring item that we’re selling now should be able to be worn next spring and the spring after. So, then you have to have quality, the fitting and the colors that are reasonably longevity, so that it can last for a longer period of time.”

The same principles go for the coordination of color schemes of the company's collections. Therefore, the former CEO of Polarn O. Pyret argued:

“We entered new colors every year, but they should marry each other. So, if it was for example a red color for spring, it should be able to work with the summer and the winter collection, so that could be married. ... The majority of your styles should be able to be repeated the next season”

Additionally, **quality and durability** are in the focus for Polarn O. Pyret:

“It has to have quality. You can wash it a lot of times so it’s actually an investment one time but it’s also something that in the long run actually you pay even less.”

The company connected slow fashion to **circularity and product longevity** through their slogan: “Three children for every garment.” This means that the garment should be of such high quality, that it lasts three children long, which promotes durability and long-term product use.

In line with this, the representative of Eton addressed the quality and long-lasting value of their products. She explained:

“Slow fashion is of course quality driven and that it should last for a long time. [...] The Eton shirt is not something you have to replace every other week, it’s a wardrobe essential that you should have in your wardrobe. It should fit you for different events, different types of gatherings and it should last for a long time.”

Likewise, the company highlights the importance of timeless aspects, where they aim to show the resistance towards the temporary and fast changing fashion trends, as this can lower the lifespan:

“It’s a timeless design as well, so it’s not changing so much depending on fashion. [...] The more trend you put into it the shorter the lifespan it gets from a look perspective.”

The company representative from Eton connects quality to durability and functionality and mentions how customers contacted the company after owning a garment for decades:

“We also try to focus on that the quality can last for repeated washing, repeated ironing, that the construction of the shirt doesn’t falter in the seams or that the buttons come off. I mean all these things are key to having a garment that can last for a long time. We have customers who have actually gotten in contact with us and said: “I bought this shirt 30 years ago and now I’ve worn it out so I’m wondering what the replacement is”

Similarly, the interviewed industry experts connected slow fashion to characteristics such as timelessness, **durability and anti-trend positioning**. The expert connected to Filippa K explained:

“It should be timeless, meaning that it shouldn’t be too much of an element of fashion, so to speak, and that goes for materials, for the cut, the look and the colors and patterns.”

The expert connected to FOV Fabrics further described slow fashion as clothing that *“can be worn for several seasons, thinking of classic design.”* He also brought up the **sustainability perspective**, that slow fashion is *“directly related to sustainability of clothing, the use of natural dyes, and not following any particular trends.”*

The expert of Filippa K noted:

“If you want to be a long-lasting company, you must and should produce and act according to sustainability, meaning the three aspects of sustainability, ecological, social and economic. You must oversee your whole value chain, which is not easy.”

Exploring Heritage Branding

As mentioned earlier, we further explored how the respondents perceive heritage branding within their brands. The respondent from Stenströms explained:

“Heritage plays a pretty central role in the identity of the company. The long history creates credibility and signals expertise, continuity and craftsmanship.”

At Eton, heritage branding was strongly associated with **craftsmanship, expertise and historical continuity**. The respondent explained:

“All the experiences and all the know-how of fine-tuning the perfect shirt for such a long time is part of almost all communication that we make. It’s a huge part for every collection, it’s mentioning craftsmanship, heritage, know-how. All of these words are constantly repeated.”

The respondent from Eton additionally emphasized the **physical and symbolic continuity** of the brand:

“I would say that our heritage is very important, we’re also located in the same place, where the company was founded. We’re in the same building and the family who used to own us still comes to visit. So, there’s a lot of heritage details.”

The expert from FOV Fabrics similarly described heritage brands as:

“A company with a very long history that is placed on the market, and they use it in the branding and the labeling and what they are thinking. They are working long-lasting and with classic designs and high quality standards are on their focus. They don’t follow the latest fashion trends.”

The former CEO of Polarn O. Pyret emphasized the **importance of history** while simultaneously highlighting the importance of adapting and remaining relevant, while still maintaining the history and the brand’s core:

“You have to be careful to not become old. We have done this since 1976 so we’re going to do the same thing copy-paste one season. That doesn’t work because you

still have to use the history, for example our founders defined the stripes, but adapt it to a new way. [...] You show that it's still new, it's the old stripes in a new way"

Eton's heritage is strongly aligned with the **attention to detail** through the statement that emerged through their founders:

"You cannot hand over a shirt until it's perfect."

Similarly, the respondent from Stenströms further stated that heritage can be displayed in various forms. He mentioned the connection to product details or their external communication:

"In the product it can be seen through the craftsmanship, classic silhouettes, high-quality materials, and attention to detail. For example, we have the mother-of-pearl buttons. I don't think it's very common for shirt makers or fashion companies to be so keen on having that kind of attention to detail. [...] In the communication Stenströms often highlights the history, expertise, long-standing traditions and if you speak visually, I would say it's also relatively timeless and understated, which I would say reinforces the sense of continuity and longevity."

Exploring Slow Heritage Fashion

We then asked the interviewees to explore the relationship between the two topics. The respondents identified a strong intersection between the concepts. Eton directly connected both concepts:

"I think for Eton we have a product that is quite timeless because we do men's shirting. It has a very slow change in like the fit and size and shape of the collars and cuffs, they don't change a lot [...] The slow fashion and the heritage is kind of going hand in hand naturally."

Similarly, the respondent from Stenströms stated that both slow fashion and heritage branding are built around the same core values and try to promote similar practices:

"I would say that there is a strong connection between those. I would say the heritage brands are often naturally aligned with slow fashion because both of them are built around the terms of longevity and quality and timelessness. The idea is not

to encourage excessive consumption but rather to create garments that remain valuable over time in contrast to fast fashion.”

The expert from Filippa K further emphasized the connection but also mentions the importance of adaption and progression:

“You can have a fantastic heritage which you talk about, you can also have slow fashion in the sense that it’s long lasting when it comes to the level of fashion so to speak and good quality of the products, but at the same time you can be super progressive.”

The expert from FOV rounds up the relationship directly:

“There’s a strong connection between these two. Heritage brands were slower before the slow fashion movement existed.”

A recurring observation across the interviews was that heritage brands embed slow values and sustainable practices within their brand without explicitly communicating it. The respondents mentioned that it is an important dimension within the brand but is not something that is necessarily and actively communicated towards their customers. The former CEO of PO.P mentioned:

“The sustainability factor was something we held back because we were scared to do greenwashing. That’s a healthy sign that you don’t want to sort of say “We’re so green and we’re so good.” [...] It’s something that we want the customer to talk about and discover.”

Eton described a similar approach. It describes its sustainability efforts as embedded within the company that guides the internal brand. However, it does not strongly use it in its external communication, as its customers do not choose their products based on their sustainability efforts but rather expect the brand to have high quality standards:

“We are not very good at highlighting the sustainability aspect. We do a lot more than we share. [...] Customers of Eton don’t really care about sustainability so much, then it’s not a huge part of our communication towards customers but it’s still

extremely important for us as a company and as a brand. So, it's part of our business strategy but not as much part of our daily communication."

The expert from Filippa K also supports this finding:

"Some brands are successful and sustainable, but they do not speak about it so much. From a branding viewpoint, it can sometimes be a hindrance to label yourself as an eco-brand, because that could make certain customers hesitant [...] For heritage brands, this does not necessarily mean that they should label themselves as sustainable. They could consider themselves sustainable if they are, but whether they should communicate depends on many aspects, such as the market they operate in and the competition."

PO.P integrated sustainability-driven approaches to their operations and product philosophy by implementing a second-hand initiative:

"Second hand is so common that people actually see the value. [...] And when we launched the second hand, we actually got an added value which we hadn't planned on."

Therefore, PO.P doesn't frame this initiative directly as sustainability, but as a way to extend the value of their products. Rather than only focusing on sustainability-driven practices, heritage brands have slow fashion values already embedded within their company for a very long time.

4.2.2 How does Slow Heritage Fashion emerge?

The question of “how” presents how the concept emerges over time within heritage brands and how they develop and maintain this positioning. As we do not see the phenomenon as fixed, the interviews with brand experts revealed different processes and approaches that contribute to form it.

A finding that emerged within every interview was the importance of the **long-term existence and continuity of a heritage firm**. Stenströms connected the emergence directly to the company’s long-term existence:

“I would say our long ties to our history and being a company that’s been developing over the past 130 years.”

Similarly, the former CEO of Polarn O. Pyret highlighted that for the company the long-term survival and continuity formed the developments of the brand:

“There’s been ups and downs. If you survive 50 years it can’t only go up.”

Also, for Eton the long history is important for the emergence of the Slow Heritage Fashion positioning, as the expert stated that they are *“a brand that has been active since 1928”*. Beyond that the brand’s origin values play a crucial role:

“It all started in this small town outside of Borås. That’s where everything comes back to. The two founders stated: “You cannot hand over a shirt until it’s perfect”.”

Eton further elaborates that heritage can be seen within many parts of the brand:

“Heritage is a big, huge part of our brand. You can see it already when you enter this building. I mean this used to be the factory where we made these shirts. [...] You can check the website; there are many things about the history.”

The respondent of Stenströms explains this importance of the history for the emergence of Slow Heritage Fashion as the following:

“Long history creates credibility and signals expertise and continuity in craftsmanship. For many customers, heritage becomes some sort of proof that the brand has maintained its standards over time, rather than following the temporary market trends. [...] It is important that the heritage is well taken care of”

This finding indicates that Slow Heritage Fashion emerges gradually through long-term consistency and continuity rather than through rapidly changing fashion cycles.

A further pattern is the **country of origin and the Scandinavian identity** of the brands. This is not a geographical label but connected to values that also align with slow fashion principles. The respondent from Stenströms articulated it as the following:

“In my opinion Swedish identity contributes strongly to the brand’s positioning, especially through values associated with Scandinavian design, for example, that could be factors like simplicity, understated elegance, functionality and quality. Scandinavian brands are often associated with trustworthiness, sustainability and timeless aesthetics, and that aligns with the values of Stenströms”

The expert from Filippa K also connects Swedish design to a slower approach:

“Scandinavian design is known for being quite timeless, sort of simple materials, simple lines, and an honest approach in a way.”

The connection to design is further reflected in their relationship with nature and outdoors. He further elaborated:

“It’s the fact that Swedish people, in general, are very much connected to nature. We constantly go out into the woods [...] I think that is a little bit of the Swedish soul that you are so much connected to nature, you love to be in nature, you love to go out into the countryside.”

Eton similarly draws on its Swedish roots in a market-specific way. The Swedish identity is communicated explicitly in certain regions. *“In North America, Sweden is still considered a high quality country. It means something to be a Swedish brand.”* Having Sweden as a country of origins connects to quality signals that can be used in other markets.

The former CEO of Polarn O. Pyret similarly connected the broader Scandinavian market and consumers expectations to high quality standards:

“H&M has comparably much higher quality than their peers in the same segment. IKEA, being a low-priced furniture retailer, has actually very good quality for the low price. We have quite a high standard of living and salaries are high. We have a very nice qualitative life and then people can afford to buy brands and therefore together the local brands are adapted to that.”

Notably he also points out the limitations of Swedishness as pure marketing force:

“I don’t think anyone would buy from Polarn O. Pyret just because it’s Swedish. It’s all in the product.”

The interviewees highlighted that Swedish origin could contribute to the emergence of Slow Heritage Fashion due to cultural dimensions, but it does not replace quality or heritage.

Another finding that emerged is the **importance of staying true to the core values while maintaining quality standards** over time. Respondents emphasized how crucial it is to connect to the original identity of the brand.

The former CEO of Polarn O. Pyret described a decisive moment in his career:

“My first mission together with the new chief product officer was to change the collections back to basics.”

He elaborated that heritage brands rely on a slower approach, and the stability drives customer relationships:

“It’s in the DNA that it’s more stable that you have your recurring customers coming back”

Similarly, Eton largely focuses that their progression as a brand must always remain connected to their origins:

“You can see how it has evolved over the centuries, but it all comes back to what was your main focus when the company started and that can never change because

if we change then we lose ourselves. It is important, that you never forget what the main core of the business was and how do we align with that when we're working towards new strategies"

Stenströms captures this through its core values of:

"craftsmanship, quality, timelessness, authenticity, and attention to detail. I think there is a strong emphasis on continuity and long-term thinking in terms of product philosophy and brand identity."

This consistency is reflected in **quality standards and product decisions**. For PO.P continuity is visible, in design, and quality and contributes to the longevity of garments:

"The colors would marry each other. [...] Quality was non-negotiable, we have to continue delivering high quality. [...] Also the longevity; I'm buying this, and I can feel comfortable so that I'll wear it next year without feeling outdated."

Eton confirmed that quality is something customers highly value as *"when customers are interviewed about Eton, they mention quality as one of the first things that comes to mind."*

A pattern that recurred in every interview was the role of **iconic products** that also contributed to the continuity and the emergence of Slow Heritage Fashion Heritage brands often have one iconic product they are particularly known for. For Stenströms the classic product *"is the regular white shirt"*. Similarly, Eton describes the iconic product as *"the white signature shirt with a plain color and a cuff. It's what every man needs in their wardrobe"*.

Polarn O. Pyret highlight the emotional and symbolic value of its stripes:

"Many customers including myself were brought up with striped long johns. [...] I think it was in the first collection that the founder did these stripes, and she kept it year in and year out. [...] It's the exact same stripes we have been using for 50 years."

These products function as anchors and differentiators for the brand and therefore symbolize continuity, linking the past to the present identity.

An observation that several respondents highlighted is that Slow Heritage Fashion is actually something they developed **organically through their history and identity** rather than sitting down and implementing within their company. Across all interviews, they described the slow positioning as something that wasn't made consciously but an outcome of who they already are. The respondent from Stenströms confirmed in the interview that the brand had worked with slow fashion values long before the term existed, describing *"that heritage is often naturally aligned with slow fashion."*

Eton supported this by stating:

"We did this before it was a word that was pushed into a very fast fashion industry. It was already part of our DNA; it was something we already did and now there's a developed world for it after we already did it. It was already something we did without knowing, it's just that it's a scattered name. I wouldn't say that we got it for free because it's been worked really hard at doing this, but we already figured it out before this was the way forward."

The expert connected to Filippa K supported this observation:

"Heritage brands don't think about the terms as slow fashion"

And similarly, the expert from FOV Fabrics highlighted that this positioning is not a recent development: *"I think this connection is developed over time."*

Heritage brands perceive Slow Heritage Fashion as an outcome of their heritage branding and positioning rather than something they intentionally develop and implement within the company. Across the interviews, continuity, timelessness and authenticity repeatedly emerged as central dimensions contributing to the development of Slow Heritage Fashion within the contemporary fashion industry.

4.2.3 Why do brands pursue Slow Heritage Fashion?

The “*why*” question answers why heritage fashion brands engage with and pursue Slow Heritage Fashion within their positioning and branding strategies. This section shows the empirical findings that contribute to the motivations and intentions behind this positioning.

Across all brands, the interviewees mentioned **authenticity, credibility, and trustworthiness**. This helps companies to share deeper values beyond just product characteristics. The respondent of Stenströms explained that customer demands in the contemporary market are changing and are more connected to responsibility and authenticity, which positively influences a positioning within Slow Heritage Fashion:

“It’s often about being environmentally and socially conscious, like the meaning of consumption is more about responsibility than just [...] throwing away things that are not durable in the end.”

Further, he highlights the **emotional aspect that consumers attach to product purchases** from heritage brands. Also, timelessness plays a part in customers purchasing decisions, as they are looking for products that reflect their personal style rather than a fast emerging fashion trend, especially with products in a higher price range:

“Customers often appreciate products with craftsmanship, authenticity and the story behind them. [...] Many customers also value timelessness because it reflects personal style”

Authenticity of the brand is important because consumers have become more critical towards brands that are only driven by trends. The representative of Stenströms mentioned:

“Customers perceive the brand as reliable and sophisticated and authentic [...] consumers are increasingly sensitive to brands that feel overly commercial, and trend driven.”

As highlighted in the previous section, the slow heritage positioning did not emerge strategically, but brands can use it to build upon it. Eton noted that:

“It was not so much that we actively sat down, made a strategy and decided that from now on we are going to be timeless. It was already there in the beginning, and we just continued to build on it.”

The representative from Stenströms similarly described that they now can use this positioning strategically, but it happened organically:

“I would say both yes and no. It is a strategic position now, but at the same time many heritage brands have existed since way before slow fashion was even a term.”

The case companies recognize the competitive advantage of their Slow Heritage Fashion positioning, but this value emerges from the fact that it was never manufactured. Eton puts it:

“It is a competitive advantage; I think that also having a heritage that survived for this long in the business also shows that we did something right. So, it gives us some confidence, and also some good pull in the communication”

Building on this, Slow Heritage Fashion helps brands to **differentiate themselves from fast fashion retailers and trend-driven competition**. All interviews highlighted that Slow Heritage Fashion and each of the brand’s values are positioned as the opposite of the fast and ultra-fast fashion business model. The respondent from Stenströms highlighted:

“Since fast fashion is largely driven by speed and trends and high consumption, products are often designed for short-term relevance. I would say that's like the complete opposite to what Stenströms stands for and what their target customers are.”

The expert connected to Filippa K supported these insights from Stenströms, as he stated:

“It's strategic that they position themselves in a slower context, because they don't really compete with fast fashion brands.”

In line with this, the expert from FOV fabrics elaborated:

“They don’t want the same customers as those for fast fashion. They want to maintain constantly high quality standards.”

Further the interviews revealed that Slow Heritage Fashion is pursued because of its **long-term value and durable asset**. The former CEO of Polarn O. Pyret puts it:

“The value is so high. [...] If you have created a brand that has a lot of longevity, that has values that the customers are buying into, no matter what those values might be. It is absolutely there for the long term and consumers think: should I buy this up-and-coming, maybe cool brand that I don't know anything about, or should I buy this legacy brand? A lot of big investors would go for the legacy brand”

He connected heritage to long-term stability for brands:

“It is easier to run a business over time when you have a legacy. [...] It’s much easier to keep a legacy slow fashion brand floating than a high fashion brand”

And raised the role of slow heritage positioning in digital competitiveness:

“We could scale up e-commerce because of the legacy of our brand, because you can be quickly forgotten on the internet.”

He described the quality as a form for differentiation within a long-standing brand positioning:

“Quality has a cost so it can’t be as cheap as the next door neighbor”

Beyond that Eton looked at it from an inventory perspective. Brands can pursue Slow Heritage Fashion as it enables continuity and reduced pressure for constantly producing new products:

“It’s a smart choice to have products that don’t go out of time that we can keep on our stock. It’s easier to have a never out of stock program where you can keep the products and you sell them over many years”

The interviews mention that brands use Slow Heritage Fashion as a long-term business strategy that uses legacy and slowness as a distinct market position and durable asset that fast-fashion brands cannot replicate.

A final motivation that emerged across the interviews was the capacity of Slow Heritage Fashion to foster **deep, more stable consumer relationships**, as they build attachment through continuity and emotions. The former CEO of P.O.P highlights the importance of legacy products:

“It makes your brand so much stronger if you can rely on your legacy products [...] The best thing you can do is to buy quality brands.”

The expert from FOV Fabrics highlighted that consumers value:

“Longevity and quality standards and also personal emotional value as opposed to following a general trend.”

The interviews revealed that consumers' demand for Slow Heritage Fashion operates on two different levels. The former CEO of Polarn O. Pyret described an explicit form of demand, where customers actively return because of the long-standing philosophy and values:

“The sales have gone up steadily because actually the customers come back because they like the concept, they like the slow fashion part of it.”

Eton, by contrast, described a more implicit form of demand, where customers are not consciously choosing Slow Heritage Fashion but are drawn to its underlying characteristics nonetheless:

“I don't think our customers choose it because it is slow fashion. Our customers are doing it for that purpose that they are doing it for convenience. Our main customers are men, and they want to have garments that are easy to care for, that are easy to wear, that look nice. So, I think our customers aren't making the conscious choice of slow fashion, they are choosing timeless and convenient garments.”

At the same time, Eton noted that customer expectations remain high even when explicitly stated:

“Customers expect us to deliver on sustainability and quality. Generalizing our customers are well-educated businessmen who expect us to perform really well but they don’t ask us for it.”

The interviews indicate that some consumers are guided by the product philosophy and legacy, and others value the products functionality and aesthetics. In both cases, the brand’s Slow Heritage Fashion position creates loyalty and long-term relationships.

Taken together, the findings reveal that brands pursue Slow Heritage Fashion for reasons of image, strategy, operations and consumer relationships simultaneously. Rather than a single motivation, Slow Heritage Fashion provides advantages that reinforce each other. Authenticity builds trust, trust enables differentiation, differentiation supports long-term resilience, and resilience deepens customer loyalty.

5. Analysis

This chapter analyzes the empirical findings through three themes that emerged within the study. It explores how elements such as history, legacy, and Swedishness contribute to the construction of Slow Heritage Fashion. Through this analysis, the chapter develops a deeper understanding of how and why brands position themselves in this way and implements the concept of Slow Heritage Fashion.

The empirical results presented the 3-W questions, which provides a foundation for presenting themes:

5.1. Silent Sustainability

A recurring theme across both case companies and industry experts is what we named *silent sustainability*. The theme describes behaviors and practices of brands that demonstrate sustainable values without them explicitly communicating them as sustainable. Practices can therefore be visible in their product philosophy, quality standards and align with their heritage. In the literature review we discussed the work from Fletcher (2010), who highlights that sustainability is a core driver of slow fashion and that it is a conscious decision for production and consumption. Jung & Jin (2014) argue in their research paper that dimensions such as authenticity, localism and functionality should be integrated to slow fashion. Both authors stress that slow fashion is a direct commitment to sustainability, however, our findings open up a new understanding and complicate the relationship. The case companies engage with sustainability, and it is a core driver of their internal brand, but they do not explicitly label it outwards. Therefore, they rather show sustainability through their practice rather than through promotion and active communication.

The reluctance to over-communicating the practices can be connected to a broader cultural level seen within the Swedish context. As we discussed in section 2.4.4. about *Swedishness*, Swedish brands often communicate more subtly and do not want to over-promote themselves (Barinaga, 1999). This is in accordance with the cultural norm of Jantelagen, which discourages bragging and self-promoting and emphasizes a more subtle approach to living (Fredlund-Blomst, 2010; Sandemose, 1936). We conclude that Swedish brands tend to understate their efforts rather than actively promoting them and that consumers prefer brands that do not overly self-promote their

good efforts. Silent sustainability, we argue, can therefore also stem from cultural factors like the Swedish origin of the brand.

Eton highlights this relationship: *“We are not very good at highlighting the sustainability aspect. We do a lot more than we share. [...] It is not a huge part of our communication towards customers but it’s still extremely important for us as a company and as a brand. So, it’s part of our business strategy but not as much part of our daily communication.”* Within the case company, sustainability is important to the internal brand and shapes their business but is not something they actively show to their consumers. Urde et al. (2007) suggest that core values are important to the brand and should remain stable over time as they keep the brand identity consistent, which implies that the values also shape brands externally. Interestingly, sustainability is embedded in the identity of the brand, but it does not actively appear in the external communication.

Silent sustainability, however, is not a weakness but due to integrity. The former CEO of PO.P explains: *“The sustainability factor was something we held back because we were scared to do greenwashing. That’s a healthy sign that you don’t want to sort of say “We’re so green and we’re so good.” [...] It’s something that we want the customer to talk about and discover”* Silence is connected to brand authenticity and aligns with the findings of Beverland (2005). In his research he argues that brands appear authentic when they stay consistent and believable in their communication. The argument from the interview PO.P reinforces this perception: *“the ones that are the best in sustainability are often the ones that talk the least about it”*.

Silent sustainability can also be visible in the products of heritage brands. The case companies do not promote their products to be sustainable but focus on their quality and durability. Those values align with the slow fashion principles, as garments should last and be worn longer than one season (Fletcher, 2010; Goldsworthy, 2017). With regard to this, Eton states: *“Our customers choose them because they are long lasting, and they are good quality, but all of those things are also connected to sustainability, but we don’t label them sustainable.”* The interviews argue that a shirt that has been worn for many years can be a sustainable product, but they promote it based on the craftsmanship and durability and not because of the sustainability. Consumers might connect this to sustainability on their own, but the brands do not actively label it.

The choice of materials and colors further contribute to this understanding. The case companies predominantly work with natural tones that work over multiple seasons, which increases the longevity of their products. The former CEO of PO.P told us: *“It needs to be in colors and forms that are lasting for a longer period of time. The spring item that we are selling now should be able to be worn next spring and the spring after.”* The brand expert from Filippa K explains: *“It should be timeless, meaning that it shouldn’t be too much of an element of fashion [...] and that goes for materials, for the cut and the colors and patterns.”* Heritage brands, in this regard, reflect sustainability in their design philosophy, which aligns with what we discuss about slow fashion in the literature review. Slow fashion emphasizes the use of natural colors and timeless design to expand the lifecycle of products and reduce the speed of purchase (Fletcher, 2010; Clark, 2008).

During the interview with the former brand strategist of Filippa K, he explained the strategic importance of this silence: *“Some brands are successful and sustainable, but they do not speak about it so much. From a brand positioning viewpoint, it can sometimes be a hindrance to label yourself as an eco-brand, because that could make certain customer groups hesitant.”* Kotler & Keller (2012) share this understanding with their research about the perception-based concept. A brand’s position is also shaped by associations brands avoid and not only by what they communicate. Therefore, actively addressing the contributions to sustainability could narrow the heritage brand’s identity that is focused on history and authenticity (Kapferer, 2008; Urde et al., 2007). Simultaneously, the same expert highlights that sustainable practices are important to the supply chain: *“If you want to be a long-lasting company, you must and should produce and act according to sustainability [...] You must oversee your whole value chain.”* This stresses that parts of sustainability can be seen as a prerequisite for heritage brands whose core values revolve around high quality standards and longevity. In this regard, sustainable practices come naturally with heritage brands but are not visible from an outside perspective.

The theme can be connected to a further cultural dimension. As outlined in section 2.4.4 Swedishness, Sweden’s society is often said to be environmentally aware, outdoor-oriented and closely connected to nature (McGurk, 2017; Cederqvist et al., 2025). It could be argued that within this culture, sustainability is already presupposed for both brands and customers. The expert from Filippa K argued: *“It’s the fact that Swedish people, in general, are very much connected to nature. We constantly go out into the woods [...] I think that is a little bit of the Swedish soul that you are*

so much connected to nature, you love to be in nature, you love to go out into the countryside.” Swedish consumers may already expect environmental practices which indicates that the brands do not need to explicitly communicate it. Further, Swedish brands may already have higher standards for themselves on sustainability-related topics. Eton elaborates on this from a brand side: *“Customers expect us to deliver on sustainability and quality [...] they don’t ask us for it.”* Sustainability within Swedish heritage fashion brands might be something that is already expected and practiced but rarely addressed.

Silent sustainability can also emerge through second-hand or circular practices. In section 2.1.4 of the literature review, we highlighted second-hand shopping and repair as part of the slow fashion movement. It increases the product lifecycles and the emotional attachment towards products (Fletcher, 2010; Machado et al., 2019). PO.P introduced a second-hand initiative but did not promote it as something directly connected or stemming from environmental reasons. The brand was able to be circular without branding themselves directly as a sustainable company. The former CEO noted that second-hand has become normalized within today's society and consumers perceive it as adding value. This aligns with Cervellon et al (2012) view that vintage and second-hand consumption contributes to identity expression of individuals.

Fletcher (2010) suggests that slow fashion is a sustainability choice that brands and consumers consciously make. Our case companies show that for heritage brands a slow positioning can be connected to other dimensions, for instance, heritage, craftsmanship, consistency or cultural drivers. The brands do not actively communicate it and therefore practice what we termed silent sustainability. This is a sustainable behavior that is embedded in the brand, yet it is not externally addressed, which allows the consumer to discover it within the brand’s products and heritage.

5.2. Organic Emergence

Across all conducted interviews, we discovered a recurring pattern that the case companies did not describe their slow positioning as consciously implemented. Instead, the findings suggest that values commonly associated with slow fashion had already been embedded within the companies long before the term itself became established within the fashion industry. The finding opens a new dimension to slow fashion literature, which typically frames slowness as a conscious choice to go against fast production cycles and overconsumption (Fletcher, 2010; Clark, 2008; Goldsworthy, 2017). The case companies do not use this slowness as a counter-movement, but it emerged naturally through their history. Therefore, slowness does not stem from resistance, but from legacy.

Several interviewees explicitly emphasized that their brands had worked according to these principles long before slow fashion became a recognized industry concept. The participant from Eton explains: *“We did this before it was a word that was pushed into a very fast fashion industry. It was already part of our DNA [...] It was already something we did without knowing.”* Similarly, the respondent from Filippa K observes that *“Heritage brands don’t think about the terms as slow fashion”*, and the expert from FOV Fabrics emphasized that *“this connection is developed over time”*. Heritage within the brands is not a marketing tool for external communication but shapes how the companies operate and develop over time. Consequently, many of the values associated with slow fashion emerge naturally from the heritage orientation.

The organic emergence of the slow positioning extends the interpretation of slow fashion literature. Fletcher (2010) introduces it as a conscious choice and a shift from quantity to quality. Jung & Jin (2014) further introduce the dimensions of authenticity, localism, exclusivity, equity and functionality. The study reveals that for heritage brands these dimensions are not set strategically but emerge over time. Authenticity is not framed as a marketing claim, but because it emerges through long-term consistency. Stenströms notes that long history *“creates credibility and signals expertise and continuity in craftsmanship [...] rather than following the temporary market trends”*. Localism can be seen as the brand’s design traditions are rooted within a place or culture and focuses on quality of materials and practices. Functionality in heritage brands is visible in its product philosophy. PO.P has the striped design, Eton and Stenströms the classic white shirt and

all of them revolve around durability across many seasons. This is embedded in their long-lasting design and not a strategically slow fashion approach, as the former CEO of PO.P emphasizes: *“The spring item that we’re selling now should be able to be worn next spring and the spring after”*. The remaining two dimensions, exclusivity and equity, are visible but not directly seen as slow fashion signals within heritage brands. Exclusivity in Jung & Jin’s framework refers to the limited production and premium pricing as intentional slow fashion signals. The case companies operate as premium brands with higher pricing, but this is not something they state as a slow fashion choice. Equity, which concerns fair labor conditions and ethical supply chains, was not directly discussed in the interviews. However, each respondent stated that the brand does more for sustainability than they externally share, which connects back to the discussed theme of Silent Sustainability.

Across the interviews, three mechanisms through which Slow Heritage Fashion develops emerged. First, **organizational continuity** was identified in every interview. The respondent from Stenströms states: *“I would say our long ties to our history and being a company that’s been developing over the past 130 years.”* At the same time, Eton highlights its founding story and principle: *“It all started in this small town outside of Borås. That’s where everything comes back to”. “You cannot hand over a shirt until it’s perfect”*. The former CEO of PO.P draws a connection between continuity and resilience: *“There’s been ups and downs. If you survive 50 years it can’t only go up.”* The case companies view identity as something that is built over time and not as a strategic choice that was implemented at one point. This is consistent with Urde et al. 's (2007) argument that for heritage brands three time zones are relevant, the past, the present and the future. For all three case brands their history is an important aspect which positions them within the slower context, but yet it is important for them to be in the present and look into their future. Within this, slow positioning is an organic outcome. Eton articulates this clearly: *“It was not so much that we actively sat down, made a strategy and decided that from now on we are going to be timeless. It was already there in the beginning, and we just continued to build on it.”*

A second mechanism is the **role of iconic products**. Each case brand has a product that remained unchanged for decades and functions as a symbol for the brand itself. Stenströms describes its iconic product as *“the regular white shirt”*, while Eton refers to *“the white signature shirt with a plain collar and a cuff. It’s what every man needs in their wardrobe.”* For Polarn o. Pyret, the

former CEO explains that the stripes are their iconic asset, which they have used for 50 years now. As iconic products can be symbols of heritage, these can be linked to a dimension of Urde et al (2007) heritage quotient framework. The symbol is a recurring feature of the brand that makes the continuity visible and remains unchanged over decades. The iconic products further bring slowness into the brand, as a garment that remains unchanged for many years will not go out of style and therefore does not need to be replaced. Longevity is therefore built by the product itself and does not depend on brand messaging or external trend cycles. Further, iconic products can often carry emotional values for customers. Stenströms respondents put it *“a garment often carries an emotional value and is not treated as disposable items such as fast fashion can be sometimes”*. Timelessness is therefore not only connected to the product design but also to slower consumption patterns as consumers see the value in the product and do not dispose of it so quickly.

The third mechanism relates to **country of origin and Swedish cultural values**. The respondents indirectly connected their slower positioning to characteristics associated with Swedish culture. Stenströms states that: *“In my opinion Swedish identity contributes strongly to the brand’s positioning through values such as simplicity, understated elegance, functionality, and quality”*. As discussed in section 2.4.4 of the literature, these values align with Swedish design traditions and cultural norms (Skou & Munch, 2016). The norm of Jantelagen becomes interesting, as it discourages self-promotion (Fredlund-Blomst, 2010; Sandemose, 1936). In this regard, Swedishness appeared to support and reinforce a slower approach to fashion and consumption. Heritage brands in this sense do not adopt these values to respond to fast fashion but as they are already rooted in the origin and identity.

Further the interviews revealed that although the positioning was never planned, the brands become increasingly aware that it is something that competitors cannot replicate, which opens a paradox. This tension between the natural development and the strategic competitive advantage is something we return to in the following section.

This finding extends the understanding of Slow Heritage Fashion. Rather than emerging through the conscious adoption of slow fashion principles, the phenomenon develops through the intersection of organizational continuity, heritage symbols, and cultural heritage. Moreover, they became strategically relevant over time, as the contemporary fashion market increasingly valued

qualities such as longevity and continuity. The brands existed before the movement, but the movement created the vocabulary through which their existing identity could be named and strategically positioned.

5.3. Strategic Differentiator from Fast Fashion

The case companies do not view fast fashion retailers as their direct competitors, and they do not aim for the same position in the market. They are occupying a different space that revolves around longevity and quality. Fast fashion retailers, by contrast, compete on speed and low prices and often neglect high quality standards to remain competitive (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010; Joy et al. 2012). As already mentioned in section 5.2., slowness is not strategically created by the brand but happened naturally over decades of existing and staying true to the origins. Out of this a paradox emerges, as the case companies do recognize this natural position and use it for their differentiation within the industry. This aligns Ries & Trout (2001), who argue that positioning is created in the mind of consumers and not the product by itself. The contrast to fast fashion becomes part of the consumers' perception of heritage brands, even though it is not actively communicated. The expert from Filippa K noted: *"It's strategic that they position themselves in a slower context, because they can't really compete with fast fashion brands."* The statement stresses that a slower position may be necessary for heritage brands as their values are incompatible with those of fast fashion. Stenströms explains: *"Since fast fashion is largely driven by speed and trends and high consumption, products are often designed for short-term relevance. I would say that's like the complete opposite to what Stenströms stands for and what their target customers are."* Heritage brands do not lose against the speed of the industry but operate on different terms.

Heritage brand's values and the emotional connection to garments is what defines them and is something the fast fashion retailers cannot reach or offer. Kapferer & Bastien (2012) touch upon premium and heritage brands in their research and imply that those brands differentiate themselves through exclusivity and craftsmanship. Also, the symbolic value functions as an important competitive advantage. The expert from FOV Fabrics elaborates: *"They don't want the same customer as those for fast fashion. They want to maintain constantly high quality standards."* The customer group targeted by heritage brands is fundamentally different from the fast fashion customers. Customers buy from heritage brands because the garments last for a long time and do not quickly go out of style. This is reflected by Eton's approach to its strategy: *"It's a smart choice*

to have products that don't go out of time that we can keep on our stock. It's easier to have a never out of stock program where you can keep the products and you sell them over many years." Timelessness in this sense reduces the pressure of constantly creating new collections and launching new designs, which stands in a direct contrast to the fast fashion business model (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010).

The former CEO of PO.P further framed the heritage itself as a competitive advantage, as the fast and ultra-fast fashion sector cannot recreate it: *"If you have created a brand that has a lot of longevity, that has values that the customers are buying into [...] consumers think: should I buy this up-and-coming, maybe cool brand that I don't know anything about or should I buy this legacy brand? A lot of investors would go for the legacy brand."* Urde et al. (2007) support this with their understanding of heritage. If a heritage is activated and integrated into the brand, it becomes a valuable, rare, and inimitable asset. Fast fashion can copy designs and aesthetics while selling them for a lower price, but they are not able to replicate the long history and the resulting trust of heritage brands.

PO.P argues *"It is much easier to keep a legacy slow fashion brand floating than a high fashion brand"*. This connects directly to the dimension of longevity, proposed in the HQ framework by Urde et al., (2007). Longevity, as one of the five dimensions, argues that brands need a long-term existence in order to be viewed as a heritage brand. Therefore, fast fashion brands are not able to copy this longevity. Track record, another dimension of the HQ framework, describes that reputation and credibility is created through a consistent performance over decades. Heritage brands offer high quality and good standards over a long time, whereas fast fashion brands are driven by low cost and trend. Heritage brands build trust over time and fast fashion retailers cannot replicate that. Kapferer (2008) frames this as a form of capital, as emotional positioning is built through meaningful stories that contribute to consumer trust. PO.P argues that *"The sales have gone up steadily because actually the customers come back because they like the concept, they like the slow part of it."* Consumers do not only engage with heritage brands because of its quality and longevity but also because they trust them.

The Swedish origin strengthens this differentiation. As discussed in 2.4.3. Country of Origin, the positive associations of a country can lead to a high brand image and the willingness of consumers to pay a premium price (Koschate-Fischer et al., 2012). The connections to Swedishness can be

used by Swedish heritage brands to enhance the credibility of the brand, something that distinguishes them from the fast fashion competition. During the interview, Eton highlights that in their marketing communication in North America, they often use their strong country image of Sweden as a differentiator, as consumers of this market connect positive associations with this origin. Consumers do not only see the Swedish origin as a functional characteristic but associate broader values like durability or authenticity with it, which aligns with the distinction of affective and normative COE (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). Fast fashion retailers are driven by standardization and offer the same pieces globally, brands that are connected to a distinct country and transport these values can be seen as unique by customers. Further if they connect with the values of the country and use it to express their identity, these brands will get favored.

The interviews showed that heritage brands can use their slowness to distance themselves from fast fashion, even though it came into the brand naturally. The case companies do not compete with fast fashion, and the interviews show that they also do not aim or need to. Heritage brands do not share the same consumer groups and the same position in the market because they revolve around different values that create credibility for consumers. Fast fashion brands cannot copy or replicate these values, which gives heritage brands a competitive advantage in the accelerated industry.

5.4. Slow Heritage Fashion

Drawing on the findings from 5.1 to 5.3., this study introduces the concept of Slow Heritage Fashion as a contribution to existing literature of the concepts of slow fashion and heritage branding.

Slow Heritage Fashion refers to a market positioning that emerges organically from a brand's heritage and long-term identity and is characterized by the alignment of heritage brand values with the principles of slow fashion, including quality over quantity, durability, timeless design and a restrained approach to trends, without the brand explicitly identifying itself as a slow fashion brand.

While this positioning can theoretically be pursued strategically, it requires a brand to first establish itself as a heritage brand, which is a process that takes decades rather than certain strategic decisions. In practice, Slow Heritage Fashion is therefore not implemented but discovered. The following section introduces the five dimensions of the concept, before combining them with the prerequisites of a heritage brand. Finally, it offers a diagnostic tool and a positioning matrix to position Slow Heritage Fashion within the market.

The Five Dimensions of Slow Heritage Fashion

The inner layer captures how Slow Heritage Fashion is visible in practice. They are not strategic decisions but appear within a heritage brand when they maintained its identity and values over a long period of time.



Figure 6_Slow Heritage Fashion Framework

The first dimension is *silent sustainability*. Sustainable values are deeply embedded in a Slow Heritage Fashion brand's DNA and made visible through products, materials, high quality standards and durability. However, Slow Heritage Fashion brands do not actively communicate or promote these efforts externally and do not engage with it as a response to external pressure or consumer trends. This approach is rooted deeply in the brand identity. The silence is not a weakness but made out of brand integrity. The silent approach can function as a signal for authenticity. Slow Heritage Brands often do more for sustainability than they externally share.

The second dimension is *organic slowness*. Slow Heritage Fashion brands practiced slow fashion values before the movement emerged. Slow Heritage Fashion brands operate slower, in terms of collection, production and products but not because they strategically view themselves as a slow fashion brand (Fletcher, 2010; Jung & Jin, 2014). Rather it happens naturally out of its core values and long-standing identity. This distinguishes a Slow Heritage Fashion brand from slow fashion, as the organic slowness cannot be created by a conscious choice, as it can only be created through long-term history.

The third dimension, *timeless design*, captures the product philosophy of Slow Heritage Fashion brands. They choose natural materials, neutral colors that match each other and cuts that go for many seasons, which directly makes longevity part of their products. With this, the frequency of purchase is lower as garments are designed to last for a long time (Clark, 2008; Goldsworthy, 2017). Timeless design is therefore related to the product, sustainability and can be seen as a brand

statement, even though nothing is directly communicated. Consumers, however, perceive this as reliable and added value. Detaching from the trend-driven fashion logic is a way for Slow Heritage Fashion brands to differ from fast fashion retailers.

The fourth dimension explains the *cultural embeddedness*. This is the role the country of origin plays in implementing slowness within a brand. For Slow Heritage Brands their country of origin is not a marketing tool, but something that shapes and is deeply rooted in their identity and core values. In the literature review, in section 2.4.3., we discussed that the COE and a positive country image lead to positive consumer evaluations and the willingness to pay a price premium (Koschate-Fischer et al., 2012). For a Slow Heritage Fashion brand, where their origin country is not a strategic tool but an element shaping the company, this can form an additional layer of authenticity and something competitors are not able to copy.

The fifth dimension, *strategic differentiation* captures an important paradox. Even though the slow positioning emerged organically, Slow Heritage brands actively recognize and leverage it strategically as a competitive advantage. Urde et al., (2007) highlight that heritage, if activated, becomes a valuable, rare and inimitable asset, meaning that fast fashion competitors cannot replicate it as it has to be built over time. Other brands are not able to replicate decades of history, country of origin and constant values. The Slow Heritage Fashion positioning is therefore a barrier to imitation.

Together, the five dimensions show how Slow Heritage Fashion is visible across different levels of a brand, where each dimension reinforces each other.

Heritage as Prerequisite

Further we propose an advanced version of the Slow Heritage Fashion Framework. The concept builds on two layers. The outer layer builds on the Heritage Quotient framework proposed by Urde et al. (2007). It introduces the dimensions of longevity, track record, core values, use of symbols, and the organizational belief that history matters.

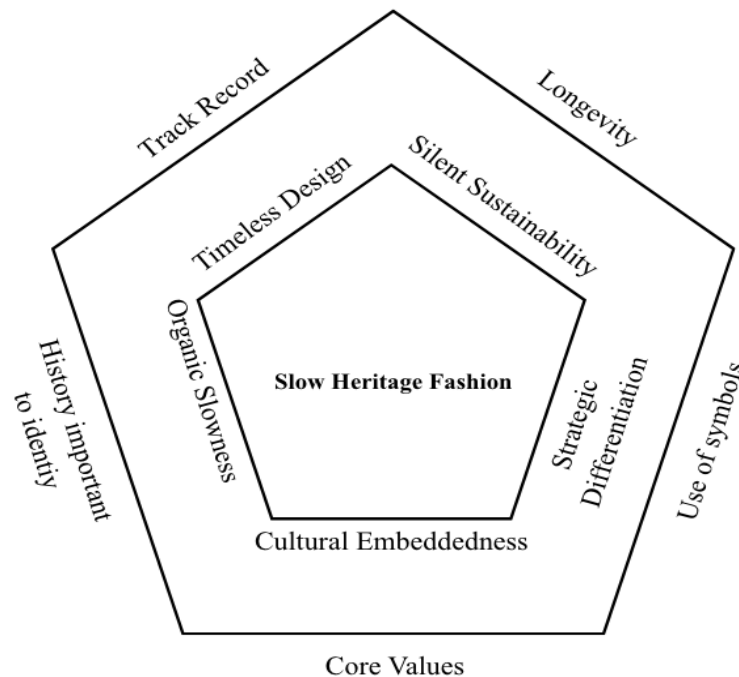


Figure 7_Slow Heritage Fashion expanded

Those are the prerequisites a brand must fulfill to be considered as a heritage brand and potentially, in the context, a Slow Heritage Fashion brand. The relationship of the two layers is sequential, as the outer layer comes first and all five dimensions have to be given, and the inner layer follows. This implies that Slow Heritage Fashion is not possible to be strategically implemented. In the first step a brand has to be a heritage brand, according to the five dimensions of the HQ framework. This implies that a brand cannot decide today to operate as a Slow Heritage Fashion brand as it needs the heritage foundation as an outer layer and that takes decades to develop. Of course, a brand could strategically aim to become a Slow Heritage Fashion brand, but this would come with a time effort.

Are You a Slow Heritage Fashion Brand? A Diagnostic Tool for Heritage Brands:

The Slow Heritage Fashion framework can help heritage brands assess whether they can occupy a Slow Heritage Fashion positioning or if they are a heritage brand that happens to operate slower.

A Slow Heritage Fashion brand is a brand whose slowness is organic and embedded in its brand identity. *A heritage brand going slow* may look the same on the surface but reached this position by strategic choices and not by decade long history. This distinction is important, because only the former comes with authenticity and inimitability.

The five dimensions can work as indicators for brand managers to test if their positioning is organic or adopted. Brands can work through each dimension and reflect on the questions:

- **Silent Sustainability:** Are sustainable values embedded in materials and products as natural extensions of the brand identity, but not promoted or communicated externally?
- **Organic Slowness:** Has the heritage brand operated with a slower rhythm before slow fashion emerged as a movement, rather than a strategic decision?
- **Timeless Design:** Are products designed for longevity and trans-seasonal relevance because of the brands philosophy, rather than a positioning decision?
- **Cultural Embeddedness:** Is the brand's identity rooted in the values of their country of origin and are they reflected in the brand?
- **Strategic Differentiation:** Does the brand actively recognize the organic slow positioning as a competitive advantage and leverage it strategically?

A brand that can answer all questions and fulfills the prerequisite of the HQ framework is a Slow Heritage Fashion brand. One that does not fulfill all dimensions is considered a heritage brand going slow. Both positions are valuable in the market but only Slow Heritage Fashion brands offer credibility and authenticity through their slowness and are inimitable for competitors.

The positioning matrix

Further we propose a positioning matrix of the concept Slow Heritage Fashion, so it can be understood where it is placed in the industry. The matrix displays two axes, with the horizontal showing the speed of fashion, which ranges from fast to slow. The vertical axis addresses if the brand identity is strategically and consciously implemented or driven by heritage.

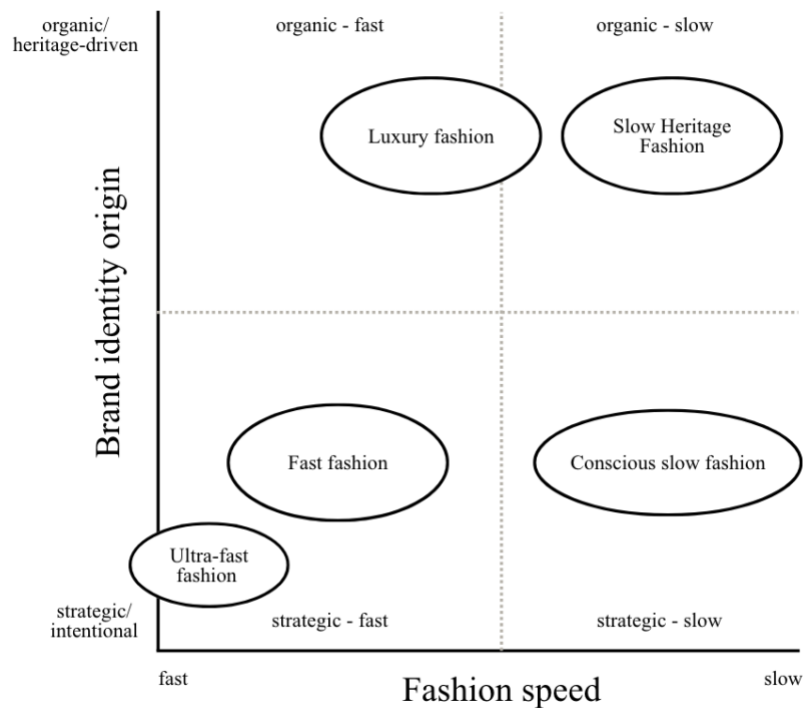


Figure 8_Slow Heritage Fashion positioning matrix

On the matrix Slow Heritage Fashion show a unique position that distinguishes it from other players within the fashion industry:

Fast Fashion brands and ultra-fast fashion brands, such as H&M and Zara, or Shein or Temu, are positioned in the *strategic-fast* segment, as they are driven by the constant implementation of new trends and their strategies are intentionally set (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). **Luxury fashion** brands, such as Hermès or Dior have a complex position as they are organic but move between

slow and fast. Their long-standing history is visible in and shapes their core values and identity. Regarding speed, they operate in a faster segment as they frequently launch new collections aiming to meet and set market trends. However, they also focus on high quality and durable pieces and offer a standard collection that does not change over time, which gives them a position of both speed and slowness. From the slow fashion movement, **conscious slow fashion brands** emerged. Examples are Stella McCartney and Patagonia, which are positioned within the quadrant of *strategic-slow*. They actively choose to follow slower values and communicate their commitment to sustainability. **Slow Heritage Fashion** takes the quadrant of *organic-slow*, where slowness is not a reaction to fast fashion but also not a concrete strategy that is intentionally implemented. It emerged through their long existence and is inherited over many decades. This market position is difficult to reach and difficult to copy, and therefore functions as a stable form of differentiation in the market. Here the distinction between a Slow Heritage Fashion brand and a heritage brand going slower becomes relevant. A brand that strategically implements to go slow without the organic heritage remains in the strategic quadrant of the matrix. This makes the inimitability visible. Competitors cannot enter this quadrant as a strategic decision, they rather need decades of consistent brand identity and core values.

The concept of Slow Heritage Fashion offers a way through which heritage brands in the fashion industry can be positioned, as they occupy a distinctive market position that emerged organically and aligns with principles of slow fashion. The framework expands previous literature as it fills the space between heritage and slow fashion theory. It shows that slowness does not necessarily have to be a conscious decision but can emerge if a heritage brand stays true to their origins for a long time. The two layered framework shows that Slow Heritage Fashion is not something a brand can quickly decide to implement but it can discover that it already has it embedded. The positioning matrix shows where Slow Heritage brands sit in the industry compared to other market players.

6. Discussion

In this chapter we will discuss, reflect and elaborate the key findings of the thesis, particularly the Slow Heritage Fashion framework and the pattern of Silent Sustainability that emerged in the analysis. We reflect back to the starting point of the study and show how we progressed from there. Further, we relate our framework and the main findings to previous literature and show direct implications for heritage brands.

After deeply engaging with heritage branding in our coursework and academic reading, at the start of our thesis we were convinced that heritage brands are consciously choosing to position themselves in slowness as they cannot compete with the fast fashion retailers on the market. For us this seemed like the logical conclusion that if a brand knows that it cannot win the race, it changes the track. Further, we engaged with slowness as a counter-phenomenon to accelerated business practices, reading about the Slow Food Movement, that resulted out of the introduction of fast food in Italy. But the outcome of our study shows something different but far more interesting. Our case companies did not consciously decide to go slow. Rather it emerged because heritage brands continued what they had always been and stuck to their origins, rather than adapting to the acceleration of speed. This finding led us to the introduction of the concept of Slow Heritage Fashion. Eton put it best, as they highlighted that they did this before it was a word. This shows what our study revealed that the slow position of heritage brands emerged naturally over their decades in the market.

Throughout the study we often came back to one question. “Why do heritage brands not actively communicate what makes them stand out?” During the interviews we recognized that the case brands do align with principles of slow fashion and do more for sustainability but do not explicitly label themselves as a slow fashion or sustainable brand. Through the dialogue with brand experts, we found out that this silence is not a communication gap but something that can be connected to cultural values. Drawing on the concept of Jantelagen, loud self-promotion is not encouraged, which links it to the brands tendency to understate their efforts rather than overly promoting it. P.O.P former CEO for instance highlights that it can be seen as a healthy sign if brands do not promote their sustainability efforts loudly. The silence is not a weakness but an integrity that can be explained by the brand’s origins.

Reflecting on existing literature, the findings contribute to already researched theories. Fletcher (2010) positions slow fashion as an intentional choice to practice conscious production, design and consumption. Our study adds that with heritage brands the slowness does not emerge as a strategic choice but naturally emerges through history and long-standing values. Previous studies focused on slowness as a response to speed, and our findings show that it can also be something that a brand naturally is.

The Heritage Quotient framework introduced by Urde et al. (2007) shaped our study and provided an understanding on how heritage brands build credibility by fulfilling the five proposed dimensions. While the framework explains how heritage in brands can be strategically activated, it does not fully capture what happens when heritage naturally lets a slower positioning emerge. The slowness within heritage brands also emerges through the five dimensions proposed in the framework. These are longevity, track record, symbols (in our case iconic products), history important to identity and core values. Slow Heritage Fashion in this sense can be seen as an extension to heritage research and describes the positioning outcome that emerges when a brand's heritage dimensions are maintained over time. Heritage in this sense also produces slowness.

Looking back, the intersection of the literature streams makes sense as they share overlapping values and principles, but this connection has not yet been examined by literature. Through the interviews with brand experts and capturing their understanding, and engaging with literature we were able to outline the concept of Slow Heritage Fashion. The concept extends the literature on slow fashion and heritage branding as it looks at the space between them.

A finding that we did not expect at the start of our thesis was how strongly our theme of silent sustainability was present across all interviews. We originally went into the research expecting that brands communicate sustainability actively or not at all. During the study we found a new path, that brands actually have it embedded in their internal brand but choose not to address it publicly. The brands mentioned that they do a lot more for the sustainability dimension than they share. This is in accordance with Beverland (2005) understanding on authenticity, as it is more credible to actually do good in practice rather than just claiming it with communication. The case brands embody exactly this. Sustainability becomes visible in the durability of their products and

materials and timeless design choices but is never something they loudly promote in their marketing.

One interesting implication is how smaller heritage brands could make use of this concept. Many companies offer rich histories and have a long-lasting heritage but remained or became invisible within the accelerated market. This is not because their positioning is weak or their quality poor but rather because they can't communicate what makes them distinctive within the market. Especially within the accelerated industry and consumers already questioning these logics, brands that emphasize a different approach can be seen as interesting. An example is SNS Herring, a Danish brand offering workwear for fishermen. They were able to activate their heritage and grow from a niche market position only available in local fisher stores to a more global position, while still operating with a slow approach. The examples show that the core values remain intact, but they actively show that they are operating at a different position with different motivations than fast fashion retailers. This suggests that Slow Heritage Fashion is a concept that can be used practically and not only theoretically. It offers small heritage brands a lens on how they can recognize and communicate their positioning and build on their heritage and identity.

Another implication emerges through the idea of acquiring a heritage. For brands that cannot be seen as a heritage brand according to the HQ framework of Urde et al. (2007), it can be an option to acquire a brand that fulfills these dimensions. Especially brands that benefit from positive country images are of major interest and offer a way to get access to cultural credibility that cannot be strategically built. Our findings showed that Swedish origin functions as a differentiator on distinct markets, for example North America, as consumers attach associations of quality and timelessness with it and therefore positively influences them. Acquiring a Swedish heritage brand is therefore a beneficial way to leverage both the country of origin and the heritage position for the own brand, which results in both an organic slower positioning and the opportunity to leverage this as a differentiation on the market.

However, an important condition must be acknowledged. This positioning cannot be manufactured or adopted by brands that do not have a deep-rooted history, which implies that Slow Heritage Fashion is not a template every brand can use. The slow positioning is directly tied to the brand being a heritage brand, fulfilling all five dimensions of the Heritage Quotient Framework. A brand

trying to be slow without having a long history can be seen as inauthentic by consumers. Therefore, the heritage must be real and given, which provides a competitive advantage and form of differentiation within the accelerated fashion industry.

7. Conclusion

The conclusion returns to the overall aim, purpose and research questions we set in the beginning of the study. We reflect on the insights we derived and how these contribute to the theoretical understanding and what implications this offers for management. We propose six principles for managers working within a heritage brand on their way to leverage slowness in their company. Finally, we outline the limitations of the presented study and give final recommendations for future research.

7.1. Returning to the Overall Aim, Purpose & Research Questions

This thesis examined the emerging concept of Slow Heritage Fashion in the context of Swedish heritage fashion brands. By exploring three case companies: Stenströms, Polarn O. Pyret and Eton and reviewing expert opinions about brand heritage and slow fashion the study explored how these brands interpret and create meaning around these concepts. This included investigating how different elements such as history, craftsmanship, longevity, and continuity influence the meaning and brand positioning of Slow Heritage Fashion.

This study aimed to address the following research question:

“What is Slow Heritage Fashion?”

“How does Slow Heritage Fashion emerge?”

“Why do brands pursue Slow Heritage Fashion?”

We conducted a qualitative, abductive case study, rooted in relativist ontology and social constructionism to reveal several recurring patterns across the interviewed brands. Qualitative methods were used to explore how Slow Heritage Fashion positions itself using themes such as longevity, timelessness, authenticity, and continuity.

This thesis contributes to the conceptual development of Slow Heritage Fashion and explores the intersection between slow fashion and heritage branding within a Swedish context.

7.2. Theoretical Contributions

The thesis provides a theoretical base to understand slow fashion, heritage branding, positioning, and country of origin within the fashion industry. In doing so, we introduce Slow Heritage Fashion as a new concept that connects the four literature streams. Through studying Slow Heritage Fashion brands, the study presented a way heritage brands can recognize their slow positioning in a constantly evolving fashion industry. The study makes five main theoretical contributions.

First, the thesis extends **slow fashion literature by exploring slowness beyond sustainability-related activities**. Existing literature focuses primarily on ethical production, environmental accountability and conscious consumption (Clark, 2008; Fletcher, 2010). The results offer a new perspective by showing that heritage brands act according to slow fashion principles without explicitly communicating those efforts externally. This led to one of the most unexpected contributions of our study, the development of the silent sustainability concept. Silent sustainability describes a situation in which brands operate in a sustainable way, but do not emphasize those efforts in their marketing communication. We further connected silent sustainability to a Swedish context, as it is additionally embedded in cultural behavior shaped by norms such as Jantelagen (Barinaga 1999; Fredlund-Blomst, 2010). In this sense, slow fashion literature was expanded by implying another form of slow fashion. It does not only have to be a conscious choice to be slow, but there are also brands that never made the choice at all but still contribute to slow fashion.

Second, this study expands **heritage branding literature by establishing a connection between heritage branding and slow fashion**, since available literature did not yet combine those two areas. While slow fashion was primarily associated with sustainability and ethical consumption (Fletcher, 2010; Jung & Jin, 2014), the focus on heritage branding has been on how brands strategically use their history (Urde et al., 2007; Balmer, 2011). The results of our research indicate that there are numerous dimensions in which the two concepts intersect. Specifically, this thesis extends Urde et al. 's (2007) Heritage Quotient framework by showing that when its five dimensions are fully embedded in a brand's identity, a slow fashion positioning emerges organically. In this sense, brands may build their foundation for slowness and long-term value creation through heritage.

Third, we contribute to the existing literature of positioning strategies **by heritage-based slowness**. It can be used as a strategic positioning tool that creates a unique competitive advantage within the fashion industry. By representing a consistent identity, heritage can be useful to differentiate themselves from competitors in the market (Urde et al., 2007; Balmer, 2011). Therefore, the findings confirm that heritage brands can distinguish themselves from fast and ultra-fast fashion competitors through a positioning that competitors cannot replicate. Moreover, Slow Heritage Fashion brands do not directly compete with fast fashion, as they attract a different target group, one that values attributes associated with heritage and slowness. Thus, when a brand is perceived as trustworthy and less commercial, consumers tend to connect more emotionally, which further strengthens their competitive advantage.

The fourth and most central contribution is the **introduction of our Slow Heritage Fashion framework**. Slow Heritage Fashion is a new concept we established that **connects slow fashion and heritage branding**. It can be recognized by characteristics such as continuity, craftsmanship, authenticity, timelessness, and resistance to trend-based consumption. Rather than emerging through a conscious and strategic choice, Slow Heritage Fashion develops naturally through the long history of a brand. In this sense, Slow Heritage Fashion represents a different form of slow positioning, as it develops over a long period of time.

The final contribution of this thesis is the visual representation and positioning of the Slow Heritage Fashion concept. To situate Slow Heritage Fashion within the fashion market, the thesis proposes a perceptual map as a conceptual framework. The map places Slow Heritage Fashion in a slower market orientation that emerged organically, which differentiates it from actively adopted slow fashion strategies and trend-driven fast fashion companies. This **framework situates Slow Heritage Fashion within the broader fashion market**, which provides both practical tools for academic research and managerial application.

The following table proves the reader with an overview of the theoretical contributions the thesis suggests:

Theoretical Contribution	Contribution to Literature
Slow Fashion	Slow Fashion beyond sustainability communication through silent sustainability
Heritage Branding	Connection between heritage branding and slow fashion through organically embeddedness in slowness
Positioning	Heritage-based slowness as a strategic positioning and differentiator
Conceptual Development	Introduction of Slow Heritage Fashion
Conceptual Framework	Positioning Slow Heritage Fashion through a perceptual map

Table 3_Theoretical Contributions

Together, these contributions suggest that for heritage brands, slowness is not something to be adopted, but something to be recognized, protected and communicated.

7.3. Managerial Implications

In an industry defined by acceleration, heritage brands risk being overlooked rather than outcompeted. This thesis confirms that Slow Heritage Fashion offers a way to reframe this challenge, by recognizing the slowness that heritage has produced as competitive strength. The concept of Slow Heritage Fashion helps managers recognize a positioning that already exists within their brand.

A first crucial implication is **that heritage brands do not need to compete on speed or price to remain relevant**, as their advantage lies in refusing to do so. Heritage brands strengthen their position within the market through authenticity, brand continuity, craftsmanship, timelessness, and emotional value. The Slow Heritage Fashion concept may provide managers with an alternative way to position their brands in an increasingly accelerated fashion market. Practitioners can recognize their brand as a Slow Heritage Fashion brand and can lean into this identity with

confidence. It gives the brands the knowledge that their positioning is authentic and also protected from imitation.

A second implication is that **smaller heritage brands may be able to recover after losing their market position** within a fast-changing fashion market by reconnecting to their heritage and long-term values. Managers of these smaller heritage brands may therefore benefit from the slowness within their heritage brand and make it a part of their strategic positioning. The example of SNS Herring introduced in Chapter 6 demonstrates that when a brand uses its heritage, it can be shifted from being overlooked to a wider market recognition, while staying true to its identity.

A third contribution is to have an **iconic product**, which builds **long-term brand loyalty and strong emotional connections** with consumers. Therefore, managers may be able to benefit from focusing on signature products rather than constantly launching new collections that fit every market trend. Iconic products have the advantage that they remain stable over seasons and consumers start to form an emotional bond, which enhances the consumer relationship over time.

A fourth implication, the research suggests that **sustainability can also be communicated in a more implicit way**. This can be understood through durability, timelessness, quality and long-term production approaches. Heritage brands may be more credible by letting the product speak, instead of labeling products as sustainable. For example, a shirt that was worn for thirty years communicates sustainability more convincingly than a campaign. Therefore, managers should consider whether and how to communicate sustainability within their heritage brand and if this helps or hurts authenticity.

A final implication is that for **brands that do not have a heritage themselves, the acquisition or merger with one can offer access to the unique market position**. As the findings suggest, Swedish origin can be used as a differentiator in markets such as North America, where customers appreciate Swedish values. Acquiring a Swedish heritage brand therefore connects to a positive country image which builds credibility around the brand.

Principles

While the diagnostic framework proposed in 5.4. helps brands detect if they have a Slow Heritage Fashion positioning, the principles guide on how to protect, nurture and leverage it ongoing:

- 1. Live your heritage**
- 2. Let your product speak for itself**
- 3. Reframe & Differentiate**
- 4. Practice, don't preach sustainability**
- 5. Don't forget your roots**
- 6. Trust takes generations**

The above-mentioned principles can be seen as a guideline for brand managers working in a heritage brand practicing Slow Heritage Fashion.

7.4. Limitations & Future Research

The Swedish context was actively chosen but also brings limitations to the thesis. The values associated with Swedish fashion culture are of course not universal and cannot be blindly adapted to any other contexts. Therefore, the concept of Slow Heritage Fashion may look different in other cultural contexts and cannot be generalized. However, this opens a first opportunity for further research, as *Slow Heritage Fashion could be studied cross-culturally*. We can image the value to examine the concept itself in different countries, such as Italy, Germany or Japan and how it emerges in each cultural setting. This opens the opportunity to investigate if Slow Heritage Fashion is a Swedish phenomenon or also applicable in other countries.

Secondly, as the study was conducted from a managerial perspective, and consumer views are not captured, it would be interesting *to study perceptions of consumers that revolve around the concept*. It may be studied how customers actively recognize the slow positioning of heritage brands, or if this connection largely remains within the brand. Future studies could use consumer interviews or focus groups to understand how customers perceive and value this positioning.

Furthermore, the study relies as noted on a small sample size of qualitative interviews. This depth was appropriate to capture the emerging concept of Slow Heritage Fashion, but the results cannot be statistically generalized. Therefore, this limitation provides a third area for future studies.

Further research could build on the *Slow Heritage Fashion framework by applying quantitative research*. This would allow researchers to test the concept across different industries beyond the fashion industry. For instance, industries such as furniture, food and hospitality share a similar potential for an intersection of slowness and heritage branding and often display a countermovement of slowness within the accelerated industry. This suggests that the concept may have relevance well beyond its current scope.

Another area for future research concerns the *relationship between luxury branding and Slow Heritage Fashion*, as both areas share characteristics such as exclusivity, timelessness, craftsmanship, and emotional value creation, while being guided by different logics on pricing and exclusivity. Heritage brands often operate within the premium to luxury sector, therefore studying the space between high luxury brands and Slow Heritage Fashion brands may be insightful to test whether luxury brands also can be seen as Slow Heritage Fashion brands. This could give luxury brands valuable insight on their positioning and if they have the possibility to leverage the unique position of Slow Heritage Fashion, where slowness only emerges through long-standing history and staying true to the origins.

Finally, it would be valuable to examine how *heritage brands communicate and leverage their slow positioning in a digital environment*, as digitalization is increasingly growing within the fashion industry. Therefore, it may be beneficial to see how the ideas of heritage, authenticity, and slowness can be digitally communicated through branding while being credible and exclusive.

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Declaration of AI Use

We used AI in the form of Open AI's ChatGPT and Claude to support the writing and inspiration process for our thesis. We used it to search for synonyms, grammatical errors and inspiration. As both of us were born in Austria and English is our second language, we used AI to get rid of grammatical errors, to structure sentences and express our thoughts in English. We used AI to enhance the context and the flow of some of the sentences and rephrase and improve quality in some parts so that our ideas can be understood by the reader. Furthermore, AI helped us generate some of the figures incorporated in the thesis, for example the product life cycle, the tree trunk, and the positioning framework. The other figures were replicated in the program Canva. In earlier stages we used AI as a tool to find inspiration for literature streams, topics that we find interesting, research questions and titles. However, these were only guiding our inspirations, and we built upon this in our supervisions and discussions with each other and company representatives. The prompts, of course, can be provided upon request.

Appendix

Interview Guide

- What is your role in the company and for how long have you been working there?
- What are your responsibilities?
- Can you please describe the brand in a few words?
- What differentiates the brand from others in the industry?

Slow Fashion

- What does “slow fashion” mean to you?
 - How would you contrast it with fast fashion?
 - Where do you see (brand name)?
- What drives customers to choose slow fashion over alternatives?

Positioning

- How would you describe (brand name) positioning in the market?
- Does being a Swedish brand play a role in your positioning?
- What are the key values (brand name) stands for?
- How do you communicate those values to customers?

Heritage

- How would you describe the role of history or legacy for your brand?
- How is this reflected in (brand names) identity, products and communication?
- Is your Swedish origin part of its heritage?
- What are customers' motivators for buying heritage products?

RQ: How does it emerge?

- Do you see any connection between heritage and slow fashion? How and where within your brand?
- Did the connection develop intentionally or over time? (strategic decision?)

RQ: Why do brands pursue it?

- Why do you think brands emphasize this approach?
- What role does this positioning play in staying competitive?
- Why do you think this approach resonates with customers?
- Do you think being a Swedish brand contributes to how customers value these aspects?
- To what extent is this positioning rooted in your brand's identity?
- Is it something (brand name) "has to" do because of its history?

Test Concept (Slow Heritage Fashion)

- In our thesis we explore the concept of slow heritage fashion in a Swedish context (explain concept).
- What are your thoughts on it? How do you perceive this connection?
- Do you see a connection between heritage brands and a slow positioning/slow fashion approach?
- Do you think the concept is feasible and relevant for the industry?