BRAND MEANING CONSTRUCTION AND TRANSFER FROM FAST-MOVING CONSUMER GOODS

An explorative study of the construction and transfer of brand meaning from fast-moving consumer goods in a consumer perspective

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ................................................................................................................. 4

2.0 INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................................................. 6
  2.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT .................................................................................................................. 7
  2.2 THEORETICAL POSITIONING ...................................................................................................... 7
    2.2.1 Designation Explanations .......................................................................................................... 9
    2.2.2 Philosophy of Science ............................................................................................................... 9
    2.2.3 Contribution ................................................................................................................................ 11
    2.2.4 Delimitation to Theoretical Foundation ................................................................................. 12

3.0 THEORETICAL FOUNDATION .......................................................................................................... 13
  3.1 CONSTRUCTION OF BRAND MEANING ....................................................................................... 13
    3.1.1 Conception of Meaning ............................................................................................................ 13
    3.1.2 Brand Meaning .......................................................................................................................... 15
    3.1.3 Brand Meaning Construction .................................................................................................... 16
    3.1.4 Summary .................................................................................................................................... 21

3.2 SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT .......................................................................................................... 23
  3.2.1 Consumer Culture Theory ........................................................................................................ 23
  3.2.2 The Current Marketplace Ideology ............................................................................................ 24
  3.2.3 Increasing Focus on Eco-labelling ............................................................................................... 25
  3.2.4 Summary ....................................................................................................................................... 26

3.3 BRAND MEANING TRANSFER .................................................................................................... 27
  3.3.1 World-Brand-Consumer Transfer of Brand Meaning ................................................................. 27
  3.3.2 Self-Brand Concept ..................................................................................................................... 29
  3.3.3 Summary .................................................................................................................................... 32

3.4 THEORETICAL FINDINGS ........................................................................................................... 33

4.0 EMPIRICAL STUDY ......................................................................................................................... 35
  4.1 METHOD .......................................................................................................................................... 35
    4.1.1 Philosophical Hermeneutics ...................................................................................................... 35
    4.1.2 Research Design ....................................................................................................................... 36
    4.1.3 Measuring the Study's Durability ............................................................................................... 37
    4.1.4 Choice of Participants ............................................................................................................... 38
    4.1.5 Presentations of Participants ..................................................................................................... 39

4.2 INTERVIEW PROCESS .................................................................................................................... 39
  4.2.1 Transcriptions ............................................................................................................................. 42

4.3 ANALYSIS PROCEDURE .............................................................................................................. 43
  4.3.1 Delimitations of the Empirical Field of Interest ........................................................................ 44
  4.3.2 Limitations to Method ............................................................................................................... 44
  4.3.3 Limitations to Findings of Empirical Study .............................................................................. 45

5.0 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS .................................................................................................................. 46
  5.1 CONSTRUCTION OF BRAND MEANING ..................................................................................... 47
    5.1.1 Components in Brand Meaning ................................................................................................ 47
    5.1.2 Brand Meaning Construction of fmCG ....................................................................................... 51
    5.1.3 Brand Meaning Construction of Structured Categories .......................................................... 54
      5.1.3.1 The Effect of Eco-labelling on Purchase Behaviour ............................................................ 58
    5.1.4 Summary .................................................................................................................................... 61
5.2 TRANSFER OF BRAND MEANINGS

5.2.1 Expressions of Self
5.2.2 Brand Meaning Transfer from Structured Categories Expressing Collective Self
5.2.3 Brand Meaning Transfer Expressing Individualistic Self
5.2.4 Summary

5.3 SUMMARY OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

6.0 DISCUSSION

6.1.1 Construction Process
6.1.2 Impact on Consumer Behaviour in Question

7.0 CONCLUSION

8.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY

APPENDICES
Appendix 1: Interview with Jytte
Appendix 2: Interview with Ellen
Appendix 3: Interview with May-Britt
Appendix 4: Interview with Eva
Appendix 5: Interview with Lisbeth
Appendix 6: Interview with Glennie
Appendix 7: Interview with Anne Mette
Appendix 8: Interview Guide
Appendix 9: Investigation in Danish women’s purchase power by LoweFriends and Nielsen Company in 2012

The appendices are all available on the USB key below.
1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dette speciale tager afsæt i en interesse i at undersøge, hvorfor forbrugere vælger nogle dagligdagsprodukter frem for andre. Inden for branding- og forbrugeradfærdsforskning er det gennem de sidste tre årter generelt anerkendt at forbrugere konstruerer brand meninger og at en form for overførsel finder sted mellem brandet og forbrugeren for at udtrykke eller underbygge forbrugerens selvforståelse (Allan et al. 2008). Forskning i meningskonstruktion og meningsoverførsel er forholdsvis baseret på empiriske studier i high-involvement brands, og derfor ligger interessen i at undersøge, om forbrugere involverer sig på samme måde med dagligdagsprodukter. Derudover er den nuværende litteratur på dette område inddelt i henholdsvis et gammelt paradigme med skoler, der følger den kognitive tradition og det nye paradigme, der er indlejret i den postmoderne tradition. Men disse traditioner tager ikke forbehold for sociokulturelle faktorer, som ifølge dette speciale har influeret informanterne i høj grad, og derfor er en poststrukturalistisk tilgang også anvendt.

Derfor udforsker dette speciale, hvordan forbrugere, indlejret i det postmoderne paradigme med indflydelse fra sociokulturelle faktorer, proaktivt konstruerer brand meninger og overfører meninger fra dagligdagsprodukter til sig selv. Samtidig ligger der også en interesse i at undersøge, hvordan forbrugeradfærden influeres af dette.

Det følgende speciale er baseret på syv kvalitative interviews med kvinder i alderen 47-61 år, der delte deres meninger omkring henholdsvis kaffe, vaskepulver, generelle forbrugsmønstre, dansk producerede produkter og økologiske/miljøvenlige produkter. Specialets fund er konstrueret på baggrund af det teoretiske fundament og den empiriske analyse og dette speciale foreslår, at forbrugere proaktivt konstruerer meninger om deres dagligdagsprodukter på baggrund af fire elementer, der indgår i konstruktionsprocessen. Disse fire elementer er henholdsvis markedsføring af produkter, forbrugerens individuelle brug og fortolkning af produktet, produkternes traditionelle kontekst i form af den nuværende markedsideologi med fokus på bl.a. miljøvenlige produkter samt forbrugerens situationelle kontekst i form af tidligere erfaringer og nuværende oplevelser. Alle elementer er ikke nødvendigvis repræsenteret i hver konstruktion, men disse elementer viste sig i fortolkningen af informanternes konstruktioner i dette speciale. Informanterne samlede deres
generelle forbrugsvaner i strukturerede kategorier enten danske eller økologiske produkter for at udtrykke deres sociale kollektive selvforståelse i deres omverden. Derudover brugte informanterne individuelle produkter pga. emotionelle faktorer, de gennem korte forhold genlevede i forbrugssituationen. Dermed foreslår specialet, at de konstruerede meninger efterfølgende bliver overført til informanterne via forbrugssituationer for at udtrykke informanternes individuelle og kollektive sociale selvforståelse.

Da dette speciale anvender en socialkonstruktionistisk tilgang er intentionen ikke at skabe objektiv viden inden for dette område, hvilket heller ikke er muligt på baggrund af syv interviews. Dermed er dette speciale set som en evaluering af de mønstre, der opstod i denne interaktion og fundene, som en konstruktion dannet ud fra disse mønstre.
2.0 INTRODUCTION

In today’s society branding of products is an everlasting criterion for companies to gain consumers’ attachment and loyalty toward their products in the global market place. Marketers’ interest in creating superior brands that consumers will prefer continues to grow (Heding et al. 2009: 3). A way to gain consumer attachment and loyalty is to manufacture products and construct brands that have the ability to transfer brand meaning from the product to the consumer (McCracken 1986). Accordingly, this subject has received much attention in consumer research during the past decades (Allen et al. 2008: 781). However, much of the research is based on brand meaning transfer from brands of higher status and calibre and the theory on brand meaning construction and the transfer of that meaning is mostly research based on high-involvement brands. In such, a fundamental area that seems to be neglected within the research studies is how brand meaning construction and brand meaning transfer from fast-moving consumer goods work.

Research based on high-involvement brands within the postmodern paradigm, specifically McCracken (1986), talks of a brand meaning transfer from the world to the brand and then subsequently from the brand to the consumer where other researchers such as Belk (1988) state that brands are used as extended selves and Fournier (1998) emphasises the dyadic nature of brand relationships between the consumer and the brand. Even though a large amount of literature and research is presently available it is still stated in recent literature (Allen et al. 2008) that the actual meaning transfer seems to still be a rather unexplored area. Furthermore, sociocultural influences have not received much attention in these studies.

The focal point of this Master’s thesis is based upon an investigation of a group of female Danish consumers’ preferences within the strands of detergents and coffee. Lately, many manufacturers that produce detergents and coffee have released eco-friendly varieties of their traditional brands, which provide the consumers with almost endless options of products with eco-labelling on them. When purchasing fast-moving consumer goods, Danish women influence DKK 79 out of DKK 100 spent in Danish households and especially within fast-moving consumer goods, women have almost absolute superiority and interest in what is purchased (Appendix 9: 4-5). This makes an equivalent setup for choosing a group of Danish
women to study how brand meaning construction and transfer works and how this affects their consumption behaviour.

2.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT
The interest for writing this master's thesis is based in a research curiosity to why consumers choose the fast-moving consumer goods they do and what factors that are in play for specific brands to be chosen instead of others. Consequently, the study explores consumer attitudes and meanings towards brand meaning construction and brand meaning transfer from fast-moving consumer goods. The following problem statement guides the study:

1. How is brand meaning of fast-moving consumer goods constructed?
2. How and why does brand meaning transfer from fast-moving consumer goods work and what factors are in play for meaning transfer to happen?
3. What is the effect on the Danish female consumer behaviour in question?

2.2 THEORETICAL POSITIONING
The theory used in the theoretical foundation reflects the Master's thesis' purpose of exploring the phenomena: how brand meaning construction and transfer work. As such, this Master's thesis explores a small area within this subject namely brand meaning construction and transfer from fast-moving consumer goods but as previously stated the research in this area is very limited and the theoretical foundation is therefore built mainly upon research within high-involvement brands. To construct the most nuanced present theoretical picture of these phenomena, numerous theories have been applied as the theories have been chosen based on certain topics explored throughout the thesis. Those topics are the following; brand meaning construction, sociocultural implications on consumer culture and brand meaning transfer.

The pivotal starting point in order to study the topic brand meaning construction is to understand how meaning is constructed and what brand meaning is consisted of. Gergen & Gergen’s (2005) view on meaning as a social construction and Ligas & Cotte’s (1999) exploration
of brand meaning containing three elements shed light on this. The main underlying literature applied in section 3.1 is the article *Brands and their Meaning Makers* by Allen et al. (2008) because it provides an overview of the previous and contemporary literature within this field. Together with this, the book *Brand Management* by Heding et al. (2009) supplemented with existing knowledge of the research traditions. The previous authors are accompanied by other research that was deemed relevant in constructing a contemporary picture of how the construction of brand meaning is depicted in consumer research. Accordingly, accompanying Allen et al. and Heding et al. in section 3.1 is a discussion of research from the cognitive research tradition provided by Keller (1993), a discussion of research within the emergent branding paradigm, also based within the postmodern research tradition, of the relational approach by Fournier (1998), the community approach by Muñiz & O’Guinn (2001), and lastly, the cultural approach by McCracken (1986).

Secondly, section 3.2 addresses the sociocultural implications on consumer behaviour through Arnould & Thompson’s (2005) *Consumer Culture Theory*, which provides the basis for understanding how the current marketplace ideology of environmentalism impacts consumer behaviour. To shed light on the marketplace ideology Jamison’s (2001) book *The Making of Green Knowledge* is employed together with research articles within consumer behaviour and environmentalism from First et al. (2008) and others only briefly mentioned. An outburst of the environmental ideology is the increasing use of eco-labelling, which is explored by a research study from Leire & Thidell (2005) who researched into consumer understanding of eco-labelling.

Lastly, in section 3.3 theories on brand meaning transfer is explored with McCracken’s (1986) seminal research into the transfer of brand meanings from the constituted world to the product and from the product to the consumer. To gain a deeper insight into how and why consumers experience this phenomenon, research from the interpretivist paradigm is explored with Belk (1988) and Shalev & Morwich (2012) as the main contributors to this section. Belk founded the beliefs of the interpretivist tradition with his research into consumer’s use of possessions as an extension of the self as knowingly and unknowingly, intentional and unintentional we regard our possessions as parts of ourselves (Belk 1988: 139). Complementing Belk’s research, Shalev & Morwich provide insights into consumers’ use of brands to restore
and evaluate self-image.

Accordingly, the present study seeks to unravel the many implications that the phenomena brand meaning construction and transfer entail but on a low-involvement product level namely within fast-moving consumer goods for this specific consumer situation.

2.2.1 Designation Explanations
Throughout the study the word ‘fast-moving consumer goods’ has been replaced with ‘fmcg’ simply due to character restraints. Moreover, to avoid any confusion in the theoretical foundation, the term eco-labelling covers marks such as the Nordic Eco-label (Swan), Asthma-Allergy Denmark, Änglamark, Minirisk, brands that are organically sourced and brand names that signify purity such as Neutral. All is covered under the term eco-labelling to simplify the writing but also to specify that no differentiation has been made on this subject when assessing theory. An eco-label is defined by the following: “A symbol that appears on a product packaging to inform the consumers that this product is in some way less harmful to the environment than the alternatives” (Tang, Fryxell & Chow 2004: 87). However, in the analysis a distinction between eco-labelled products and organically sourced products is provided, as buying eco-labelled detergent did not equal buying organically sourced coffee and as such the two terms had to be separated.

2.2.2 Philosophy of Science
The Master’s thesis’ applied philosophy of science: social constructionism is based within the humanistic paradigm, which points to the pivotal point that the researcher is immersed in the research process of the phenomena under investigation. It is impossible not to disrupt the natural functioning of the phenomena when undergoing this study but the goal of the process is to fully understand the informants’ worldview and to depict it as close to their construction as possible simultaneously with recognising that some impact on the phenomena’s natural functioning is inevitable (Hirschman 1986: 242). Similarly, through the interviews, language is a way for us to determine what the world is to us and it is by conversation and the specific relation that we construct our world (Gergen & Gergen in Hansen 2011: 18-19; Hansen & Sehested 2003: 187).
The humanistic approach is based on a set of fundamental beliefs about the nature of reality that people construct multiple realities that may be understood holistically, the author’s self or involvement cannot be distanced from the phenomenon and that research inquiry is a social construction resulting from the subjective interaction between the researcher and the phenomenon; meaning that knowledge is constructed not discovered (Hirschman 1986: 238). This also makes all knowledge constructed, conditioned on the perspective of the constructor (Hansen & Sehested 2003: 184).

Within the humanistic paradigm, the social constructionist philosophy of science is coherently based on the same belief that reality is a human construct, which means that the possibility to construct objective knowledge in research is non-existent but that focus is on the acknowledgement of the social context within that reality (Hansen & Sehested 2003: 99). In such, it may seem irrelevant to study a phenomenon based on several individuals’ worldview and not just one individual’s as generalizable knowledge cannot be constructed by this anyway but to this, social constructionist theory says that a person’s individual meaning horizon cannot be reduced to a social as the prerequisite for the subjective reality is peoples’ togetherness with others in a shared world (Hansen & Sehested 2003: 104). So to understand the informants’ subjective social worldview, it has to be placed among others’ worldview.

In the analysis of the phenomena, a hermeneutic interpretation of the text (the interviews) is a prerequisite for the social constructionist’s critical perspective as the social constructionist philosophy is an ideology critical stance built on the hermeneutic philosophy of science (Hansen & Sehested 2003: 101-104). The social constructionist philosophy does not consider context to be a factor when constructing meaning as meaning is only constructed in relations between two people (Gergen & Gergen 2005: 23). On the other hand, hermeneutics places much emphasis on the context that surrounds a text or a meaning construction. Social constructionism and philosophical hermeneutics are therefore not seen as two opposing philosophies of science, but as coherent ways to investigate the phenomena (Hansen & Sehested 2003: 101). The two philosophies are combined and highlight that recognition of something is always decided by our interpretations and in those interpretations context and history are essential (Hansen & Sehested 2003: 125). Furthermore, the formation of any given reality is a contingent empirical question, meaning that it is not possible to formulate a pre-established view of a reality.
without the empirical perspective that is provided by empirical research (Hansen & Sehested 2003: 125).

There exist several contradicting hermeneutics theories, which all possess different characteristics. A main difference is the intended outcome of the interpretation. For example hermeneutical theory believes that it is possible to determine an objective meaning contained in the text or intended by the author (Arnold & Fischer 1994: 55-56). However, this does not correspond with the beliefs of social constructionism and therefore the philosophical hermeneutics developed by Heidegger and Gadamer is applied as it suggests that interpretation does not convey decidable objective knowledge (Arnold & Fischer 1994: 55-56).

The two philosophies are used in a combination in the Master’s Thesis; the social constructionist approach is concerned with investigating the conditions for constructing meaning and works primarily on a meta-communication level. Subsequently, the hermeneutic approach is more concerned with the actual phenomenon, how it is expressed in the text, and the researcher’s interpretation of it and pre-knowledge of the subject matter. In addition, in philosophical hermeneutics, constructions are formed based on the facet that an individual textual component has to be dealt with as belonging to a larger whole and it is therefore used in the analysis of the interviews (Hansen & Sehested 2003: 101; Kvale 2007 WEB 1: 16). We will return to this in Method section 4.1. So the applied tactics for understanding how brand meaning construction and transfer work are an interpretation of the existing theory in consumer research in correlation with the subsequent interpretation of the constructed findings based on seven qualitative interviews.

2.2.3 Contribution

Given the philosophy of science that the Master’s thesis employs, the outcome of this study is to provide a subjective evaluation of how brand meaning construction and transfer work in a specific group of female consumers by understanding their reality and how they fit fmcg purchased into that reality. The Master’s thesis proposes a contribution to the existing literature in two areas: (1) As a contribution to the scarce literature on brand meaning transfer from fmcg and (2) as an explorative study of how this affects the consumer behaviour in
The Master's thesis' contribution also serves a purpose in the form of practical implications in relation to marketing of fmcg as the findings in this Master's thesis may propose a potential for evolving the way that fmcg are viewed upon and how they should be marketed in order to forge deeper bonds with consumers.

2.2.4 Delimitation to Theoretical Foundation

Stated by McCracken "Every theory trades certain kinds of knowledge at the expense of other kinds of knowledge; every piece of knowledge comes at the cost of a certain kind of blindness" (McCracken 2005: 169 in Allen et al. 2008: 814). This is evidently the case in all kind of theoretical framework. In such, the theoretical foundation is based upon theories within consumer behaviour research mainly retrieved from the Journal of Consumer Research, Journal of Consumer Psychology and Journal of Marketing. These theories most often reflect upon consumer attachment towards brands of heavier calibre than what this Master’s thesis explores. This, however, leaves no restrictions in suggesting that consumers may experience a brand meaning transfer from fmcg and the theories were selected based on their appropriateness to be converged into this specific construction.

Some aspects of the theory on brand meaning construction and transfer have been omitted even though they are potentially relevant to this study. This was done either due to space restraints or being less compatible with the present theoretical foundation. These areas are e.g. price aspects when buying brands, the informants' view of the manufacturer of brands and how the informants may be influenced from others in the construction process and similarly, notions of appearance control through the transfer process was omitted.
3.0 THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

In chapter three the literature and theories chosen to shed light on brand meaning construction and transfer and the implications this involves are presented. We start in section 3.1 with a clarification of the concept of meaning and how meaning is created in social constructionism. Next, we move on to brand meaning construction that starts out with an illumination of what brand meaning is and traditionally viewed as in the literature. Additionally, it addresses the different meaning makers in the brand meaning construction. Furthermore, section 3.2 discusses the sociocultural implications that influence consumer culture to shed light on the current marketplace ideology that may influence the consumption of brands with eco-labelling. Section 3.3 further unravels consumers’ use of brand meanings in the quest to discover how brand meaning transfer works. Rituals in the transfer process and purposes of self-expression are important areas of discussion here.

3.1 CONSTRUCTION OF BRAND MEANING

Allen et al. state that today’s marketers’ challenge is to understand more deeply the multiple sources and dynamic nature of brand meanings (Allen et al. 2008: 782). In order to explore this, it is pivotal to look at how the literature defines the conception of meaning, which is discussed in section 3.1.1. The following section 3.1.2 revolves around what brand meaning is and consists of. Lastly, section 3.1.3 illuminates the different authors’ contributions to the brand meaning construction and this section is mainly constructed with a time perspective from early research traditions towards newer as it goes.

3.1.1 Conception of Meaning

“The I'm afraid that if I look at a thing long enough, it loses all its meaning.”

(Andy Warhol in Chang 2005: 115)

The above statement comprises the complexity of the social constructionist’s way of creating meaning. One of the underlying questions raised in the social constructionist philosophy is whether all that we see in the world really exist or if something only exists when we agree that it exists. In social constructionism, a phenomenon is only real when it is assigned a
meaning. Whatever objects, persons, phenomena etc. we see in the world are assigned a meaning based on our previous social relations (Gergen & Gergen 2005: 8). Thellefsen & Sørensen (2013) describe the common conception of meaning through a shared memory, in that, when we biologically and culturally agree upon a certain meaning for a phenomenon we create a name for it and that name becomes a statement in the form of a symbol, which contains a shared memory meaning (Thellefsen & Sørensen 2013: 483). This is also described by Gergen & Gergen, who state that for practical reasons we have to name e.g. persons, phenomena or objects. Names are arbitrarily linked to the person, phenomenon or object as they might as well be named something else but the names are used to sustain a relation to the person or to sustain a relation to others when talking about the person, object or phenomenon (Gergen & Gergen 2005: 12).

As language is one way of expressing meaning, the joint cultural traditions that we are surrounded by decide whether or not words are accepted or rejected in certain situations. As Gergen & Gergen describe, the word ‘checkmate’ only works in the situation where somebody is playing chess and not out in the street with no connection to the chess situation (Gergen & Gergen 2005: 13). Again words carry meaning that is arbitrarily linked to the object but linked to a certain meaning in our minds based on the cultural traditions surrounding us and words can thus be used to command actions from others. E.g. if someone points to an object and calls it a chair one would not hesitate to sit on it, but if that same object is called a valuable antiquity one would probably choose another spot to sit (Gergen & Gergen 2005: 12-13).

In essence there is no such thing as a true meaning but multiple meanings that have been constructed based on the culture collectives that we are embedded in. Thus, the social constructionist believes that all has value to the people constructing it and there are many ways to validate and designate meaning but every construction is the result of certain traditions and values (Gergen & Gergen 2005: 15). As such, it may be argued that the phenomena this Master’s thesis explores are also socially constructed as they have been agreed to be valid constructs within the humanistic paradigm based on research in consumer behaviour.
3.1.2 Brand Meaning

Both in marketing and consumer behaviour research the meaning of a brand has been acknowledged as an important quality but has still, however, received little research attention (Muñiz & O’Guinn 2001: 428). According to Keller (1993) "brand associations are the information nodes linked to the brand in memory and contain the meaning of the brand for consumers" (Keller 1993: 3). Continuously, associations have been defined as information in branding research, but by Allen et al. an apparent distinction between information and meaning makes this definition obsolete (Allen et al. 2008: 784). Information is concerned with disintegrating complex elements into smaller more understandable parts whereas meaning is derived by making sense out of many small elements put together (Allen et al. 2008: 784). The concept of brands as information and managers as brand knowledge managers has led to the idea that brand meaning is conceptualized as something marketers can assert in a brand by the use of marketing and long-term success based on consumers’ favourable associations with a brand is described as being achieved by short-term marketing efforts (Allen et al. 2008: 784; Pelsmacher et al. 2010: 75; Keller 1993: 2).

However, Ligas & Cotte (1999) state that marketer-communication of a brand is vital as it injects certain beliefs about the brand into the marketplace but brand meaning is consistent of more than just that; “It must also be capable of provoking personally relevant components within the individual” (Ligas & Cotte 1999: 609). In their perspective, the actual brand meaning is a construction of three components; the physical make up, the functional characteristics and the personality of the brand. The physical make up is comprised of the brand’s unique shape and distinctive packaging, which makes it easily recognisable over alternatives. The functional characteristics are defined by consumers’ repeated use of the brand for the same tasks and thereby agreeing that those tasks are what this brand can be used for. The last component is the personality, which may be of greater difficulty to determine. By Ligas & Cotte, the personality has two purposes; to draw the individual consumer closer to the product as well as creating a shared awareness of the brand’s meaning to a larger audience albeit that they state that the brand personality is agreed upon by an individual as “the brand becomes something (or someone) personal for the consumer, and its specific attributes play a key role in one’s life” (Ligas & Cotte 1999: 610). In accordance to this, Ligas & Cotte argue that the consumer will only be able to communicate the implied meaning behind the brand to others if this
meaning is consistently recognised. In such, brand meaning offers an agreed way of recognising and communicating about the product (Ligas & Cotte 1999: 609).

Allen et al. divide the literature view on branding into two paradigms; the received review (old view of branding) and the emergent paradigm (new view of branding). The old view presents brand meanings as informational vehicles that support choice processes, where context is noise in research and the marketer’s role is to own and create brand assets that consumers are passive recipients of. Contrary, the emergent paradigm presents brands as meaning rich tools that help people live their lives, context is everything in research and marketers and consumers are both meaning makers alongside culture (Allen et al. 2008: 787). In addition, within the emergent paradigm, brands are described as having a polymorphic nature; brands can have different meanings to different people but they can also mean multiple things to the same person dependent on the context and time (Allen et al. 2008: 814). Allen et al. clearly research in the emergent paradigm and see brands being created in correlation between three different meaning makers; culture, marketers and consumers, and they totally dismiss the former prevalent view of brand meaning serving as information in consumer choices. However, in the following, we will start of by a brief assessment of the cognitive research tradition before moving on to the emergent paradigm.

3.1.3 Brand Meaning Construction

Early research into brand management and communication frequently applied a ‘sender end’ perspective and it was first in 1993 when Keller introduced his research article: Conceptualising, measuring and managing customer-based brand equity that the perspective changed into a consumer-based approach (Heding et al. 2009: 84). In the consumer-based approach, which is solely founded on Keller’s costumer-based brand equity, the perspective on brands changed to the common conception that brands reside in the minds of the consumers as a cognitive construal (Heding et al. 2009: 84). The concept that brands are a cognitive construal in the minds of the consumers imply that this approach denies the presence of marketer-driven communication and that consumers control brand meanings but as Heding et al. explain it, this is quite the opposite. The consumer-based approach relies on the facet of an ‘if-then’ logic: if the marketer feeds the consumer with the appropriate information then
the consumer will act as intended by the marketer and choose the brand. Or as Keller (1993) explained it, costumer-based brand equity acts “as the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of a brand” (Keller 1993: 2). The focus is on consumer reactions towards the marketing actions.

In the light of present day research, the cognitive research tradition, in which the consumer-based approach belongs, seems to be a method that perceives the process of constructing brand meaning as a very simple and linear process leaving important factors out. This is also exemplified when Heding et al. compare the process to programming a computer; input leads to the intended output (Heding et al. 2009: 86). The cognitive research tradition has always deliberately neglected both emotional factors, cultural and historical aspects when studying human behaviour leading to a focus on how knowledge is stored in and can be retrieved from memory (Heding et al. 2009: 88, 96). Within the cognitive research tradition, brand meaning is believed to be collectively held by all members of the target audience and is presumed stable and constant over time, which have been subdued to much criticism in later research (Allen et al. 2008: 783). In such, the consumer-based approach neglects factors that may be perceived, by other research traditions, as important elements that form the consumers’ thought processes and make them able to construct and alter brand meanings. Accordingly, in later work, Keller does resign to the conclusions that “brand equity is increasingly built by activities outside the company’s direct control” (Keller & Lehman 2005: 27 in Allen et al. 2008: 782).

Moving on to explore the research based within the emergent paradigm, Fournier (1998) builds upon the consumer-brand connection with her study of consumers and their brands. Fournier’s phenomenological study showed that consumers formed dyadic relationships with brands when those brands’ meanings were considered useful in helping the consumer live her life (Fournier 1998 in Allen et al. 2008: 799). Fournier believes that brand meaning is not inherent in the brand but is constructed by the individual when the brand intersects with that individual’s identity themes, life projects and current concerns (Fournier 1998: 346). To specify this, Fournier believed that brands could be humanised through a brand-person association when a consumer transfers the meanings of another person into a brand if that person uses the brand or through a person-object relation when selective human properties are attached to a brand (Fournier 1998: 345). By Fournier, brand meaning is totally dependent on the individual
consumers’ use of the brand and interpretation of that and the relationship is therefore based between the individual consumer and the brand. Brand meaning is not seen as a fixed term, which means that a brand meaning can never be reached by persuasion as earlier described or agreed upon by negotiation as described later, but really only exists in the individual mind of the consumer. However, at the end of Fournier’s work Consumer and their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research, she states that “specifically, brand personality can be thought of as a set of trait interferences constructed by the consumer based on repeated observation of behaviours enacted by the brand at the hand of its manager (...)” (Fournier 1998: 368). In this it seems as though also marketer-communication plays a part in the construction of brand meaning.

Consumer co-creation is at the heart of the emerging perspective on branding and has its roots in the philosophical hermeneutics (Allen et al. 2008: 785). On collective consumer co-creation, Muñiz & O’Guinn (2001) provide a triadic view on brand meaning construction with communities as brand meaning makers. The brand relationship is described as triadic because “brand communities are social entities that reflect the situated embeddedness of brands in the day-to-day lives of consumers and the ways in which brands connect consumer to brand, and consumer to consumer” (Muñiz & O’Guinn 2001: 418). This research was built upon Boorstein’s argument that group membership in contemporary society was defined by shared consumption symbols and belonging to a group is a way to express the social self (Allen et al. 2008: 800). Related to this, brand meaning research also shows that individuals are more willing to associate with brand meanings that are equal to other members of their in-group e.g. significant others, and rejects meanings that are perceived to be equal to members of out-group (Donovan, Janda & Suh, 2005: 128). Muñiz & O’Guinn describe a brand community as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community based on a structural set of social relations among admirers of a brand” (Muñiz & O’Guinn in Allen et al. 2008: 801). Brand communities are described to serve an interpretive function in that meaning is socially negotiated between community members to reach a common consent of meaning (Muñiz & O’Guinn 2001: 414). Community brand members often feel that they have a better understanding of the brand than the actual manufacturer and that the brand belongs to them, however their loyalty is oftentimes ambivalent towards the brand and its manufacturers by criticising them (Muñiz & O’Guinn 2001: 414). It is clear that Muñiz & O’Guinn embrace the social constructionist view that
brand meaning is socially constructed through a negotiation whether it is in society as a whole or in smaller communities.

Next, we move on to the cultural approach. Allen et al. describe culture through McCracken’s (1986) view that culture is the original source used to make sense in the phenomenal world and to interpret the brand (McCracken 1986 in Allen et al. 2008: 785). McCracken has divided culture into nine categories; gender, lifestyle, age and cohort, occupation, class and status, decade, time and place, value, fad/fashion/trend in which all cultures create a system of distinctions through and are in this way defined as a culture different from other cultures (McCracken 1986: 72 in Allen et al. 2008: 791). McCracken symbolises a collective view on culture in that when creating brand meaning it is done in co-creation between the company, which produces the brand and “the broader cultural production systems that create, clarify and sort these meanings over time” (McCracken 1986 in Allen et al. 2008: 786). In that sense, McCracken argues that a brand’s meaning is constructed through two processes; (1) the meaning created by marketing and the cultural traditions surrounding the brand and (2) a personalized meaning created by the individual consumer (McCracken in Allen et al. 2008: 787).

In light of McCracken’s two-way process to construct brand meaning, McCracken has developed a model of how meaning moves from the world to the product and subsequently, from the product to the consumer and now we will explore the first part of that, namely how meaning moves from the world to the product. McCracken argues that the original cultural meaning of a brand resides in the culturally constituted world, which are divided into two concepts: the cultural categories and the cultural principles. As previously mentioned McCracken has divided culture into nine categories and it is through those categories that brand meaning is drawn. He does, however, note that the individual has some effect on the cultural categories as people are more or less perceived to be whom they claim they are as social constructionism portrays and this individual element has a manipulative effect on culture as it makes it rapidly changing by both social groups and marketers (McCracken 1986: 72).

What McCracken resides to on cultural categories is that people construct the world consistent with the world they imagine. McCracken describes the difference between categories and principles: “(...) cultural categories are the result of a culture’s segmentation of
the world into discrete parcels, cultural principles are the organizing ideas by which the segmentation is performed” (McCracken 1986: 73). Thus, cultural categories can be ‘men’ and ‘women’ and the principles are what characterise the two; which may be ‘strength’ for men and ‘delicacy’ for women (McCracken 1986: 74). Cultural principles may shift in meaning over time as such like the principles ‘modern’ or ‘traditional’, which do not contain the same associations to people. Categories and principles are substantiated by consumer goods, which make them both the object and objectification in the constituted world (McCracken 1986: 74). In such, this could be exemplified by a cultural category such as very expensive car, which is perceived with the cultural principles of power and wealth or as a virility symbol depending on historical time.

McCracken’s description of the meaning transfer process from world to product seems to be a rather spontaneous interference, as described through advertising that the consumer good and a representation of the culturally constituted world is brought together for the consumer to see the similarities between the two. When this is successful, the known properties of the culturally constituted world will be transferred as unknown properties to the consumer good (McCracken 1986: 74). Ultimately, what McCracken describes is that the consumer accomplishes brand meaning transfer from the world to product as he or she sees the marketer-generated communication of the product and links this to his/her view of the world. However, this process may not always be a successful one and the following describes how the cultural production systems surrounding a brand affect the consumers’ meaning construction.

As Allen et al. explain, the context surrounding a brand can change from one day to another making the associations of the brand positive one day and negative the next. Allen et al. illustrate the cultural production systems surrounding a brand by a case of the American Martha Stewart, who quickly became an icon and the Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia (MSLO) gained a celebrity status that few brands ever get. But the accusations against Martha Stewart of illegal stock trading in 2002, which sentenced her to six months imprisonment and six months house arrest made the brand value of MSLO decline by 65 % (Allen et al. 2008, 790). By this example, the broad cultural production system consisting of journalists, bloggers, biographers and television news critics etc. play the part of cultural intermediaries, who influence brand meaning and overshadow the initial marketer-controlled meanings of the
brand (Allen et al. 2008, 793-794). By the example above, the culture perspective is disclosed as an external force that changes the associations of a brand and because of this, Allen et al. argue that brands are sociocultural creations and brand meaning is “neither inherent in the product nor constant across individuals, but rather derived from the “contexts” in which brands “reside” (Allen et al. 2008, 787).

Allen et al. propose a fourth side into the creation of meaning with a cultural and social view on creating brand meaning, supported by brand-related consumer research, to look at “the meaning that people value in real life” (Allen et al. 2008: 784). Adapting the hermeneutical philosophy’s hermeneutic circle, culture and social collectives influence an individual person’s meaning process because “a person’s understanding of a concept reflects broader (shared) cultural viewpoints, as interpreted through the lens of the individual’s (unique) life experiences” (Allen et al. 2008: 785). Individual meaning is derived from shared understandings within the certain cultural meaning-making group that a consumer belongs to (Allen et al. 2008: 785). Allen et al. touch upon the sociocultural context that until now have seemed to be dismissed in the construction of brand meaning. We will return to the social-cultural context in Consumer Culture Theory later in section 3.2.1.

3.1.4 Summary
In social constructionism, phenomena and objects only really exist when they are ascribed a meaning and that meaning is ascribed through a shared memory in that when we culturally and biologically agree upon a certain name for a phenomenon, object or person that name is used to sustain relations to the phenomenon, object or person. The names are only arbitrarily linked to the object etc. and words used in relation to the name is linked to a certain meaning in our minds and therefore only works in the specific situations that has connection to that meaning. Our words express a certain meaning and that has the ability to command actions from others as in the case with the object being a chair or a valuable antiquity. In every research tradition certain traditions and values result in a constructed meaning, which has meaning to the people constructing it and in social constructionism there is no such thing as a true meaning but multiple meanings as a result of multiple traditions and values. When constructing brand meaning, Ligas & Cotte argue that brand meaning is consisted of a
complex of the brand’s physical make up, the functional characteristics and the personality of the brand, which offers consumers an agreed way of communicating about a product. This aspect will be employed as one description of brand meaning during this study.

Assessing the cognitive research tradition, it approaches brand meaning construction through a linear perspective, which does not allow the context and culture that the brand resides in nor the consumer to affect the construction. Keller’s (1993) approach revolutionised the view from a sender-end to a customer-based approach but the if-then logic does not consider the myriad of interferences that are present when constructing brand meaning. The notion that companies can assert brands with static brand meanings without any interference of cultural production systems, context or consumers belongs in the received view of branding and has not transcended through the barriers into the new paradigm.

It is evident that research within the emergent paradigm portrays brand meanings to be co-constructed by the consumer. However, a pivotal point of disagreement in the literature seems to be whether it is marketer-communication, communities, culture or context, which influence the construction of the actual brand meaning. Fournier focuses on the dyadic self-brand relationship, where she describes consumers as co-creators as they build relationships with brands and create individual meanings based on that relationship, however, she involuntarily resides to the notion that the consumers’ brand meaning is based upon marketer-controlled brand behaviours. Muñiz and O’Guinn reside to a triadic co-construction when saying that brand communities construct brand meanings and that this involves a relationship between the situated embeddedness of brands in every-day lives of the consumer, the brand and the consumer and consumers among consumers (Muñiz & O’Guinn 2001: 418). Both Fournier and Muñiz & O’Guinn do not consider external factors to have an influence on the consumer-brand relationship.

Within the culture-driven research stream, McCracken points to co-creation between marketers and the broader cultural production systems, which is then interpreted by the individual consumer to create a brand meaning. Similarly, Allen et al. brings major focus on the context, which brands reside in and assign huge influence to the cultural context saying that brand meaning is not inherent in products nor individuals but the context in which they
are portrayed.

However, it is clear that brand meaning construction cannot be separated to only be constructed by marketer-communication, consumers, context or culture alone and that all these elements are present in some way when constructing brand meaning. The cornerstone of all the postmodern research studies that are discussed in the emergent paradigm is the consumer participation when constructing a brand meaning and the total abandonment of the previous notion of a static and constant brand (Allen et al., 2008, 787). However, in order to move closer towards how brand meaning is transferred we move on to the next section where the sociocultural context is added to the construction process.

3.2 SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT

This next section discusses the sociocultural factors that influence the consumers’ meaning construction. Section 3.2.1 provides an introduction to Consumer Culture Theory in order to specify what the term covers. Section 3.2.2 addresses the current marketplace ideology with the environmental context that consumers are embedded in. Lastly, section 3.2.3 discusses the increasing focus on eco-labelling.

3.2.1 Consumer Culture Theory

Arnould & Thompson’s (2005) seminal article *Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research* forms the basis of the CCT tradition. Although called a theory, they view their contribution as more of a theoretical perspective that addresses the dynamic relationship between consumer actions, the marketplace and cultural meanings. CCT explores the collection of heterogeneous distributions of meanings together with overlapping cultural groupings that exist in the socio-historic frame of globalization and market capitalism (Arnould & Thompson 2005: 869). Specifically, Arnould & Thompson’s view on consumer culture theory as a framework that consumers act within is interesting. CCT portrays culture as the essence of experience, meaning and actions. In such, a frame that, much like a game where individuals acts within the constraints of rules, is drawn from the culture and the subsequent marketplace, that this culture works within, which set out conceivable actions for consumers
to follow. This makes certain patterns of behaviour and sense-making interpretations more likely to occur than others (Arnould & Thompson 2005: 869).

Thus, consumers cannot be ‘disconnected’ from the marketplace trends and the prevalent ideology when looking at their behaviour, as those are exactly what direct them towards certain meanings and actions. Furthermore, CCT has contributed to analyses showing that “particular manifestations of consumer culture are constituted, sustained, transformed and shaped by broader historical forces (such as cultural narratives, myths and ideologies) and grounded in specific socioeconomic circumstances and marketplace systems” implying that we are now embedded in multiple ideologies (Arnould & Thompson 2005: 869). As a result, CCT focuses on the experimental and sociocultural dimensions of consumption; product symbolism, ritual practices, consumer stories in product, brand meaning and the symbolic boundaries that structure personal and communal consumer identities that are not plainly accessible through experiments, surveys or database modelling but, nevertheless, dimensions that influence consumers’ consumption behaviour (Arnould & Thompson 2005: 870).

3.2.2 The Current Marketplace Ideology

One current marketplace ideology that was deemed relevant to consumption of fmcg is the notions of environmentalism. The environmental movement has its background in two opposing kinds of ecology. One stream termed the ‘imperialist’ saw nature as natural resources for human use and benefit and by interfering with the productive utilization it could become more effective and extensive and with the industrialization more exploitative approaches to nature became the dominant paradigm. The other view, named the ‘Arcadian’, believed in living in close harmony with nature and their scientific view on nature was to explore it and not exploit it. The two views have today led to an environmental movement that from an imperialist point of view focuses on resource management and the development of ecosystems and from an Arcadian point of view on conservation of nature to save it from exploitation (Jamison 2001: 74-77). From being a scientific area, environmentalism changed into a global agenda with the Brundtland Report and other political infringements that attested to the environmental challenges that the world is facing today.
Jamison states that with the dominant culture, which seeks to incorporate environmental concern into all modes of operation, an emergent culture of sustainable development is increasing as new forms of social solidarity forms (Jamison 2001: 41). In such, the current marketplace ideology contains an increasing pressure from the outside world on companies to produce environmentally friendly, responsibly and sustainably. Among others, the UN’s Global Compact’s ten principles and the global environmental challenges are increasing the pressure (First et al. 2008: 91). The development and communication of companies’ ethical and moral responsibility has become a must for large corporations to show their costumers and the surroundings that they take responsibility for the environmental impact their company has on the community. In response to this, “social and environmental concerns have assumed a greater level of importance on consumers’ product choice and supplier selection decisions” and a growing public sentiment towards environmentally sound products and technologies have emerged (Cleveland et al. 2005; First et al. 2008: 90-91).

3.2.3 Increasing Focus on Eco-labelling

Pointing back to CCT, one of the sociocultural dimensions that has emerged from the current marketplace ideology is the increasing use of eco-labels on products and the surrounding rhetoric on buying environmentally sound products. With the increasing attention on global environmental challenges together with a consumer trend of buying more natural and pure products, marketers have increasingly made use of eco-labelling (www.fda.gov). Moreover, brand names such as ‘Neutral’ and product tags such as “no additives” and “all natural ingredients” are used on a variety of brands (Mick 1986: 203). This use of eco-labelling has the intention of leaving the consumer with a perceived meaning of the brand and to invoke specific consumer behaviour (Sammer & Wüstenhagen 2006: 195). Related to this, Kehret-Ward (1982) explains that tags such as “all natural ingredients” and “low fat content” can change the meaning of a competitive brand without any changes having been made to that brand or advertising, because the tags pervade competitive products with the meaning-by-implication that they contain “few or less natural ingredients” and “high fat content” (Kehret-Ward in Mick 1986: 203). In the same way, eco-labelling may imply that other brands are less environmentally sound.

The literature within the humanistic paradigm on this subject is very limited even though the
first eco-label appeared as early as 1977 in Germany (Tang et al. 2004: 87). However, recently, other research traditions have studied this area and the literature that do exist generally seems to agree that consumers have a positive attitude towards eco-labels but that they have difficulty understanding what the eco-labels stand for and what impact they have (Leire & Thidell 2005: 1062). Literature on consumers and goods declarations show that consumers generally hold a positive attitude towards green products and eco-labelling, but that the consumers have difficulty deciphering that information: “However, despite high recognition and good consumer intentions, studies report the limited ability, interest and willingness of consumers to absorb and act upon the information. As a result, product-related environmental information has been repeatedly scrutinised in regards to its communication capacity” (Leire & Thidell 2005: 1062-1063). This scrutiny can be explained by the fact that most environmentally-friendly products are made visible only by the use of a mark on the product but do not contain any explanatory text about the effects of that labelling (Leire & Thidell 2005: 1064). The lack of knowledge and ability of the consumers to verify the different eco-labels seems to cause scepticism and consumer distrust (Bickart & Ruth 2012: 52).

3.2.4 Summary

The research tradition CCT, researches in the sociocultural factors that influence consumer behaviour that are not measurable through statistics, but is highly relevant to the humanistic paradigm in such that these factors are what may be described as the culture that the consumers are imbedded in. CCT includes the marketplace as it puts up conceivable “paths” for consumers to follow. The current marketplace ideology, stemming from the environmental movement influences consumers as the thought of being environmentally responsible has moved from a radical thinking into a common social belief, and the growing marketplace ideology of companies being forced to become more sustainable and environmentally friendly has led to a public sentiment towards eco-labelling. This ideology may almost lead to a pre-established belief that eco-friendly products are more healthy and should be the preferred choice for consumers. In such, the current marketplace ideology is also suggested to influence the consumers’ brand meaning construction, as the increase in eco-labelled products is highly relevant to research in fmcg.
3.3 BRAND MEANING TRANSFER

Now we have explored how the prevalent research studies in the literature define brand meaning and the elements present in the brand meaning construction together with the implications to consumer culture that enforce those brand meanings. The next point of departure to gain more insight into the actual brand meaning transferral is to explore the literature on how brand meaning transfer works. Seemingly though not much research has looked into an actual brand meaning transfer, which supposedly takes place from the brand to the consumer. McCracken (1986) has; however, researched in what situations this phenomenon happens, which is discussed in section 3.3.1. Section 3.3.2 comprises theories from the interpretivist tradition, which suggests that consumers buy brands with certain brand meanings to express self-concepts. These theories are included as they implicitly research in how the brand meaning transfer happens by the consumers’ use of brand meanings.

3.3.1 World-Brand-Consumer Transfer of Brand Meaning

McCracken’s (1986) seminal article; Culture and Consumption: A Theoretical Account of the Structure and Movement of Cultural Meaning of Consumer Goods was a contribution to the prevalent theories on cultural meanings in consumer goods. However, McCracken sought to contribute with the notion that the cultural meanings carried by brands had a mobile quality to be transferred from the brand to the consumer. McCracken argued that cultural meaning is located in three places; the culturally constituted world, the consumer good and the individual consumer and that meaning is transferred from the world to the product and from the product to the consumer in a trajectory. The focal point of McCracken’s theory is meaning in which consumers and consumer goods are seen as way stations of meaning. In accordance, advertising, the fashion world and consumption rituals are instruments to move that meaning in the trajectory world-product-consumer (McCracken 1986: 71). Having covered McCracken’s view of the transfer from the world to the product in section 3.1.3, we will continue with the transfer from the product to the consumer by the use of consumption rituals.

In the meaning transfer process from consumer good to consumer, McCracken emphasizes the use of rituals for the transfer to happen. The four kinds of rituals: exchange, possession, grooming and divestment are used by the consumer to transfer brand meaning. The first;
exchange rituals form in the shape of gift-giving, where one purchases a gift for a recipient with brand meanings that the recipient may define themselves by, opening up for meaning transfer to happen. The second; possessing is expressed differently from owning a consumer good. Consumers may own a good but never really claim the symbolic properties of the good and thus not possessing it. When a consumer accepts the goods as possessions it can be used to discriminate between cultural categories such as class, status etc. as a meaning transfer has taken place when the consumer accepts the cultural meaning of the possession. The third; grooming rituals are, as assumed, linked to rituals of grooming e.g. before going out. The consumer’s choice of goods for this, are, through advertisement, tacitly associated with meanings of e.g. glamorousness or powerfulness. But the grooming ritual can also be turned around so that it is the consumer good that is groomed to show brand meaning associated with the consumer. An example of this may be the abundant time many spend on their cars. By grooming the car the good may transfer meaning to the car owner. McCracken states that this process, however brief and precariously, makes the object’s meaning come alive in the life of the individual consumer. The last ritual is the divestment ritual in which consumers remove meanings from goods if they are to sell/give them away but also remove meaning from goods they have bought to be able to fill them with their own meaning (McCracken 1986: 78-80). McCracken notes that brand meaning transfer is not always successful if consumers try to transfer meaning from a product that it does not contain or if individuals try to appropriate meaning to which they are not. However, he still resigns to the facet that “in normal situations, however, the individual uses goods in an unproblematic manner to constitute crucial parts of the self and the world” (McCracken 1986: 80).

Undoubtedly, McCracken’s article is of older date and the view on culture as a closed system to only influence the perception of the brand and not as an influence on the consumer and that meaning can be transferred in a one-way trajectory process from world to product to consumer does not consider the myriad of consumer interferences happening today. Furthermore, this theory is exclusively built on high-involvement brands as showed by the rituals that he claims enact the transfer process. Moreover, the rituals are so specific for these certain situations, which makes this theory less applicable to other situations. In addition, McCracken does not really explain how the actual brand meaning is transferred from the
product to the consumer making this theory fall short when explaining brand meaning transfer.

### 3.3.2 Self-Brand Concept

The following theories are comprised as a compact to understand the interpretivist tradition to further elaborate on how the consumers use brands, helping us to understand the phenomenon of brand meaning transfer.

With his foundational article on possessions and their role in defining an individual’s sense of self, Belk (1988) established, similar to McCracken’s second ritual, that consumers use the meanings of possessions to define themselves and to create alternate views of themselves through their lifespan (Belk 1988 in Allen et al. 2008: 798). Belk’s research examined the relationship between possessions and the sense of self in order to understand consumer behaviour. His premise for possessions is that *knowingly and unknowingly, intentional and unintentional we regard our possessions as parts of ourselves* (Belk 1988: 139). To really understand the impact of possessions, Belk cited Csikszentmihalyi’s research study that found that “*the objects we possess and consume are... wanted because... they tell us things about ourselves that we need to hear in order to keep our selves from falling apart*** (Csikszentmihalyi 1982 in Belk 1988: 148). Belk states that middle-aged people are most likely to experience the most extended concept of self through possessions because they have accumulated many possessions from their past but also have a future before them while having achieved parenthood, where parents treat their children as an extension of themselves. Similarly, Furby (1978) found that 40-50 year olds are most likely to regard possessions as symbols of social power and status (Furby 1978 in Belk 1988: 148).

Through Sartre (1943), Belk also states some ways or ‘rituals’ when comparing to McCracken, to which consumers incorporate possessions into the extended self through control, creation and knowledge (Belk 1988: 151). Belk found that external objects become a part of our selves when we are able to exercise power and control over them just as we are able to control our own arms or legs. Opposite, objects are also viewed as part of selves when they exercise control over us and impose their traits on us. This led Belk to the hypothesis that the more we
believe that we possess or are possessed by an object the more it becomes a part of our selves and when claiming something is ‘mine’ we also come to believe that the object is ‘me’ (Belk 1988: 141). This may be a physically attainable object or public property, events etc. as he explains that learning the subway system literally increases our mobility thereby increasing our self to figuratively extends to the subway system. This may be what inspired Fournier’s relational approach when saying that the brand’s meaning is dependent on the consumer’s use and interpretation of it. However, Belk also states that in this one should bear in mind that a single item cannot inform others about our selves (Belk 1988: 146). By Belk, gift giving may also act as a control because the gift is associated with the giver contrary to McCracken’s notion that the gift giver buy gifts with a brand meaning associated with the recipient. Secondly, by creating something your self or purchasing an object by the use of money contributed to the sense of self because with money people have the ability to select or reject objects and thus shaping more selectively the extended self. Thirdly, by having intimate knowledge about somebody or something the person/object is considered ours and part of the self (Belk 1988: 150).

Belk notes that some possessions are closer to the self than others and that those possessions are visualised in concentric layers around the core self opening up to different layers of self (Belk 1988: 152). These layers are influenced by time and cultures with different symbolic meanings for different goods within the individual but also according to our existence in collectivities. The actual layers of self, Belk leaves open to discussion but mentions four based on individual, family, community and group. Additionally, he states that the primacy in the levels of self is the distinction between the individual and collective conception of self. However, he expresses that the individual attain possessions in the same manor as a family, community or group albeit they are chosen to define individual vs. collective sense of self leaving one to believe that the extended self can be shared with others when thought of in collectives (Belk 1988: 152-153).

Belk’s research paved the road for many research articles on consumers’ use of possessions to construct narratives of identity (Hill & Stamey, 1990; Holt, 2002 in Allen et al. 2008: 798) and to fulfil goal-driven identity projects (Fournier 1998; Mick & Buhl 1992; Thompson & Haytko 1997 in Allen et al. 2008: 798). Studies also argued that brands are used to “fashion a coherent albeit fragmented and diversified sense of self” (Arnould & Thompson 2005; Elliot & Davies 2006; Elliot & Wattanasuwan 1998; Grayson &
Similarly, Arnould & Thompson say that consumers’ lives are characterised by having multiple realities and consumers use consumption to experience the different realities (Arnould & Thompson 2005: 875).

Similarly, according to Shalev and Morwitz (2012), consumers constantly self-evaluate and use brands’ meanings to construct and restore their self-image. Shalev and Morwitz describe it as: “Consumers evaluate themselves on specific traits by observing the possessions of others” (Shalev and Morwitz 2012: 965). Shalev and Morwitz’s research suggest that comparisons depend on the consumed product and the traits that it symbolises, specifically they state that eating organic food, for example, signals a high level of health consciousness (Shalev & Morwitz 2012: 965). The trait that the product symbolises is defined as the human trait that users of that product are expected to have at high levels (Shalev & Morwich 2012: 965). Ultimately, the end result of Shalev & Morwitz’s research suggest that people define themselves with containing specific traits and to uphold that self-concept they buy products that they believe will enhance those traits. To the consumer, those products gain the specific traits by observing others who use the product that have the ‘wanted’ traits. Seemingly though, the research suggests that people buy products that will enhance their self-belief based on self-evaluation and restoration. But the product’s ‘value’ or ‘the meaning that it transfers to the consumer’ is defined by observations of and comparison with others as the theory suggest that they are expected to have high levels of that trait and influence from others may have an impact as well.

Solomon and Buchanan (1991) explored beyond consumers’ use of individual brands to create identity and researched in collective meanings of coherent brands and products to express social roles. Their research proposes the idea that certain products or brands can be combined in clusters that insinuate a certain social status or role and by combining brand in collectives it may transmit a message that the individual brand does not (Solomon & Buchanan 1991: 97). In connection with this is Wicklund & Gollwitzer’s (1982) study of consumers’ use of products or brand collectives to express desired role-based identities (Allen et al. 2008: 798). By this, consumers combine certain brand clusters to express to others that they belong in certain social roles.

Allen et al. point the above studies to the interpretivist tradition, which established that
consumers use brands as cultural resources, like building blocks, with which they construct, express and manage their self (Allen et al 2008: 798). The intrepretivist tradition's literature suggest that consumers transfer brands’ meanings onto themselves and build up their ‘personality’ by consuming specific brands that express either their individual or collective self, but brands’ meanings are also suggested to be pivotal to keep the selves from falling apart, which proposes that consumers’ only way to express who they are is by what they have.

3.3.3 Summary

McCracken’s theory on the brand meaning transfer that accordingly acts in a world-product-consumer trajectory addresses the cultural context in which consumers and consumer goods are seen as way-stations of meaning. The second process of the transfer from the product to the consumer is very specific in explaining in what situations brand meaning transfer may happen but these rituals does not seem to possess the ability to be transferred to other situations. Other studies within the interpretivist traditions have focused on what consumers use brands for, which implicitly state how this meaning transfer happens and why. Research streams inspired by Belk come to the notion that brands are perceived as cultural resources, like blocks, that consumers can use to express self-concepts with. Brands are perceived as part of the consumers’ selves when the consumer can exercise power over the brand but accordingly also the other way around when brands exercise power over the consumer. And in such situations, what is termed ‘mine’ becomes ‘me’ instead. Put very specifically consumers’ desire for possessions is characterised as vital as they tell consumers things about themselves that they need to hear to keep their selves intact.

Shalev and Morwitz suggest that consumers use products to restore and evaluate their selves. However, despite their efforts, they cannot seem to shake influences from others as brands are perceived to be able to transfer specific traits, but these traits are constructed by observation of others using those brands. Along the same line, Solomon researched in consumers’ use of coherent brand meanings to express social roles and found, similar to Wicklund & Gollwitzer, that people use clusters of brands with coherent brand meanings to express their social role or role-based identities to others.
3.4 THEORETICAL FINDINGS

The overall purpose of this study is, as mentioned in the problem statement, motivated by a fundamental research interest in why consumers purchase the fmcg they do and why they choose them over others. Accordingly, brand preference has been explained by a transfer of brand meanings and the study, therefore, explores how consumers embedded in a postmodern consumer culture, influenced by the sociocultural context, proactively construct brand meanings and experience the brand meaning transfer process. To gain a comprehensive understanding of this research area this chapter has reviewed the existing literature based on three topics, namely the construction of brand meanings (section 3.1), the sociocultural context (section 3.2) and brand meaning transfer (section 3.3). Throughout, attention has been given to assess and evaluate the theories from a research point of view to construct the present theoretical foundation but in such the individual theories’ perception of consumers were not problematized but rather supported by other research as the purpose was to form a foundation for the empirical study.

Accordingly, several authors have contributed to the move from the received view to the emergent paradigm of branding. Starting within the cognitive research tradition, Keller’s seminal research into brand equity formed the consumer-based research method that aspired many authors to perceive brand meaning as constructed by marketers. As the postmodern research tradition formed this view was thus abandoned for the emergent view that throughout the research, presented in the theoretical foundation, emphasized brand meaning co-construction. Firstly, as a two-way process supported by Fournier’s research, then as a three-way process in communities as Muñiz & O’Guinn unfolds, and subsequently by marketing, the cultural production systems that surround brands and the individual consumer as proclaimed by McCracken.

Given the high emphasis on culture in the brand meaning construction, the current sociocultural dimensions that surround consumers and brands was explored by discussing Consumer Culture Theory. This testified that consumers cannot be disconnected from the marketplace ideology when assessing their behaviour and construction process. The current marketplace ideology with environmentalism and sustainability works as a paramount influence on consumers. Research testified that social and environmental concerns have
increasingly become of greater importance in consumers’ product choices and purchase decisions. As a response to this, the increasing use of eco-labelling was discussed as the way that eco-labels are portrayed show that consumers are embedded in a consumer culture that is marked by an ideology where buying eco-labelled shapes both brand meanings and consumer self-concepts.

The brand meaning transfer process was explored through two different perspectives; as a trajectory describing the overall process by McCracken’s research and by what consumers use brands for to constitute the building of selves through the interpretivist tradition. The theoretical foundation represents many ways to explore the phenomena of brand meaning construction and transfer but the overarching focus is the consumer being portrayed as a proactive co-constructor and as a proactive user of brand meanings and not as a passive recipient.
4.0 EMPIRICAL STUDY

As stated by Hansen and Sehested (2003), the formation of any given reality is a contingent empirical question, meaning that it is not possible to formulate a pre-established view of a reality without the empirical perspective that is provided by empirical research (Hansen & Sehested 2003: 125). Thus begins the second part of the Master’s thesis and the focus moves to the empirical study of the phenomena brand meaning construction and transfer from fmcg.

4.1 METHOD

In the following sections we will turn our attention to the empirical study and the subsequent analysis of the findings based on it. In order to gain a comprehensive and time-current understanding of why the informants buy the brands they do and what effect those brands have on them, a qualitative research method was chosen. As the qualitative research method leads to interviews, which when transcribed lead to texts, a philosophical hermeneutic approach to the analysis was deemed appropriate. By using the philosophical hermeneutics approach in the analysis of the interviews, the interpretation is based on the part-to-whole approach. Section 4.1.1 explains the use of philosophical hermeneutics on a meta-level. Secondly, section 4.1.2 addresses the research design and the reason for choosing an interpretive research method together with qualitative interviews. Thirdly, sections 4.1.4 and 4.1.5 elaborate on the reasons for choosing the participants together with a presentation of them.

4.1.1 Philosophical Hermeneutics

*There does not exist a general hermeneutics, that is, a general theory of interpretation,... there are only various separate and contrasting hermeneutic theories* (Thompson 1981: 46 in Arnold & Fischer 1994: 55). As such, there is no common definition of applied hermeneutics, however, the hermeneutic approach’s relevance to consumer theory is defined by the particular relevance to understand understanding. In order to understand understanding in it self, the phenomenon of pre-understanding must be understood. Stated more specifically the concept of pre-understanding accounts both for the existing theory and research findings of the phenomena in question but also the knowledge that the researcher shares with the subjects of
the inquiry (Arnold & Fischer 1994: 55). Pre-understanding is a recognition that before any interpretation both we and the object of our interpretation already exist in a cultural world (Arnold & Fischer 1994: 56). The cultural world can be thought of as the set of traditions in the form of beliefs, theories, codes, metaphors, events, practices, institutions etc. that may ordinarily be taken for granted but nonetheless form the worldview of the interpreter and what is interpreted. Gadamer used the term prejudice for our window on the world and our base for recognition and comparison (Arnold & Fischer 1994: 57). He also stated that without this prejudice it would not be possible to make sense of the events and objects that we observe or to make meaning in words and the actions of others (Arnold & Fischer 1994: 57). Prejudice is, though, regarded as integral to the inquiry's outcome as the understanding of being a consumer and the theoretical knowledge on consumer behaviour make the researcher able to make sense of the phenomenon under study (Arnold & Fischer 1994: 57).

The subject of interpretation, the text, is considered to be an “enduringly fixed expression of life” (Gadamer 1989 in Arnold & Fischer 1994: 61). However, this does not imply that an interpretation cannot lead to an understanding that is contrary to what the author of the text meant. Once the text is applicable for interpretation it is out of the author's hands. Meanwhile those same texts are only considered as representative of the authors (in this case the informants) but not autonomous with them. Furthermore, a person's understanding is always considered partial and Heidegger stresses that it is not possible to apply neutrality when interpreting text’s meanings but nor is it the goal (Heidegger 1949 in Arnold & Fischer 1994: 58). Rather the goal of interpreting text is to end up with a new self-understanding. The process described is when pre-understanding becomes understanding, explained by Geertz, research have the ability to “open (a bit) the consciousness of one group of people to (something of) the life-form of another, and in that way to (something of) their own” (Arnold & Fischer 1994: 64).

4.1.2 Research Design
The postmodern inquiry method of interpretive research was chosen over any positivistic research method because of its ability to treat the researcher-as-instrument, meaning that the researcher serves as an instrument in observation, selection, coordination and interpretation of data (Sanday 1979 in Spiggle 1994: 492). Stated by Spiggle, when grasping the meaning of others it is done by metaphorically translating their experiences into our own, drawing upon our stock of
previously grasped meanings (Spiggle 1994: 499). The construction of knowledge may always be contingent upon the researcher's point of view and what stories he or she accentuated from the data. Furthermore, any positivistic method was deemed inappropriate due to the positivistic belief that knowledge is discovered and objective.

Furthermore, the qualitative research method with individual interviews was chosen over any quantitative for its ability to gain a comprehensive understanding of the informants' individual experiences and sense-making processes (Spiggle 1994: 492). In the interview, the possibility to ask clarifying questions makes the descriptions more detailed and the possibility to construct a thick description by understanding the informants’ point of view to portray broader cultural meanings is magnified (Spiggle 1994: 492). However, any general knowledge of the phenomena brand meaning construction and transfer cannot be constructed from only seven interviews, but it is believed that the current consumer trends in this social context are though important indicators of one reality and may serve to enrich human discourse (Geertz 1973 in Spiggle 1994: 500).

4.1.3 Measuring the Study’s Durability

Trying to represent the informants' realities most adequately ensures the credibility of this Master’s thesis (Hirschman 1986: 244). This was e.g. done in the interviews, where every informant was told that no answers were wrong or right, which in Hirschman’s perspective also is ensured by the informants themselves as in the humanistic inquiry people really are what they appear to be and “if people are approached with the sincere intent of genuinely understanding them (as opposed to the intent of manipulating or testing them) they will extend to the researcher as much honesty and openness as it is possible between two or more human beings“ (Hirschman 1986: 244).

When interpreting the interviews, an intrasubjective reality is at play as idiosyncratic or unique interpretations are not viewed as false but as a construction based on the interaction between the particular researcher and the phenomenon and some of the study's findings may be unique to this situation and others will be supported by the theoretical foundation (Hirschman 1986: 245-246). However, the findings should be supportable from the data gathered and represent a logical set of conclusions based on the reasoning employed during the
interaction (Hirschman 1986, 246). The goal is not to eradicate value judgement but to be without prejudice of the observed reality. In this context prejudice does not attain the same implications as Gadamer has expressed, but it is the interpreter’s prejudice of the informants’ worldview that should be eradicated.

4.1.4 Choice of Participants

Seven women were asked to participate in interviews to understand what patterns are prevalent within this group of female consumers as women have been acknowledged to exhibit stronger brand involvements than men (Guest 1964; Sherrod 1989 in Fournier 1998: 347). All seven women accepted and the interviews were held in all the women’s own kitchens, except one that was held in one of the other women's kitchen. The seven women were chosen based on a study on women’s influence in purchase decisions performed by the communication agency, Lowefriends, and the analysis company, Nielsen Company, in 2012. The results of the study are based on 1200 online interviews with women and 400 with men for comparison. The study’s intent was completely made for commercial reasons and was made as an awakening for companies to realise the opportunities in communicating more directly to women, as women are the main influencers in all purchase decisions. The study investigated Danish women's influence when purchasing everything from groceries to cars and found that women control DKK 79 out of DKK 100 spent in a family. The study claims that Danish women have almost a 100 per cent influence on and interest in purchase of fmcg and that they are willing to pay more for products that will make their lives easier and more convenient (Appendix 9: 5 and 15).

The seven women belong in a segment that may seem narrow but women of this age and with the occupational background of being well educated are in a target group where neither work nor finances evoke much worry. They maintain a good balance between work and leisure time and are not situated in a stressful environment (appendix 1, 12). In such, these women have small restraints with reference to financial parameters as they are in a place in their life where they are able to afford to purchase what they want and are able to choose the products they want without considerations to children (except one informant).
4.1.5 Presentations of Participants

In regards to demographics the informants were relatively homogenous in terms of age, educational level and family situations and can therefore be interpreted as a segment of consumers. The seven informants are all in the ages from 47 to 61 years old, with six of them having grown up children and one still having young children. All the women are married, which was an important element as it may pervade them for having absolute superiority on what is purchased in the household, but according to the investigation above they may have. All also agreed that they were the primary shopper of fmcg, making them applicable for the interview. Below is a diagram explaining the demographics of the seven women, the order in which they were interviewed, their preferred strands of coffee and detergents and the fmcg category that they purchased within.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Work Position</th>
<th>Detergent</th>
<th>Coffee</th>
<th>FMCG Category attested to</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jytte</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Health Coordinator within elderly care</td>
<td>Anglamark</td>
<td>Green Irma</td>
<td>Organically sourced/eco-labelled brands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Bio Analyst in a blood bank</td>
<td>Omo</td>
<td>Nescafé Gold/Café Noir</td>
<td>Danish produced brands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May-Britt</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Day Care Supervisor</td>
<td>Anglamark/Coop Extra</td>
<td>Nescafé Espresso/Green, blue or red Peter Larsen</td>
<td>Organically sourced/eco-labelled brands and Danish produced brands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eva</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>Retired Head of Secretary from the Defence Department</td>
<td>Ariel/Biotex</td>
<td>Blue Irma/Café Noir</td>
<td>Danish produced brands and conventional brands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisbeth</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Caregiver for schizophrenic adults</td>
<td>Anglamark</td>
<td>Green Peter Larsen</td>
<td>Organically sourced/eco-labelled brands and Danish produced brands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glennie</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Head of Secretary at Slagelse Libraries</td>
<td>Neutral/Anglamark</td>
<td>Arabic/Green Irma</td>
<td>Organically sourced brands/eco-labelled and Danish produced brands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne Mette</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Supervisor in the National Work Environment Board</td>
<td>Neutral/Budget</td>
<td>Ali coffee/Café Noir</td>
<td>Danish produced/Eco-labelled brands</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 INTERVIEW PROCESS

The seven interviews were conducted like semi-structured interviews in order to understand themes of the lived daily world from the informants’ own perspectives with respect to
interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena (Kvale 2007 WEB 1: 3 & WEB 6: 2). Because the informants agree to describe their experiences, self-understanding and clarify and elaborate their own perspective on their lived world, interviews are particularly suited for studying of people’s understanding of the meanings in their lived world (Kvale 2007 WEB 8: 18). Before conducting the interviews, several implications had to be clarified for the interviews to proceed as expected. Firstly, the research purpose was made clear to be an explorative study of the phenomena brand meaning construction and transfer from fmcg with special attention to coffee and detergents. Coffee and detergent were chosen to make the topics discussed more concrete for the informants who were then afterwards able to talk in general about their purchase behaviour. The interviews were all conducted to be descriptive of the informant’s lived world but with the inductive purpose of exploring the phenomena within this social context. Secondly, before venturing out to conduct interviews, the theoretical foundation was established as the basis for the thematic understanding of the topic of the study. This provided a familiarity with the subject and enabled to ask significant interview questions (Kvale 2007 WEB 5: 9). An interview guide (see appendix 9) was prepared beforehand to keep a similarity and uniformity between the different interviews for the analysis. But being an explorative study the interview guide was thus only structured around 6 broad areas of interest: (1) general information about the informant, (2) their preferred choice of coffee, (3) their view on organic products, (4) their preferred choice of detergent, (5) their view on eco-labelled products and (6) general purchase behaviour and attitudes towards fmcg. But as each individual informant is different so were the interviews, as the interview situation developed with follow-up questions around what the informants wanted to talk about.

During the interviews the six areas of interest were explored and because a qualitative interview seeks to cover the meaning that is said between the lines, several implicit messages were sent back, so to speak, in explicit form to the informant for confirmation or disconfirmation (Kvale 2007 WEB 1: 5). Two examples of that are: “So you say that the allergy label is not as important as the eco-label (the swan label) is to you?” (Appendix 1: 3) or in another interview: “So you perceive Café Noir more to people that buy quality coffee but Nescafé is more to a quick cup or to people that does not assign much to the experience of drinking coffee?” (Appendix 2: 2). This ensured that interpretations of what was said were perceived correctly. At other times, the informants answered with contradictory statements, which were then
disclosed to them in order for them to clarify what they meant. An example of this is: “If we look at what you say, you feel that buying organically sourced food is doing something good for yourself and nature so if one chooses not to buy organically sourced food, one does not do good for oneself or nature or what do you mean?” (Appendix 2: 3) This was asked to an informant who did not buy organically sourced food but her opinion of people who did, was the above. According to the dynamic interpersonal interview situation, the questions were asked in everyday language to constitute a natural conversation flow (Kvale 2007 WEB 6: 10). At times, to support the questions, examples were given from my own world, in order to try out some of the theoretical knowledge, but in everyday situations. An example of this is: “I buy the cheapest coffee available, but then I storage it in a ceramic bowl and it is not that I am embarrassed about the brand that I buy, but I do not think that it says anything about me as a person and that is why I do not want it at display in my kitchen. Do you have the same feeling about any of your brands?” (Appendix 4: 8).

The interviews were composed with a mix of probing, specifying, direct, indirect, structuring and interpreting questions (Kvale 2007 WEB 6: 14). Probing was used to get more insight into the actual statements made by the informants and was used continuously throughout the interviews. One informant told about her reluctance to buy tiger shrimps like it was a natural choice. With the probing question: “You were talking about tiger shrimps, what is that all about?” she told the story of how poisonous tiger shrimps are, due to all the toxins they are bred in and the loss of tundra in the breeding areas (Appendix 5: 4), which provided insights into her construction of this. Specifying questions were asked to get more detailed descriptions of feelings. In one interview the informant talked about buying fruit for her work, but because of budget restraint, she was not allowed to purchase organically sourced fruit, which she always did personally. To clarify the issue the clarifying question: “Where is it that is it difficult?” was asked and the informant specified that it was difficult because buying organically had become such a deep-rooted part of her that she could not stand buying products that were not organic (Appendix 1: 7). To keep the time, that was set aside for each interview and to keep the informants on track; structuring questions were used to shift between the six broad areas of interest. Furthermore, to gain knowledge into how the informants viewed themselves they were all asked indirect questions about how they felt that a person who purchased/did not purchase organically sourced/eco-labelled or Danish produced fmcg, according to their own
situation, looked like and felt like. Each informant had views that were not potentially corresponding with their own view on themselves and they were, therefore afterwards, asked directly: “How do you see yourself and how do you think others see you?”

To avoid any potential bias, the informants were not informed about the actual research purpose when beginning the interviews but were all told that the interview was to explore why consumers purchase what they do and what factors are important when consumers choose certain products instead of others. The actual areas of study; brand meaning construction and brand meaning transfer were not directly mentioned in the interviews but the informants were asked questions to implicitly move towards those topics but in their own natural way. As a result, the interviews followed the characteristics of a funnel-shaped interview and revealed the purpose after the interview ended (Kvale 2007 WEB 6: 9). None of the informants were asked to prepare for the interview, as the study should characterize the hectic everyday lives of the women where they may not have the time to deeply consider their choices of fmcg. Furthermore, to avoid any potential social desirability bias, where informants may state that they purchase a specific brand or products of a special character to e.g. enhance appearances, all the informants were asked to show me their detergent and coffee and open their kitchen cabinets so their actual products could be validated visually.

The interviews were performed in Danish to keep a relaxed authentic tone and setting so the informants would not feel inhibited by their language skills. All the interviews were recorded and lasted from 38 minutes to 60 minutes with an average of approximately 50 minutes.

4.2.1 Transcriptions

The recorded interviews were transcribed in Danish after all the interviews were performed. To transcribe means to transform and when transcribing oral language into written text some alterations and interpretations have to be present in order to construct a readable written text (Kvale 2007 WEB 2: 3). In such, when transcribing the interviews, the conversations were at times slightly altered to avoid any fragmented or half sentences that are common in the spoken language. This was of course done with much attention to detail, in such that firstly, everything was transcribed with half sentences and pauses and off topic conversations to ensure the meaning properly. Afterwards fragmented sentences, pauses and conversations
that were deemed way off topic and sometimes too personal were left out, as it had no attachment to the research purpose. Then the remaining was altered into written language. In addition, when the informants used hand-signs to enhance the spoken word those signs are stated in brackets for further explanation. Furthermore, the informants’ answers are highlighted by an ‘I:’ in front, with no highlight of the interviewer’s questions. The transcription process was considered very important to the interpretation and a substantial amount of time was spent on this process.

4.3 ANALYSIS PROCEDURE
The analysis of the seven interviews is based upon Kvale’s modes of analysing meaning in qualitative interviews. There does not exist any presubscribed method for analysing interviews in order “to arrive at the essential meaning and deeper implications of what is said in the interviews” (Kvale 2007 WEB 3: 5). However, some common approaches have gained validity through time. In the start phase of the analysis of the interviews, patterns were constructed by using categorization known from content analysis. Categorization is known as the process of classifying or labelling units of data (Spiggle 1994: 493). Usually, this is done deductively by choosing some categories beforehand and then classifying chunks of data into those categories. However, in this analysis it was done inductively by classifying the patterns that were present in the texts in order to find commonalities between the informants’ worldviews (Spiggle 1994: 493). This means that certain patterns were constructed based on the informants’ responses. This was done in the start phase as categorizing provides an overview of the large amount of transcripts and helps to facilitate comparisons and test hypotheses (Kvale 2007 WEB 3: 8).

In addition, the patterns were categorized into large conceptual classes by using abstraction. This increased the opportunity for choosing certain patterns to be accentuated as some patterns occurred in several of the informants’ stories. Furthermore, it amplified the choices for initial comparison of the informants’ choice of fmcg (Spiggle 1994: 494). Even though, being an appropriate method to gain overview, categorizing, abstraction and comparison are not appropriate for the further analysis as they reduce the statements and detach them from their original context (Kvale WEB 3 2007, 11). In order to gain access to the meaning that is not
immediately apparent in the text, the hermeneutic approach of *meaning interpretation* was applied.

Using the philosophical hermeneutic approach, the analysis was comprehended by interpretation through the hermeneutic circle; where the meaning of the text is established through a process in which “*the meanings of the separate passages are determined by the global meaning of the text as it is anticipated*” (Kvale 2007 WEB 3: 13). As a result, the texts were read and re-read, which changed the meaning of the single passages until a sensible coherent meaning was constructed. It forms like a back-and-forth procedure between the part-to-whole. In the single interview, the individual passages (which is the part) was analysed according to the entire interview (the whole). And in the large picture; between each interview (the part) and the entire set of interviews (the whole) (Spiggle 1994: 495). In such, the process consisted of gathering smaller part into a whole to construct a meaning throughout the interviews.

### 4.3.1 Delimitations of the Empirical Field of Interest

The present study is not trying to evaluate all consumers’ attitudes towards all fmcg and has no intentions to do so. In such, the delimitation offers a more detailed analysis on specific topics in this specific context. In addition, the areas of environmentalism and eco-labelling were studied in both the theoretical foundation and subsequently in the empirical research, but the Master’s thesis does not allow for these areas to be fully explored as they have not been chosen as the main topic but as contributing factors in the construction and transfer process.

### 4.3.2 Limitations to Method

The current method of the seven interviews with the seven informants may have the limitation that only one interview was performed per informant lasting an average of 50 minutes. A long-term ethnographical study of all the informants or just a few of them may have resulted in a more deep and well-rounded understanding of the phenomena, with the opportunity to relate the consumers’ meaning construction with their actual behaviour. But again according to the philosophy of science, reality is constructed in the interaction between
the researcher and the phenomenon and there is no such thing as a true and non-interpreted knowledge. Thus, the findings of the Master's thesis are constructed based on the interpretation of the available data.

Other types of data could have been to construct the interpretation on surveys to get more respondents to join in on the investigation, but this type of data does not allow for a close connection between the researcher and the subject and the ability to construct knowledge in the social context that an interview does. Otherwise the empirical study could also have been supplied with fieldwork and interviews of other women in the supermarket e.g. to study if the patterns were common in other social situations, but this approach was deemed inappropriate due to people not wanting to stop for interviews when they are out shopping because of time restraints.

4.3.3 Limitations to Findings of Empirical Study

The Master’s thesis does not propose to convey general knowledge of the researched area but explores the patterns both in the literature and in a group of Danish female consumers to construct a time-current picture of the phenomena.

Applying the philosophical hermeneutic approach to the analysis provides only one interpretation of the empirical data. Therefore, the results are contingent upon this method and applying another method would maybe have resulted in a different outcome. Critics of the hermeneutic approach stresses that it does not take social structures that are not verbalised outside of consciousness into account in the interpretation. Gadamer explained, “in the mirror of language everything that exists is reflected” (Arnold & Fischer 1994: 65). As the world only exists in language, the idea that there is a truth outside of the mirror of language is inconsistent with philosophical hermeneutics’ understanding (Arnold & Fischer 1994: 65) and accordingly some social structures may not be accounted for in the analysis.
5.0 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Pointing back to the introduction, brand meaning transfer is a seemingly underexplored area in the consumer behaviour literature and that fact is still stated by the end of this study. This area is consisted of significant and enormous variety and to claim that it has been researched fully or just a bit would be to sound arrogant.

Before we move on to the analysis of the empirical findings, a construction element will be explained in detail. After reviewing the interviews, it became clear that the informants had a difficult time explaining their attachment to an individual fmcg but kept referring it to a larger category to explain their reasoning for their general purchase behaviour. This may be because combining brand in collectives transmits a message that the individual brand does not (Solomon & Buchanan 1991: 97). Assembling the informants’ responses to their general purchase behaviour resulted in three structured categories, which the informants bought fmcg within. The three structured categories are; Danish produced products, organically sourced products and conventional products. All of the women regarded themselves as supporters of Danish produced products for two reasons: (1) because of their cultural surroundings as everybody knew somebody who produced Danish products in some way and they attained great value in supporting Danish work places and animal welfare and (2) as the general assumption was that Danish produced products had less pesticides in them than products from other countries making it healthier for them to consume and less harmful to the environment. Some of the informants bought organically sourced products and this category was attached to a high level of health consciousness together with an environmental concern (Shalev & Morwitz 2012: 965). The last structured category of conventional products was characterised more negatively with references to e.g. fruit and vegetables from Holland, Spain and Italy and in general associated with a low health consciousness and being very damaging to the environment and is as such not mentioned in the analysis due to its negative associations, which deemed it irrelevant to this study. Consequently, the result is that when looking at the phenomena brand meaning construction and transfer from fmcg, the analysis both considers individual fmcg when exploring the specific situations as well as the structured categories when addressing the informants’ general purchase behaviour.
To support the structure of the theoretical foundation and to answer the problem statement the following is divided into two main sections. In such, section 5.1 addresses the informants’ way of constructing a meaning for their products. The overarching theme of this section is the loyalty towards known products, the influence of marketer-communication and influence from the informants’ individual life projects, the sociocultural context as well as their past life experiences. Secondly, it addresses the effect on the informants’ consumer behaviour with special attention to eco-labelling. Section 5.2 takes on the task of illuminating how brand meaning transfer works. Importance is placed on the informants’ use of fmcg and structured categories to express individual or collective self-concepts. At the end of each section managerial implications to branding of fmcg are provided to relate the research findings to real-life practical usage.

5.1 CONSTRUCTION OF BRAND MEANING
The following sections characterise the informants’ way of constructing a brand meaning for their preferred brands. Section 5.1.1 characterises the relationship that the informants have with their preferred brands and the reluctance for marketer-communication of unwanted brands and is provided to show the different elements that brand meaning consists of. Furthermore, section 5.1.2 comprises the construction of brand meaning attached to the informants’ individual choices of coffee and detergents based on individual life projects. Lastly, section 5.1.3 explores how the sociocultural context surrounding the consumers has an effect on the brand meaning construction when combined with the informants’ individual contextual surroundings. Moreover, section 5.1.3.1 elaborates on the brand meaning construction of eco-labels to show how it affects the informants’ purchase behaviour.

5.1.1 Components in Brand Meaning
Common to the seven informants in the study is their loyalty to the specific brands that they purchase. This loyalty is based within experience and habit. They all characterize the brand meaning of their coffee or detergent being based on experience with the brand and the recurring relationship when purchasing this brand is based on habit. Exploring this, it is acknowledged in the personality approach that creating a strong brand personality serves as
a driver of loyalty for consumers (Heding et al. 2009: 121). Ligas & Cotte state that marketer-communication must be capable of provoking personally relevant components within the individual when creating a brand meaning based on the physical make up of the brand, the functional characteristics and the brand’s personality (Ligas & Cotte 1999: 609-610). However, marketer-communication of brands were generally not positively acknowledged as a contributor to enhancing loyalty but rather as a contributor to avoid certain brands.

When asked if the informants saw commercials for detergents and how this affected their choice of products almost all said that they turned away from commercials but many were able to describe commercials anyway. Jytte provided a good example of this reluctance of the marketer-communication in commercials. In this case, she was asked about the brands OMO, Ariel and Neutral:

**Jytte:** I watch very few commercials, but when I have seen (those) commercials, I think that they literally smell, but I have not seen commercials for detergents in many years.

**Interviewer:** What is it that makes you think that they smell of perfume in the commercials?

**Jytte:** I think that it is the whole presentation of the happy housewife who is hanging up laundry. And sometimes, but that may be more fabric softener, I think that they indicate that it smells nice too and they also say it. But I do not know, because I have not seen these commercials in many years. (Appendix 1: 4)

Anne Mette also provides basis for this:

**Anne Mette:** (...) A few years ago, I saw the fabric softener commercials for Bamseline with scent. They are not common anymore, but there is still something with scent (...). (Appendix 7: 2)

Even though Jytte had not seen detergent commercials for those specific three brands in many years, she was still able to describe a storyline of a commercial and likewise for Anne Mette. However, this affected them negatively and the message from the marketer-communication did not lead to the intended output in this case. Instead it made Jytte construct a common brand personality for those brands as brands filled with perfume that happy housewives uses based on the depicted functional characteristics of the brand seen in commercials (Ligas & Cotte 1999: 609).

In each interview, other brands than what the informants used were mentioned to gain insight into what brand meaning they were surrounded by since they were avoided and Anne
Mette explains quite well her perception of the functional characteristics of the perfume brands and how this brand meaning was constructed many years ago and the reason for its perseverance within the informants’ minds:

Anne Mette: (...) But my perception of the others – about OMO and Ariel – have maybe just stopped at a time, where they, for me, stand for perfume products and they may probably not be that anymore but I have not been interested in (...) It is safety, I have just remained with what is known and then I have not explored the market because I did not feel that I had the need to absolutely go out and search the market and be innovative. (...) This is on another consumer product level than other products such as olives for example. It is not a delicacy, we are all the way down in the basic fundamental product category. So I do not think “Oh I will just switch brand.” No my imagination stops there and it just have to work.
(Appendix 7: 3)

Detergents are as described within a basic fundamental product category, where perception of the brand’s meaning is based within its ability to uphold its displayed functional characteristics. For most of the informants the packaging of the products had great impact on the constructed brand meaning. The physical make up of the brand made it easily recognisable over alternatives (Ligas & Cotte 1999: 609), and in this case the colouring or lack of colouring of the brand were associated with a brand personality. Detergent brands that were packaged in bright colours were associated with perfume and with a personality that was harmful to the environment/the informant and brands that were packaged in neutral colours were associated with eco-labelling/being free from harming ingredients. Jytte and Lisbeth explain their opinions of detergents with colour packaging:

Jytte: (...) With colours that is absolutely of no object, but I do actually prefer a packaging such as this (white bag). That is not so injurious to the environment, which I think that some coloured packaging out of cardboard is.

Interviewer: It makes you think that the product is more injurious to the environment if there are a lot of colours on?

Jytte: Well the packaging is at least, unless it has been printed with colours that are very environmentally friendly and with cardboard, I do not think it is.
(Appendix 1: 4)

Lisbeth: Well I do not care if there are colours on or not, to me, it may be the smallest paper packaging as possible, as long as we save resources.
(Appendix 5: 6)

According to McCracken, people construct the world consistent with the world that they imagine (McCracken 1986: 74) and in this Jytte and Lisbeth have constructed a cultural principle; ‘contains perfume’ for the cultural category; ‘detergents with coloured packaging’ showing
that even if those brands are not used by the consumer a brand meaning transfer from the constituted world to the brand is still accomplished. The cultural production systems that surround these brands may make the brand associations positive one day and negative the next. In this eco-labelled products may imply that conventional products are less environmentally sound because of the use of perfume, as with this example (Allen et al. 2008: 790).

Additionally, the reluctance for detergents containing perfume was present for six of the seven informants (everyone except Eva) and the brand that stood out, as the main carrier of that brand meaning, was Ariel. Interpreting the interviews it has become evident that a strong brand meaning for Ariel as a ‘perfume brand which is not good for neither me nor the environment’ has been constructed based on functional characteristics depicted in marketer-communication and the physical make up as explained by the except from the interview with Jytte. Additional probing in this subject may have revealed more into the construction of Ariel’s brand meaning but this particular brand’s construction was not placed at high value during the interviews.

The collection of the above excerpts suggest that, as according to Ligas & Cotte, that brand meaning of fmcg are also, just as high-involvement brands, consisted of the physical make up of the brand, the functional characteristics of the brand and the brand’s personality. Rendering Ligas & Cotte, the brand meaning offers an agreed way of communicating about a product to others if the implied brand meaning is consistently recognised (Ligas & Cotte 1999: 609). The brand meaning of Ariel was consistently recognised as a perfume brand as well as all the other detergent brands that had coloured packaging. Accordingly, it is suggested that the informants’ constructed a brand meaning of Ariel that was not in compliance with Ariel’s current marketer-communication but was based in accordance to Ligas & Cotte’s principles.

If we look at the managerial implications for marketing of detergent brands this may imply that an old brand meaning, based on the showed functional characteristics in commercials many years ago, still exists among women of this age. Even though these commercials are rare or even non-existent today, they still roam in the consumers’ minds and the physical make up of the brand, such as Arial with many colours, still subtracts that brand meaning with the informants. However, another influencer on this may also be the entry of eco-labelled brands
into this market as explained by Kehret-Ward that advertising product tags pervades competitive brands with the meaning-by-implication that they contain less natural ingredients or are less environmentally friendly (Kehret-Ward in Mick 1986: 203). Thus, environmentally friendly brands being provided with eco-labelling may construct a meaning of the conventional brands with the consumers as being very hazardous to the environment and as thus as explained by the Martha Stewart example earlier the cultural production systems that surrounds the brand may make the associations of the brand positive one day and negative the next. Of course this did not happen in one day but over time as the presence of eco-labels made their way into the market.

5.1.2 Brand Meaning Construction of fmCG

According to the discussion of the literature in section 3.1, brand meaning construction is believed to be co-constructed by the consumer based on a compact of marketer-communication, the consumer’s use and interpretation of the brand, the cultural production system that surrounds the brand and as showed in 3.2 the sociocultural context. As we have covered the effects of marketer-communication and the cultural production systems, we will move on to the informants use and interpretation of the brand how brand meaning is constructed when the brand intersects with consumers’ individual life projects.

Firstly, Fournier’s (1998) research, which attested that consumers construct brand meaning when the brand intersects with life projects, is challenged. Fournier’s description of life projects involves the construction, maintenance and dissolution of key life roles that significantly alter one’s concept of self (Fournier 1998: 346). This theory is quite overwhelming according to this case but it is, nevertheless, applied to show how fmCG may have an impact on parts of life projects. Bringing the theory down on a smaller everyday scale, Fournier talks about using brands to cope with every day current concerns, which may be converged into drinking a quick cup of coffee or a great cup of coffee. This amounted into that most of the participants had a daily brand of coffee and a more upscale brand of coffee for special occasions. This is evident by the statements made by Ellen who uses both Nescafé and Café Noir:
Ellen: We do use something else we also use Nescafé by the way (...) When I think to myself that I want to go home and have a great cup of coffee, then I do not imagine myself going home and having a cup of Nescafé. Instead I brew a real cup of coffee and I do that when I come home in the afternoon and also if I know that I have the time to drink more than one cup, then I also brew real coffee, and not just Nescafé.

Interviewer: What kind of people do you imagine buy Café Noir?

Ellen: Someone who are willing to pay a bit more for coffee. Someone who appreciates coffee (...)

Interviewer: And what about the Nescafé Gold, where does it stand on this?

Ellen: Well it may be more of the lazy type who just quickly wants a cup of coffee. (Appendix 2: 1-2)

The brand meaning that Ellen has constructed for these two brands are dependent on how they individually are considered useful when living her life (Fournier 1998 in Allen et al 2008: 799). And as Fournier states this brand meaning is totally dependent on the consumers’ use of the brand and interpretation of it and the brand meaning construction is therefore dyadic of nature (Fournier 1998: 345). According to Fournier, the person-object relation may appear when consumers attach selective human properties to a good (Fournier 1998: 345). This is evident when Ellen attaches the human properties of a lazy type to Nescafé Gold and appreciation of coffee to Café Noir and in such, Ellen places the Café Noir in higher value than the Nescafé because of the way that she has chosen to use the two brands and her constructed brand meaning attest to that. A form of relationship may be attached to Ellen’s use of Café Noir, but accordingly only a short-term on in the moment of consumption.

This brand meaning construction of the coffee that the informants buy is similar throughout the study with the acknowledgement of their own, sometimes laziness or busy schedule, with which an instant coffee helps them achieve. On the other hand, the ‘real’ coffee helps the informants to create special occasions as described by May-Britt, who serves Peter Larsen coffee for her guests but normally drinks Nescafé Espresso:

May-Britt: Well it is because when you have guests you cannot come in with four cups that are already made, that looks silly. In such situations, I will like to come in with a thermos or a coffee pot. And that is not possible with this one (Nescafé Espresso), or at least I have never tried that. Of course it may be possible to make large portions, I have never really though of that. I have just thought that it should be a cup when you make Nescafé. But again it is also because when we are many people, then you think that it is on a coffee pot and when one pot is finished, the next one can be brewed and then you can go in and entertain the guests in the meantime. (Appendix 3: 2)
This excerpt shows that the ‘real’ coffee helps May-Britt in one of her life projects that makes her able to create a situation where she serves as a good hostess and spend time with her guest and the real coffee makes her able to uphold a self-concept as a good hostess that the instant coffee is not able to provide. Her brand construction of the ‘real’ coffee helps her maintain a key life role as a good hostess that supports her core concept of herself. When thinking back to the effects of the marketer-communication, an interesting thought on the excerpt from May-Britt is also the fact that she has never really thought about making large portions with the instant coffee, which may be awarded to the marketer-communication of instant coffees. This attributes to the brand’s personality, as Fournier states: “Specifically, brand personality can be thought of as a set of trait interferences constructed by the consumer based on repeated observation of behaviours enacted by the brand at the hand of its manager (…)” (Fournier 1998: 368). Instant coffees serve the purpose of a quick cup of coffee and that construct is held within May-Britt as this excerpt shows. Hence, Fournier’s concept of the dyadic relationship between the consumer and the brand is also influenced by the observed marketer-communication of the brand, which this shows.

It seems as though brand loyalty, habit and experience with the brand control the informants’ repeated purchase of ‘real’ and instant coffee and short-term relationships forms in the consumption situation. Consequently, brand meaning is suggested to be constructed because of the feelings that are attached to the usage situation and not the specific brand. In such the informants collectively attain the same feelings towards their coffee regardless of the individual brand name and they all attain positive feelings towards their ‘real’ coffee but less positive feelings towards their instant coffee – leaving it to be perceived with a brand meaning of lower value than the ‘real’ coffee. In such it is suggested that for fmcg, it is the individual usage situation that brand meaning is constructed upon and not the actual brand because if it was not for loyalty towards this specific brand it would be just another brand but the brand meaning would remain the same because the usage situation would remain the same. Of course in this, it is implied that any brand chosen would be able to uphold to the standards set by the informants based on the functional characteristics, physical make up and brand personality.
With reference to managerial implications when branding coffee, the informants’ use of the brand affects brand meaning and effectively also the other way around in certain parts of their current concerns. Because the implied brand meaning that instant coffee has been attributed by the consumers’ feelings attached to the usage situation, it is not seen as a quality brand but more as an every-day brand that helps the consumers in current concerns with getting a quick cup of coffee. This may also be attributed to the marketer-communication of instant coffee, which actually shows that the consumers use the product as intended by the marketer. On the other hand, the brand meaning that is attributed to ‘real’ coffee seems to be attached on a deeper level and is surrounded by situations of well-being, comfort and entertainment of guests. The real coffee helps the informants with upholding a self-image of how they are and how they are supposed to act in social situations. Even though most of the informants did not assign the brands with human properties attesting to Fournier’s person-object relation or brand-person association that occur if somebody you know used or uses the brand, they still assigned feelings towards the brands especially the Danish word 'hygge' was assigned to the experience of drinking a great cup of coffee (Appendix 1: 6; appendix 3: 2).

5.1.3 Brand Meaning Construction of Structured Categories

Moving on to explore the effects of the sociocultural context surrounding the informants, McCracken’s (1986) and Arnould & Thompson’s (2005) theories are applied. According to McCracken consumer co-creation is a process where consumers make sense by adapting culturally shared meanings into their own unique circumstance to create a brand meaning. McCracken argues that a brand meaning is constructed through two processes; (1) the meaning created by marketing and the cultural traditions surrounding the brand, which is turned into (2) a personalized meaning created by the individual consumer based on that individual’s contextual surroundings (McCracken in Allen et al. 2008: 787). In this, the cultural tradition surrounding the brand is viewed as the marketplace ideology and the individual’s contextual surroundings is the informants past and present life experiences and the sociocultural context they are embedded in. One informant that addressed the cultural traditions surrounding the structured categories of organically sourced brands and Danish produced brands was Anne Mette, who thought that the debate on organically produced products vs. Danish produced products had become too one-sided.
Interviewer: What is it that makes you reluctant towards organically sourced products?

Anne Mette: Well it is because we own a conventional agricultural farm and I think that the whole discussion and the whole society's perception of organic and conventional farming is totally diluted, one-sided and such (...) It is the same with organic being sustainable and being healthy. Why is it though? You can also buy organic candy and become fat and obese in organically sourced food. It is like there exists some kind of misunderstanding. (...) There are also compromises to this. It just annoys me that we live here and we are farmers and the debate has just become too easy and café latte-like (...)

(Appendix 7: 4)

Anne Mette’s statement visualises McCracken’s two processes when she confirms that one meaning is created by the current prevalent environmental marketplace ideology that surrounds the structured categories, which is that organically sourced products are healthier than conventional Danish products and that conventional farming is not sustainable. And the second brand meaning is constructed by her self, based on her individual contextual surroundings, which is that conventional farming can be sustainable and organic products can be just as unhealthy as conventional products. Anne Mette constructed another scenario during the interview when she contested that:

Anne Mette: I think what is essentially disregarded in the Danish society is that we in reality attain huge trust in Danish produced products.

(Appendix 7: 7)

Consumer trust in Danish produced products may be another current marketplace ideology, even though this was not discussed in the theoretical foundation. Through the interpretation of the interviews it became clear that all the informants’ brand meaning construction of the structured categories were very much influenced by either the prevalent environmental marketplace ideology as suggested by CCT or trust in Danish products as provided by Anne Mette. Arnould & Thompson addresses the dynamic relationship that exists between the current marketplace ideology, consumer actions and cultural meanings through their Consumer Culture Theory. As previously stated, CCT portrays culture as the essence of experience, meaning and actions. In such, a frame that, much like a game where individuals acts within the constraints of rules, is drawn from the culture and the subsequent marketplace, that this culture works within, set out conceivable actions for consumers to follow. This makes certain patterns of behaviour and sense-making interpretations more likely to occur than others (Arnould & Thompson 2005: 869).
The current marketplace ideology of environmentalism and the effect on culture is described through many interfaces and books and one interpretation of it is that: “The political quest for sustainable development is best thought of as an ongoing series of cultural transformations by which the visionary ideas and utopian practices of the environmental movement are working their way into the social lifeblood” (Jamison 2001: 45). This quote explains quite well the cultural context that the informants are surrounded by where the environmental movement has transcended into common social beliefs. Environmentalism has moved away from being radical and into the mainstream and social concerns for the environment were evident with the informants. Jytte and Lisbeth describe their brand meaning of organically sourced brands and eco-labelled brands:

Jytte: (...) I want products without pesticides and artificial fertiliser, because I want as pure products as possible and they (organically sourced and eco-labelled), more so than other products, do not have an adverse impact on the environment. (Appendix 1: 1)

Lisbeth: The meaning that I put in when it is organically sourced is that it at any rate takes care of the environment where it is from. (Appendix 5: 1)

The brand meaning that was constructed had most emphasis on the environmental impact of purchase behaviour resembling the current environmental context that surrounds the structured categories at the moment with the high emphasis on climate challenges. In order to combine the two-way process created by McCracken, the informants’ individual contextual surroundings may also have an impact on the brand meaning as sociocultural meanings is linked with changes in our life conditions (Heding et al. 2009: 158). Jytte and Lisbeth were deeply invested in buying organically sourced brands, which may be centred in their own unique circumstance as Lisbeth just recovered from breast cancer and have had a double preventative mastectomy and Jytte is struggling with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (KOL). Lisbeth admit to having changed her purchase behaviour after having a life-threatening disease (Appendix 5: 5), while Jytte made the choice to buy purely organic over 40 years ago (Appendix 1: 8). Lisbeth attested that buying organically sourced food made her feel like it gave her a bigger chance of not becoming ill again (Appendix 5: 5). For these two informants buying brands with eco-labelling was more important than Danish produced products albeit they also stated that they could not always taste the difference between Danish produced food and organically sourced food but it was the idea that made them buy the organically sourced
food and this idea seems to be constructed based on the current marketplace ideology described by Anne Mette that organic products are portrayed as healthier than Danish produced products.

The other five informants were also affected by a growing marketplace ideology but accordingly that was marked by trust in Danish produced products as constructed by Anne Mette. This is visualised through their statements below:

Ellen:  First of all, Danish products are controlled in relation to pesticides, in relation to additives and if you buy Danish products you also preserve Danish work places.  
(Appendix 2: 3)

Anne Mette:  On some areas, I buy Danish with complete ease of mind, because I just know that the control has been performed.  
(Appendix 7: 5)

Glennie:  Basically, I prefer Danish produced products because then you know that it is kept within certain maximum permissible values and such. (...) But the best you can do if you want to be free of as much as possible is to buy organic or Danish. (...)  
(Appendix 6: 4-5)

May-Britt:  It is because I would like to support small companies. (...) It is an attitude that animal welfare is both for the cow, chicken and the pig and such.  
(Appendix 3: 1 and 3)

Eva:  (...) And for instance with apples, well Danish fruit growers also uses pesticides but I think that they use a lot more down in Italy.  
(Appendix 4: 6)

Giving in to influences from this marketplace ideology, the other five informants placed high value in Danish produced brands, with Ellen and Anne Mette being very invested in this supported by their individual context, which again shows the second part of McCracken’s brand meaning construction process where brand meaning is affected by the individual’s personalised meaning. Ellen’s husband primarily works for all the local farmers as an entrepreneur and Anne Mette and her husband own a conventional agricultural farm that produces seeds, sugar beets, rapeseed and so on. Anne Mette’s relationship with organically sourced brands was marked by conflict as she was against, what she described as the general debate of organic being healthier than conventional food, but again she did purchase a few organic brands but only for the taste. Glennie and May-Britt bought some brands organically and some Danish putting most emphasis on animal welfare and childcare for May-Britt with her pedagogical background and in Glennie’s case because of hyper-allergic grandchildren (Appendix 3: 3, appendix 6: 4). The last informant, Eva, did not seem to have any individual past or
present experiences linked to her purchase behaviour as she bought mostly conventional brands and sometimes Danish. Most of her choices did not seem to uncover any felt meaning from her contextual surroundings but the effect of the two marketplace ideologies was visible during the interview as she several times responded to questions of buying organic or Danish with phrases such as “one really ought to do it” (Appendix 4: 2, 5, 6).

In regards to marketing of brands, the current marketplace ideologies that the target group of consumers are imbedded in seem to have a huge influence on the brand meaning construction as they permeate what is commonly accepted or rejected. At the moment the emerging marketplace ideologies are working their way into private consumers’ social lives and affects them to at least take a stance on what they believe in. However, the individual contextual surroundings definitely also mark the informants and directs them towards certain structured categories. In such the meaning construction of the structured categories cannot be defined by either the usage situation or the marketer communication but evidently the informants expressed a more collective social view of the categories but made their individual choices according to how the current marketplace ideology fits into their past and present life experiences. In the next section we will explore what effect eco-labelling has on the informants’ purchase behaviour.

5.1.3.1 The Effect of Eco-labelling on Purchase Behaviour

In the previous, the prevalent environmental marketplace ideologies influence on the consumers were discussed and along that same line we will now explore how eco-labelling affects the informants’ brand meaning construction and purchase behaviour. Literature on consumers and goods declarations states that consumers have a positive attitude towards eco-labelling but have difficulty understanding what the labels individually stand for (Leire & Thidell 2005: 1063) and this was also evident in this study. The informants who did not place high value in eco-labelling did not have the ability to describe the brand meanings of the different eco-labels that were mentioned in the interviews and some also proclaimed their reluctance for eco-labels. As stated by Bickart & Ruth, the lack of knowledge and ability of the consumers to verify the different eco-labels seem to cause scepticism and consumer distrust (Bickart & Ruth 2012, 52). One example is given:
Ellen: (...) Sometimes you also feel that you are being cheated and cannot always trust that it is organic (...) Because it comes from other countries where you know that the control is different than here. And then I think that much of what we control here with great austerity, they do not control that thoroughly in those countries so saying that it is organic, I do not always believe it.
(Appendix 2: 2)

Ellen’s interpretation of eco-labelling is clearly affected by her brand meaning of Danish produced products as she suggests that Danish produced products are subdued to more control than eco-labelled products from other countries, which may or may not be true but affectively her lack of ability to confirm this made her construct a negative and mistrusting brand meaning of eco-labelled products.

However, this was only evident for the informants who did not buy eco-labelled fmcg. Four of the informants; Glennie, Lisbeth, May-Britt and Jytte bought eco-labelled brands and their construction of brand meaning for eco-labelled brands is very interesting as the brand meaning of the eco-labelling superseded the original brand’s meaning. When interpreting this, it became evident that this was done unintentionally and Allen et al. argue that because brands are sociocultural creations, brand meaning is “neither inherent in the product nor constant across individuals, but rather derived from the “contexts” in which brands “resides” (Allen et al. 2008, 787). This implies that the cultural production systems surrounding the brands affect the meaning construction. Eco-labelled brands reside within the structured category of organically sourced products and are therefore influenced by the brand meaning constructed for this category. The following shows the informants’ meaning of eco-labels.

The majority of the informants shifted between several detergents. The main deciding factor on this area was the eco-labelling that was present on the brand. Lisbeth states that she changes between Neutral, Levevis and Ånglamarke:

Lisbeth: I do not care what it is called, it is more if it has the swan label. (...) What is important to me is that it is less harmful to nature and us. And that is why I have not bought the other things (...) (Appendix 5: 7-8)

Similarly, Glennie responds to the question of what her detergent is called:

Glennie: (...) The only thing I am concerned with is that it is labelled with the Swan. And that it is free of perfume and parabens and whatever it is all called. (...) I just cannot remember the name. (Appendix 6: 1 and 3)
The brand meaning of the eco-labelling supersedes the originally brand’s meaning and what matters in the purchase decision is the presence of eco-labels and not the specific brand name. Because they attain such high emphasis on the brand meaning of the eco-labelling they failed to construct any brand meaning for the actual brand name and was thus not able to remember them. By placing such high emphasis on the brand meaning of the eco-labelling the detergents looses their distinctive markings and evidently becomes de-branded. The brand meaning of eco-labelling is constructed within the brand meaning that the informants have constructed for the structured category and it is the associated benefits for the environment/the informants that is suggested to stand out for the informants and not the specific brand name.

When shifting between different detergents one informant, May-Britt, actually transferred the eco-labelling from one brand to another that was not organically sourced as she regarded the products as the same even though they were not:

Interviewer: Let us move on to Coop's Extra. Why have you chosen that?

May-Britt: Because I think that it washes the clothes really good. I think that the clothes become clean and it is also available in an organic variety Ånglamark, and sometimes I buy this and sometimes I buy Ånglamark. It depends on what is on sale. I think that it is the best detergent there is.

Interviewer: You change between the regular and Ånglamark?

May-Britt: Yes it is the same product. I think Ånglamark is organically sourced.

(Appendix 5: 5)

What is essential here is that she talks of the two brands as one when stating: “I think that it is the best detergent there is.” By May-Britt’s viewpoint Coop’s Extra has become the same as Ånglamark implying that the brand meaning of the eco-labelling has been transferred to Coop Extra. Due to her limited recognition of visual cues, she mistakes Coop Extra with Ånglamark and vice versa because they have similar packaging and are placed in near proximity in the store situation and as such the unique brandedness of the Coop Extra and Ånglamark disappear and the choice in the consumption situation seems arbitrary and only linked to sale offers. Again this suggests that the brand meaning is associated with the benefits attained in the usage situation and not the specific brand.
With regards to managerial implications this preference for eco-labels supported by the marketplace ideology de-brands the original brand and the distinctive markings of the individual brand becomes less important leaving the consumers to only construct a brand meaning for the eco-label and not the brand name. This implies that the physical make up of the brand is important in that it must be visible for the consumer that the brand is eco-labelled or otherwise it would not be purchased by this segment of consumers. However, brands that are not eco-labelled may be confused with brands that are if they have similar packaging and are placed in near proximity in the store.

5.1.4 Summary

As shown through the previous sections, brand meaning construction is a complex phenomenon that may be constructed in multiple ways when considering the different elements in the construction process. The phenomenon can be looked at from many angles and in this study four elements was considered paramount to the brand meaning construction of respectively fmcg and the structured categories. These four elements are; marketer-communication, consumers individual use and interpretation of the brand, the sociocultural traditions surrounding the brand e.g. the marketplace ideologies and lastly, the contextual surrounding of the consumer, which is the consumer’s past and present cultural experiences.

Applying these four elements to the informants’ meaning constructions resulted in some patterns explained by the informants’ actions. Marketer-communication was generally not positively acknowledged by the informants to construct a positive brand meaning. Through marketer-communication the informants contributed detergents with perfume with a brand personality of being less environmentally friendly, which was based on the physical make up of the brand that through the functional characteristics depicted in old marketer-communication still roamed in the informants’ memory. This could also be connected to the increase in eco-labels that by their presence imply that the ‘old’ brands are environmentally hazardous.

Secondly, it is suggested that brand name does not really matter in the brand meaning construction as showed by the informants’ constructed meaning of ‘real’ coffee and instant
coffee. The brand meaning was constructed around the feelings that were attached to the usage situation and as such it seems as though the brand could be anything as long as it is still able to bring up those emotions with the informant. This was also evident for the consumers who bought eco-labelled detergents. The brand meaning was constructed based within the structured category of organically sourced brands and the benefits this category has to the environment/consumer. In such, any eco-labelled detergent was attained with these benefits regardless of the name and the informants were therefore able to switch between different detergents but still held on to the constructed brand meaning regardless of the brand name. This effectively supports Allen et al.’s notions that brand meaning is not situated in the actual brand or ever constant between individuals but derived from the context that surrounds the brand (Allen et al. 2008: 787).

When constructing a meaning for the structured categories, the current marketplace ideologies that the target group of consumers are imbedded in seems to be a collective of opinions that permeate what is commonly accepted or rejected. And the interpretation of these marketplace ideologies based in the informants’ individual contextual surroundings directed the informants towards a certain structured category that fits into their past and present life experiences.

Basically, this part of the analysis suggests that the informants’ proactively construct brand meanings based on the four types of influence similarly to the research in high-involvement brands and that none of the informants acted as passive recipients of meaning from marketer-communication but chose fmcg independently or within the structured categories according to how they fitted into their lives.
5.2 TRANSFER OF BRAND MEANINGS

The following sections take on the task of illuminating how the actual brand meaning transfer works in the context of fmcg and the structured categories. Section 5.2.1 addresses the actual brand meaning transfer and the influences on the informants’ self-concept. Secondly, sections 5.2.2 and 5.2.3 focus on the two different transfer processes that are constructed in this study.

5.2.1 Expressions of Self

Even though McCracken’s theory on brand meaning transfer from the world to the product was demonstrated in the previous construction sections, the second process of the meaning transfer from the brand to the consumer could not be testified during this study. None of the informants had experienced the personalizing rituals of exchange, possession, grooming or divestment as described by McCracken in relation to fmcg or the structured categories. Ultimately, the analyses of the informants’ brand meaning construction suggest that brand meanings are proactively constructed by the informants and in such, it is suggested that brand meaning is not transferred to the informant but is inherent within the individual informant and is used to express self-concepts. But to remain within the problem statement’s wording, the concept ‘brand meaning transfer’ is still used albeit it does not constitute an actual transfer from the brand to the consumer. Accordingly, as the brand meaning construction does not seem to depend on the specific brand name or structured categories it is suggested that the informants transfer meaning from the usage situation of brands or the benefits of the structured categories to express self-concepts. In such the following explores the informants’ self-definition purposes based on collective and individualistic expressions of selves using the interpretive tradition’s research.

According to Belk, consumers regard possessions as a part of their extended self (Belk 1988, 139). For the purposes of this analysis fmcg and the structured categories will be regarded with the same intrinsic characteristics as possessions are by Belk but instead of extensions of the selves they are regarded as expressions of the selves for self-definition purposes – a term more recently applied by the interpretivist tradition (Solomon & Buchanan 1991: 97; Kozinets 2001, Grayson & Martinec 2004; Arnould & Thompson 2005; Elliot & Davies 2006; Shalev and Morwitz 2012: 965). Belk opened up to consumers possessing multiple layers of self in his research as it found that
some possessions are closer linked to the core self than others saying that concentric layers exist around the core self and those layers are influenced by the individual, time and culture (Belk 1988: 152). Thus, consumers possess multiple layers of selves, albeit only four are mentioned by Belk; individual, family, community and group. However, Belk emphasised that regardless of the number of selves the primary is the distinction between the individual and collective conception of self, which we will move on with in this interpretation of the informants’ brand meaning transfer (Belk 1988: 152). Therefore, it is suggested that the degree to which the brand meaning transfer appears in the same way as high-involvement brands is based on the level of how much the constructed meaning expresses the individual's individual and collective self-concepts.

5.2.2 Brand Meaning Transfer from Structured Categories Expressing Collective Self

According to Solomon and Buchanan (1991) people use clusters of brands with coherent brand meanings to express their social role or role-based identity to others (Solomon and Buchanan 1991, 97). In this, social role may term the collective self as an expression of one's place among others. Through the analysis of the constructed brand meanings for the structured categories, it is suggested that the informants use those meanings as a way to position themselves in their situational context and thereby express a collective social self both introvert and extrovertly to others. Rendering Boorstein's argument that group membership in contemporary society is defined by shared consumption symbols and belonging to a group is a way to express the social self (Allen et al. 2008: 800), individuals are more willing to associate with brand meanings that are equal to other members of their in-group e.g. significant others, and rejects meanings that are perceived to be equal to members of out-group (Donovan, Janda & Suh, 2005: 128). Whether it is in the local community as all the informants bought within the structured category of Danish produced products or in the global community for the informants who bought organically sourced products, the informants evidently showed a form of community sense when expressing their collective social self through their consumption of the structured categories. Relating this to Muñiz and O'Guinn’s triadic brand relationship, the structured categories are also a way for the informants to connect interpersonally because “brand communities are social entities that reflect the situated
embeddedness of brands in the day-to-day lives of consumers and the ways in which brands connect consumer to brand, and consumer to consumer” (Muñiz & O’Guinn 2001: 418).

The analysis of the brand meaning construction in section 5.1.3 shows that even though the informants chose one or the other structured category based on their contextual surroundings, the brand meaning was similar implying influence from the marketplace ideology although it was interpreted by their individual past and present experiences, which may also be expressed by community brand members often feeling that they have a better understanding of the brand than the actual manufacturer and that the brand belongs to them (Muñiz & O’Guinn 2001: 414). A transfer of this construction may be a way to maintain and uphold a collective self-concept when affiliating with a group mentality forged by the cultural context that surrounds them, which they consider is in accordance with their constructed reality.

5.2.3 Brand Meaning Transfer Expressing Individualistic Self

From his research, Belk stated that external objects become a part of the self when we are able to exercise power over the objects just as we can control our own body parts or when the external object exercises power over us (Belk 1988, 146). Applying this to the current context, objects may be converged into the structured categories and for Jytte the structured category of organically sourced products had enormous power over her individualistic self. Jytte explains her reluctance to buying conventional coffee and fruit in a situation at work, where she was on a budget:

Jytte: I cannot stand to buy it. I simply do not like to buy it. I can feel that it has become such a deep-rooted part of me that I choose this coffee (organic) and not this coffee (random conventional coffee). I can feel that I have a real difficult time with picking something else (...) It is just very unacceptable you might say because I am not used to buying these things and I would never buy apples for myself that were not organically sourced. (...) It is not the individual product, it is me, you might say. It is a choice in my life (...) In such situations I realise that my own premises are high because I have become used to it being such a big part of my consciousness and you might say that it is a part of my identity because it is. Well it is an identity the way that we live our lives. (Appendix 1: 7)

This excerpt shows that buying organically sourced brands have become such a major part of Jytte’s individualistic expression of herself. She is really struggling when she has to buy brands that are not coherent with her sense of self even though they are not for herself. And it truly shows that the structured category exercises power over Jytte and permeates her self-
concept. Jytte was definitely affected by this in all areas of her life from wanting to buy an eco-labelled TV to prevent African children from dismantling hazardous electronics to having a kitchen made out of pinewood to prevent Brazilian rainforest from being cut down to choosing a career as a health coordinator (Appendix 1: 4 and 6).

In such, Jytte’s brand meaning transfer process profoundly accepts the notions of the interpretivist research traditions and the brand meaning transfer that she feels from the benefits of buying organically sourced products acts as an expression of her self-concept forbidding her to buy anything else. This is effectively most due to her long-ago (over 40 years ago) established self-concept, based on her past life experiences, that she is a person who buys environmentally friendly products. Contrary to Jytte none of the other informants had affiliations to a structured category for the same amount of time that she had. The brand meaning transfer for the other informants can be characterised by their use of fmcg and structured categories respectively to express parts of their social self on an individualistic level.

As Fournier’s relational approach is based on the individual’s life projects it may be so that the informants use the individual fmcg as a short-term relational partner to express their individual social self as explored earlier in section 5.1.2. It was contested that Fournier’s research is based in deep relational bonds between the brand and the consumer where the brand is regarded with human properties. Accordingly, the actual brand may not be the basis for the brand meaning construction and in such the feelings attached to the usage situation may render a short-term relationship in the specific consumption situation. And as those short-term relationships express their individual social self they purchase the same brands over and over again to experience those feelings that occur in the moment of consumption. For Ellen and May-Britt individual fmcg were used to respectively construct an individualistic self-image of their social self. Shalev & Morwitz’s research suggest that people define themselves with containing specific traits and to uphold that self-concept they buy products that they believe will enhance those traits based on self-evaluation and restoration (Shalev & Morwitz 2012, 965). For Ellen, with the use of Café Noir she was able to construct a personality of being someone who appreciates coffee and is willing to spend money on it while other times using Nescafé helped her in busy situations albeit making her feel quite lazy and putting a fast
cup of coffee above taste when choosing Nescafé. For May-Britt, Peter Larsen coffee made her able to construct a social role as a good hostess and to uphold her self-concept based on evaluation of what it means to be a good hostess. In such the transfer of meanings was based in an individual concept of self.

As in the previous sections, this also leaves some managerial implications when branding products. It suggests that importance should be placed on showing how brands can help the consumers to gain positive self-concepts. For individual fmcg importance should be placed in the usage situation attaching feelings to this and fmcg should be situated within structured categories for consumers to gain comprehensive understanding of the benefits that they will gain from this while simultaneously showing them as an expression of the collective social self.

5.2.4 Summary
The interpretivist tradition's research was deemed most appropriate to show the transfer processes constructed in this study as it clearly expresses the informants' self-concepts albeit it may be unconsciously. When interpreting the use of the structured categories, it reflected the informants' way of fitting their purchase behaviour into the societal norms expressed by marketplace ideologies. This provided the informants with a way to maintain and uphold a collective social self-concept and feeling of belonging in a group in their cultural context and in that a form of community sense may appear as community members often feel that they have a better idea of what the brand's meaning is, resembling the informants meaning of the structured categories that were influenced by their sociocultural context and their past and present life experiences.

Representing a transfer that expressed the informant's individualistic self was explored by Belk's notion of objects possessing the consumer, which is clearly the case with Jytte. Her whole life revolves around her self-concept of being an environmentally responsible consumer and that permeates her consumer behaviour making her almost feel sick if she cannot buy organically sourced products. For Jytte, it did not seem to matter is we were talking about the individual products or the structured category she experienced the meaning
to be the same. Accordingly, Jytte’s experience is on a deep felt emotional level that could not be contested to with any of the other informants.

The other informants used fmcg as a short-term relational partner in current concerns as the brand meaning was not derived from the actual brand but from the feelings attached to the usage situation and in such these feelings were transferred while using the brand but dissolved afterwards for other short-term relationship to occur in the moment of consumption. The situational use of the fmcg also reflected the informants’ restoration and self-evaluation according to their individual sense of social self.

### 5.3 SUMMARY OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Going back to section 3.1 the perception of meaning from a social constructionist’s view was presented. The underlying principle is that phenomena only exist if they are assigned a meaning and as language is a way for us to express meaning, words are used to express that meaning, albeit arbitrary linked to the phenomenon, because they are linked to a certain meaning in our minds. In such the phenomena of brand meaning construction and transfer are only acknowledged to be valid constructs due to the pre-existing literature within the humanistic paradigm where they have been socially accepted among researchers.

As argued in the theoretical foundation in chapter 3.1, there exist several contrasting research traditions that explore the brand meaning construction and even in the post-modern view, several authors have contributed to the theory in this field. Applying the method of discussing it from older to newer as it goes it was contested that three elements are present in the consumers’ construction of brand’s meanings. Furthermore, a fourth element was included by adding the sociocultural context as presented by CCT to have great influence on consumer behaviour. These elements are respectively marketer-communication, the consumers’ individual use of the product, the cultural production systems surrounding brands and the contextual surroundings of the consumer. In the analysis, these four elements presently stand for the informants’ memory of old marketer-communication as showed in the analysis in section 5.1.1, the individual interpretation of the feelings attached to the usage situations in section 5.1.2, the growing marketplace ideologies of either environmentalism or trust in
Danish produced products together with the culture and the context that the consumers are embedded in serve as dominant drivers for constructing brand meaning as shown in section 5.1.3. Consequently, it may suggest that the process of brand meaning construction is not dyadic or triadic but fourfold in nature but that consumers’ construction processes do not always reflect all four elements simultaneously. In addition, consumers proactively construct brand meaning and are not passive recipients of meaning created by their surroundings but they interpret those meaning to express social self-concepts.

The informants’ expression of collective social self was linked to the structured categories and as a way to affiliate with group beliefs to express their social belonging in both local society and global society. The individualistic expression of self was linked to two concepts; (1) when the meanings of the structured categories exercised power over the informant and (2) when the meanings of fmcg related to the usage situation forged short-term relationships to express the informants’ social selves.
6.0 DISCUSSION

Rendering the introduction, the aim of this study is to explore consumers’ attachment to low-involvement fmcg to explore the consumers’ role in proactively constructing brand meaning and the implications that interfere in this process. Subsequently, the aim is also to explore if consumers experience a brand meaning transfer in the same fashion as suggested for high-involvement brands and how all this affects the specific consumer behaviour in question. Additionally, this led to explore the myriad of elements in the brand meaning construction to understand if this leads to a transfer of the constructed meanings. Coffee and detergents were used as a starting point to understand the informants’ choices and thus to understand the informants’ collective consumer behaviour the structured categories were constructed.

Consequently, the question is; do consumers construct and transfer meanings from fmcg? A short reply to this question will be ‘yes’ but relating to the analysis this process is rather complex and also dependent on the specific consumer, which means that no real theory on this subject can be said to apply to all but nor is it the goal and that leaves us to discuss the implications in the specific construction this study entails.

Moving on with the discussion, the following will now assess the informants’ reality and the study’s interpretation of that and how this influences the consumer behaviour in questions guiding managerial implications to marketing of fmcg.

6.1.1 Construction Process

When reviewing the pre-existing literature in chapter 3, the consumer-based approach depicted the brand meaning construction process as a closed-off process between the brand maker and the brand user sealed off from any sociocultural context. Within the cognitive research tradition a framework had been constructed that originally viewed marketer-communication as paramount to brand meaning construction. This was supported by the prevalent view on meaning serving as a cognitive construal in consumers’ minds (Heding et al. 2009, 84) This approach to the construction and the subsequent transfer process was deemed inadequate to understand these phenomena as it denied cultural and historical factors to be present influences, which are of great importance in the philosophical hermeneutics. The
findings in the analysis also contest to this. Specifically, it found that due to the increase in eco-labelling, marketer-communication of e.g. detergents, despite it being viewed years back, was now perceived negatively as the cultural production system surrounding the brand had changed, even though the brand had never changed. The increase in eco-labelled brands fostered a meaning-by-implication that the conventional brands were less environmentally friendly (Kehret-Ward in Mick 1986, 203). As such it was contested that the phenomena are influenced by other factors beside the brand maker and the brand user and the cognitive research tradition was abandoned to explore the emerging paradigm.

Even though the relational approach depending on Fournier’s work also works with a closed off meaning making process between the consumer and the brand, this theory proved to be more valid into the construction process as the completion of a relationship was existent with some of the informants. Research into relational branding viewed the brand meaning construction as forming a relationship with the brand that was based in the situational use of the brand (Fournier, 1998: 346) as such this is not constructed as a transfer in Fournier’s theory but relationships are based on mutual transactions between two partners meaning that some form of transfer occurs between the two. Fournier’s theory provided much insight into the informants’ construction of meanings of everyday coffee and special occasions coffee. Firstly, this attested to constructing brand meanings based on the feelings attached to the usage situations and secondly, short-term relationships formed to experience the emotions in the consumption situation when the informants consider a brand with containing certain human properties to express her social self-concept.

The study only contested to short-term relationships due to the fact that none of the informants’ purchase behaviour was rooted in life themes, which is described to be deeply rooted in history but this may also be because it is buried in the unconscious and often difficult to verbalise due to it being so fundamental to the informants and this study’s method maybe did not allow for such deep thinking (Heding et al, 2009: 158). Fournier proved as a great instrument to characterise the informants’ transfer process when entering short-term relationships to uphold a self-concept of one’s individual social self but when assessing the general purchase behaviour the sociocultural context was a major influence and the cultural approach aided in that construction.
The cultural approach enforced two aspects that influenced the consumers’ construction process; the cultural traditions surrounding brands and the contextual environment that the informants are embedded in. These two aspects were closely interlinked in the study. The structured categories were a construct applied by the informants that seemed to be based within the cultural traditions that the brands were surrounded by. McCracken’s interpretation of this process is that culture is an ever-changing element influenced by time, as the cultural categories are not always associated with the same principles [McCracken 1986, 74]. This resulted in the association that for some of the informants eating organically sourced products signalled a high level of health consciousness (Shalev & Morwitz 2012, 965). While Danish produced products for others, signalled the same as shown in section 5.1.3.

These current associations with the structured categories were constructed based within the current marketplace ideology, an element that sprung from CCT research, but was not originally contested to in any of the literature researching in construction or transfer. In such, a new element in this construction appeared as the sociocultural context influences the informants’ construction process. The culturally shared meanings of organically sourced products and Danish produced products were represented by the informants’ statement in section 5.1.3 and they were deeply influenced by the environmental ideology, but as presented, a trust in Danish produced brands was also present. This current environmental marketplace ideology also affected some of the informants negatively, not that they were against environmentalism and sustainability but that only organically sourced products seemed to be linked to this ideology. As Anne Mette said: “I can understand it in some way that it has to be sustainable but really what in not sustainable in this (conventional farming)?” (Appendix 7: p.4). She addressed the current common beliefs surrounding the structured categories that organically sourced products were presented as the only way towards a sustainable agriculture. Moreover, she addressed, what to her, also seemed to have become common knowledge: organically sourced products are healthier than conventional products, which she certainly did not believe herself. Another informant, Ellen, also addressed her mistrust in eco-labelling defying the current marketplace ideology. Linking this to the informants’ contextual environment it was suggested that their immediate surroundings
impacted these constructions, which, in this situation, was marked by illnesses, heritage and support in local society linked to the informants past and present experiences.

Moving on to the construction of the experienced transfer process, purposes of self-concept were suggested to be the locus for the transfer. Evolving on Belk’s extended self-concept, the interpretivist tradition turned to expression of self. One informant in this study, Jytte, attested to Belk’s notions of being possessed by an object in this case the structured category of organically sourced products as it exercised power over her in all areas of her life. Contrary to the rest of the informants nothing could make her shy away from her organically sourced products as this option did not seem to exist for her and her individual self-concept was permeated by this attitude. To say that “I buy Danish produced products” or “I buy organically sourced products” seemed to be a way for the informants to position themselves collectively with a social self in their surrounding world as these categories are supplied with a constructed meaning that for the informants were quite similar whether they bought within one category or other. Applying Solomon & Buchanan’s research of using brand clusters to express role-based identities or social roles (Solomon & Buchanan: 1991: 97), it was evident that through shared consumption the informants’ were able to affiliate with a group and thereby express their collective social self to their surroundings (Allen et al. 2008: 800).

This has important consequences for consumer behaviour research. When assessing consumers’ brand meaning construction and transfer of fmcg, some limitations are evident in the current literature. Firstly, being able to apply existing literature to this specific area is solely dependent on the consumers’ presupposed self-image. A consumer’s collective self may be linked to the structured categories, but seemingly has to be constructed through the consumers’ entire life-time for it to convey a deep felt meaning transfer as described in e.g Belk’s research. Secondly, the existing literature did not seem to provide the link between the sociocultural context with the marketplace ideology and the structured categories that this study constructed, which seemingly created the informants’ collective meaning of what is wrong and right for a consumer to purchase. Fourth, the actual literature on brand meaning transfer from McCracken was so specific in the different rituals that it may be difficult to apply to other situations. Nor is the theory trying to and the present study cannot provide specific situations or rituals to this process either but a development in this specific area could prove
to enhance marketers’ understanding of fmcg and because fmcg are every-day products this could provide essential knowledge into the branding of fmcg e.g. in coherent collectives such as described by the structured categories.

6.1.2 Impact on Consumer Behaviour in Question
Guided by the third question in the problem statement, we will now move on to discuss what implications this study’s findings have on the informants’ purchase behaviours.

In section 5.1.1 it was showed that a strong loyalty for known brands was present that may be grounded in the consumers having found a brand that works for their usage. Furthermore, detergents were placed within a basic fundamental product category that just had to work and the informants were not out shopping around like it was a delicacy. Secondly, it showed that old marketer-communications still influenced the informants’ choices of detergents as functional characteristics of perfume brands depicted in old commercials were subtracted from consciousness when seeing brands with coloured packaging.

At the moment the emerging marketplace ideologies are working their way into private consumers’ social lives and affects them to at least take a stance on what they believe in. For eco-labelling, the marketplace ideology’s influence was present as it permeates what is commonly accepted or rejected. To this, the physical make up of eco-labelled brands vs. conventional brands impacted the purchase behaviour as a link between natural packaging and eco-labelled was present and formed the construction of brand meaning both for eco-labelled and not eco-labelled products and even in one case transferred the eco-labelling to a non-organic brand. The coloured detergents have never really changed but the perception of them have changed due to changes in society as explained by the increase of eco-labelling, which imply that the existing products on the market have an adverse impact on the environment even though the products themselves have never changed. For the consumers that gave in to this ideology they also did it on a level where they de-branded regular fmcg and only judged them on the eco-labels present on the packaging. This implies that the physical make up of the brand is important in that it must be visible for the consumer that the brand is eco-labelled or otherwise it would not be purchased by this segment of consumers.
The study showed two clear distinctions in reference to coffee. Instant coffees were associated with a brand personality of being lazy and fitted in to the informants’ busy schedule, which also left them to construct brand meanings of it not particularly devoted to them. On the other hand, the brand meaning associated with ‘real’ coffee was more deep felt as it was associated with situations of well-being, comfort and entertainment of guests and thus constructed by the informants use and interpretation of the brand (Fournier 1998: 346). The study suggested that informants do not buy brands because of the physical make up of the brand but because of feelings created in usage situation and this indicates that coffee may be marketed to show what emotions the consumer may experience when using it instead of functional characteristics.

For the structured categories the study showed that they, for six out of seven informants, were constructed based on their usefulness in expressing the informants collective social self and thereby position themselves, however, one category was never fully acknowledged based on their purchase behaviour. They all at some point in the interviews admitted to buying within all categories except Jytte. One informant’s, who knew all the other informants, comments during a phone conversation, may explain this; “we are all very comfortable and if everyday things becomes too difficult we are willing to, momentarily, compromise our beliefs for the simplest or the cheapest option” (phone conversation with Ellen 04.03.14). This implies that other factors, such as price and convenience do influence the brand meaning transfer even though these factors have not been subdued to much research within this paradigm and have also been omitted in this study. Employing a critical view on the study’s findings, they are constructed upon looking for occurrences in the interviews and as such not for findings that disagreed with the existing theory as the study’s purpose is to understand how the phenomena brand meaning construction and transfer work and not to shoot it down. Additionally, the informants possess many sides and different realities are present at different times and this is only one construction of the informants’ reality and other eyes on the interviews may have rendered different results.
7.0 CONCLUSION

The present study was based in a curiosity towards consumers’ choices of fast-moving consumer goods. The prevalent research within consumer behaviour contests to the phenomena of brand meaning construction and meaning transfer to explain consumers’ attachment to brands, however, the existing research is mainly based in studies of consumers and high-involvement brands. Accordingly, a neglected area within consumer research seemed to be whether consumers construct brand meanings of fast-moving consumer goods and transfer these meanings on to themselves. To explore these phenomena, seven qualitative interviews with seven women were performed as research states that women exhibited stronger brand involvement than men and that women have almost a 100 per cent interest in and influence over the daily purchases of fast-moving consumer goods (Fournier; Appendix 9). In such, the informants’ descriptions of their coffee and detergents together with their general purchase behaviour formed the basis for this study.

The study was guided by the present theoretical framework within the humanistic paradigm, which contested to multiple types of involvement between brands and consumers and as such several authors’ research was explored to provide a fitting framework for this particular situation. However, turning to the dominant postmodern perspective on consumer behaviour this evidently showed a disregarded element, namely the sociocultural context that consumers are embedded in at the moment with an increasing focus on environmental concerns. The sociocultural context was argued to be an equally important influence in the construction process because of the increasing use of eco-labelled brands, which is most heavily seen within the fast-moving consumer goods category. Secondly, the theory on brand meaning transfer was discussed where emphasis was both on theory exploring the actual transfer as well as theory exploring consumers’ use of brands as the interpretivist tradition have gained heavy ground since Belk’s research in consumers’ use of possessions.

Employing the theoretical foundation in the analysis rendered the current construction of the phenomena brand meaning construction and brand meaning transfer. As such, the study suggested that the informants proactively construct brand meanings but those brand meanings are not based within the actual brand but related to the feelings that are attached to
the usage situation and as such switching between brands are common as long as those brands still create the same feelings for the informants and hold the standard set by the women based on the functional characteristics, the physical make up and the brand personality. Secondly, it showed that the informants’ meanings of the structured categories were influenced by both the current environmental marketplace ideology as well as their individual situational context. Additionally, the first research into brand meaning transfer from McCracken was deemed inappropriate for this specific context and brand meaning transfer was therefore explored through the interpretivist tradition with emphasis on brand meanings serving as expressions of self. The informants used the constructed brand meanings to express individual and collective social selves. The meanings of the structured categories were used to express a collective social self as affiliating with a group mentality forged a community sense, which is showed by shared consumption. The individualistic expression of self was linked to two concepts, when the meanings of the structured categories exercised power over the informant permeating all areas of her life and when the meanings of fast-moving consumer goods related to the usage situation forged short-term relationships to express the informants’ social selves.

As such this study suggest that certain patterns are evident for women in this constructed segment and their consumer behaviour is influenced by the above, because the increase in eco-labelled brands have changed their perception of conventional brands even though those brands have never changed. The physical make up of brands is linked to an environmental stance, which dependent on the consumers’ self-concept is perceived positively or negatively. Additionally, the study suggest that because the meaning of the brand is not inherent in the brand but the consumer based on their context, consumers search for brands that can aid them with positive feelings related to their self-concept in the consumption situation.

Consequently, it is suggested that marketing of fmcg should be subjected to more research, as the prevalent literature does not consider the myriad of interference processes that influence women’s purchase behaviour. This study, affected by the philosophy of science, does not seek to contest to a single view on this subject nor trying to convey objective knowledge and further research into these phenomena is advised.
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