Master’s Thesis

Exploring the choices behind women’s brand purchase in relation to fitness

Student: Anne Hedegaard Andresen
Academic supervisor: Adam Stasiak
Programme: Cand. Merc. Brand and Communications Management
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Abstract

A central consumption object that has really taken an intake on the Danish consumers is fitness. Especially women’s intake on the different aspects of fitness and purchase of brands relating to fitness have increased. This thesis “exploring choices behind women’s brand purchase in relation to fitness” tries to give an interpretative answer to how women’s perception of themselves, their self-image, other women and others aspects, affect their brand choices in relation to fitness.

This thesis is an explorative study, where the findings are based on empirical evidence, and the theoretical aspects are used to achieve understanding and knowledge about areas of branding, consumer behavior, self-concept and identity. The empirical investigations are qualitative and consist of in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and field observations.

The analysis establishes that women’s perception of themselves, their self-image, other women and others aspects are affected by different aspects like discrepancies, context of brand usage and the situation of the brand usage, need for classification, brand noticeability etc. Based on the analysis the thesis concludes that there are five segments of women, and the segment they belong to affects their brand purchase.

Finally, the thesis concludes that companies need to take all these aspects into consideration, when they promote their brands to consumers, when it comes to fitness. Companies like Nike and the Danish chain, Fitness world are already aware of the different choices behind brand purchase and have incorporated it into their promotion.
The structure of this thesis is reviewed in section 1.6 (The structure of the thesis).

References to literature in the text is marked with ( ), and contains last name of researcher(s), year and page number example (Holt, 1995, p. 15). Further information about literature is present in chapter 8 (Bibliography). The term “ibid” (short for Latin ibidem) is used if the reference is the same as the previous one.

Footnotes are used, when referring to appendix. The footnotes are continuous and placed at the bottom of the pages.

The thesis contains 156.542 characters excl. front page and bibliography, which is equivalent to 68 pages of 2275 characters pr. page. This is inclusive footnotes, but front page, abstract, reading guide and preface, table of contents, bibliography and appendix. Appendix has been separated from the thesis and can be viewed in another folder.

I will like to a special thanks to my academic supervisor Adam Stasiak, my father Finn Hedegaard, Kris Fairbrother Svane, the sixteen participants, my mom Karin, my brother Morten, my sister Line, brother-in-law Carsten and my boyfriend Jens Johannsen for both theoretical and emotional support throughout the thesis process.
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Chapter 1: Introductory

1.1. Introduction

The motivation for writing this thesis comes from an interest in branding and consumer behavior. In today’s society, almost all consumers purchase brands, and everywhere you look, you will see somebody wearing Ray Ban sunglasses, Nike shoes or see signs and commercials for Dior perfumes or Subway’s new super healthy burger.

However, why have purchasing brands become such a big part of consumption? Why not just purchase a product that “does” what you want it to do? Some state that the reason for purchasing brands more often than no-brands relates to marketing and branding. More specifically that these methods have manipulated consumers into thinking that they need certain products/brands in order to achieve their goals and dreams (Arons, October 3, 2011). Others state that the usage of brands originates from people moving from the local communities, where everybody knew each other, to the big cities, where they do not know each other the same way. So the only way we can signal who we are to one another is by using brands, as almost everybody will be aware of the symbols and meanings that they stand for, and thereby consumers can showcase to one another who they are without knowing them (Fromberg, May 3, 2011).

As stated, there is a great interest in the concept of branding and consumer behavior, and one area that was found particularly interesting correlates with a massive trend that is going on in the Danish society as well as in the rest of the world: the whole fitness trend and health wave. For the last couple of years the whole fitness lifestyle has taken over, as eating healthier, working out, wearing fitness brands have become a daily part of consumers’ lives (Nørr & Zøllner, 2007). Particularly interesting is female behavior, as especially women have made this new trend a part of their lives (ibid). Different interesting aspects to investigate in relation to fitness, branding and consumer behavior could be: what motivates women to work out at the gym, why do they choose the brands they do, how do they make brands a part of their own identity, how do brands help these women develop as individuals. In addition, other interested aspects would be: how do other women affect them into brand purchase and how does society affect women in general, in aspects of looks, behavior etc.
1.2. Research question

Based on the above description of the interest field, the thesis is going to examine the following research question:

*How women’s perception of themselves, their self-image, other women and other aspects affect their brand choices in relation to fitness?*

1.3. Delimitation

In order to make this thesis more focused, different delimitations have been made. The study is only going to focus on female fitness consumers and their behavior and actions in regard to brand choices. Additionally, the women investigated will be living in Aarhus, Denmark aged 16-27.

This study delimits only to use qualitative data, as the purpose is to gain a more detailed understanding of women’s lives, feelings, thoughts and choices. It is understood that in-cooperating quantitative methods into the investigation will increase the validation of the findings. However, the purpose is not to make statistic statements on this phenomenon, but instead understand a specific group of women’s feelings, thoughts and opinions about their behavior.

Additionally, three brands have been used in order to make it more tangible for the respondents to discuss and answer questions about their behavior. The brands used were Adidas, Nike and H&M. It was not a requirement for the respondents to only use one of these three brands; however, they needed to know them and have an opinion about them. The reason for choosing these three brands is because of pre-thesis investigation. Different women, who worked out at the gym, were asked to state which brands they mostly use or purchase, and Adidas, Nike and H&M were the ones named most often.

1.4. Structure of this thesis

This thesis is divided into four parts. The first part of the thesis will introduce the purpose and the reflections concerning scientic viewpoint, drawing conclusions, theories and investigation methods. The first part of the thesis contains chapter 1: Introductory and Chapter 2: Method.

The second part contains chapter 3: Branding and Consumption, chapter 4: Identity and Self-concept and chapter 5: Empirical investigation. This part will give a theoretical examination of how consumers consume,
the complex nature of brands, the different self-representatives, the aspect of identity and consumers usage of brands. This part of the thesis also demonstrates the empirical investigation, in terms of selection of respondents, the contents of the interview guides and the different techniques used in the different interviews.

The third part of the thesis will showcase the analysis and the discussion that is established based on two theoretical chapters and the empirical findings from the second part of thesis. The analysis will therefore try to establish how women’s perception, self-image, other women and other factors, related to the gym, affect brand purchase. Chapter 6: Analysis and Discussion is the third part of the thesis.

The last part, chapter 7 contains the conclusion of this thesis and implications regarding further investigations concerning this subject and how companies can use the findings. This can be viewed in the figure below.
Chapter 2: Methods

This chapter deals with the methodological reflections and choices for this thesis. This chapter contains the following aspects:

- The scientific theoretical viewpoint
- How conclusions are drawing
- The investigation methods
- The theoretical reflections

2.1. The scientific theoretical viewpoint

There is no proper way of working with a research question, but the approach you choose is relevant, as it has consequences for the methods and conclusions of the study. In the aspect of the theory of science, we often talk about paradigms, which represent different working methods and assumptions a study is built on (Fuglsang, Olsen, & Rasborg, 2013).

In this thesis, the purpose is to understand how women’s perception of themselves and others affect their brand choices. In order to do this, I need to understand their world, understand who they are, understand their behavior, their actions, their feelings and their intentions. Therefore, to sum it up, I want to understand these women and therefore interpret this specific phenomenon, and hence the hermeneutic paradigm will be the scientific theoretical viewpoint, as the purpose is to understand and interpret, instead of explaining and concluding.

2.1.1. Hermeneutic approach

The hermeneutic paradigm focuses on interpretation, understanding and viewing the world as a picture that you want to try to understand and interpret. Two important aspects of the hermeneutics are the understanding and the pre-understanding. When it comes to the understanding, we can talk about three elements: First, you have to try to understand other people’s values and emotions; second you have to create an understanding of a person through her/his behavior, and at last you can learn to understand by interpreting the consequences of the behavior. However, in order to establish an understanding, you need to have a pre-understanding of the phenomenon that we wish to examine (Højbjerg, 2013, pp. 289-323).
Pre-understanding means those expectations you have, every time you experience something new. Your pre-understanding can also be called a “prejudice”, as it is something you need to confirm or disconfirm. This means that when you perceive new things, the interpretation is based on these prejudices that you have. Since we are talking about pre-understanding, horizon should be mentioned as it is the field that allows us to interpret things. If we wish to examine a new phenomenon, we need to base it on our horizon of understanding (ibid).

All that we experience, hear, see and think arises from this horizon of understanding, which we have even before we try to understand. Nevertheless, despite of this, the pre-understanding is not obvious. The way we think and how we think is all related to the way we were raised and the social values and norms that we have grown up with. This means that your own understanding of things does not come from something measurable or observable, but is instead determined by your own individual interpretation combined with the knowledge you have inside yourself (ibid).

An important principle in hermeneutic, is the hermeneutic circle. What it means is that the understanding should be interpreted circularly, which means that you can only understand something new, if you have already understood the old one. The idea behind the hermeneutic circle is that it constitutes the relation between the overall understanding and the sub-understanding. This means that the only way that you can establish an overall understanding is if you understand the relation between the whole and the individual parts and vice versa (ibid).

2.1.2. Hermeneutic research principles

This section showcases how the hermeneutic approach has been used in relation to the thesis. An important condition to writing hermeneutically is that I explicate my pre-understanding, as it affects the interpretation process. My own pre-understanding of this phenomenon, in terms of how women’s perception of themselves, self-image, other women and other affect their brand purchase in regards to fitness, is that women use brands in order to portrayal a certain image to the outside world. Women want to be viewed as certain in terms of fitness, and therefore they purchase brands that either support who they are and or help display someone they want others to think they are.

In order to avoid concluding based on my own pre-understanding, it is important that I challenge my own prejudices and knowledge by putting them to risk. This means that in my choices of theory, empirical evidence and in my argumentations I strive to give a balanced and nuanced picture of how different aspects affect these women’s brand choices.
In addition to this, my understanding throughout the empirical findings will also be challenged. In the sense that when new ideas, new relevant concepts, not relevant concepts and implications discussed will be added, modified, or deleted in the guides, before preceding to the next interview, so that this can be incorporated to the new understanding of the phenomenon and add to the understanding. This process of adding and modifying to the empirical studies, based on newfound understanding, should add to the interpretation and understanding of this specific phenomenon because considering new and “unknown” aspects should only enhance the understanding of what perceptions, identities and other aspects affect these women concerning brand purchase.

The hermeneutic circle is applied, when the first point is a pre-understanding of the research field based on knowledge, feelings and emotions. This pre-understanding is tested by discussing different subparts subparts. A) the concept of branding, B) Consumption, C) Identity and Self-concept, D) Empirical investigation and E) the analysis, which ends up in a new and deeper understanding of the research field. The conclusions made, based on this interpretation approach is not the definitive truth, but more a realistic, temporary picture of how this phenomenon can be understood. The conclusions can also be stated as my new revised pre-understanding of this phenomenon based on the analysis, interpretations and discussions. Therefore, this thesis’ conclusions cannot be tested and verified by other researchers because they are affected by me as a researcher, and therefore it is very important to explain every single choice and decisions made, in order to ensure transparency and that the reader can follow this thesis’ reasoning.
2.2. Scientific conclusions

When it comes to the methodological way of drawing conclusions, you distinct between an inductive and a deductive method. When the method is inductive, the researchers often examine a trend or a single case, and thereby try to say something more general, based on the results of that specific study. As a contrast, the deductive method is used when researchers use existing theories or hypotheses to say something about a specific case, organization or group of people (Andersen, 2005).

In this thesis, the approach will be inductive, as the purpose is to understand a specific phenomenon, which in this case is how different aspects affect women’s buying behavior. The approach is thereby to combine both the empirical study with different theories, so this thesis will be able to say something more general about why not just these women, but consumers may purchase brands.

2.3. Investigation methods

There are two general investigation methods in the way we collect and process knowledge and data, which are quantitative and qualitative (Andersen, 2005). The quantitative method focuses on specific numbers in order to measure and view them against each other, whereas qualitative methods are where you investigate conditions that are more difficult to measure statically (ibid). The investigation method for this thesis is going to be qualitative, as this thesis wish to understand these women more in-depth. The advantage of qualitative method is that it gives a more specific knowledge about the investigated phenomena (Haug & Heldbjerg, 2010).

This thesis builds on my own production of knowledge, where data has been collected through different qualitative methods. The choice regarding methodological choices regarding empiricism will now be explained.

2.3.1. Empiricism Collection

Empiricism is the experiential knowledge which we collect from real life, and which we thereby interpret, based on theory (Andersen, 2005). As stated earlier qualitative investigation, methods will be used, as the purpose is to receive an understanding of women’s behavior and actions. The qualitative methods will be in-depth interviews, focus group interviews and field observations. The reason for combining these two methods is to minimize the disadvantages that they both possess.
In-depth interview or a research-based interview is a conversation between an interviewer and an interviewee, where you talk about specific theme(s) and try to understand the subject’s experience and her understanding and view of the world or the specific theme(s) (Kvale, 2007). The strengths of in-depth interviews are that the interviewer has a lot of control and you receive a lot of information about the interviewee’s point of view, feelings and thoughts. The disadvantages of in-depth interviews are that they take a lot of time and it is only one respondent’s opinion, which makes it harder to provide evidence of similarities and differences from other respondents (Morgan, 1997). These cons can be, to some extent, decreased by using focus group interviews. A focus group interview is a technique, just like an interview, where you collect information through group interactions on a topic determined by the researcher (ibid). The weakness of collecting information from focus group interviews is that you are not able to receive as detailed information about the participant’s experiences and opinions, as you would with an in-depth interview and some participants might withhold information because they perceive them as too private to share. In addition, disadvantages can also be that some participants might affect other people’s opinions and some respondents might take over the entire focus group and dominate the outcome (ibid).

The entire process behind the empirical investigation builds on the seven research principles of Steinar Kvale (2007). This framework, in terms of this thesis, works as a guideline on what to consider at specific stages and overall during the entire collections of empiricism. By using it as a guideline, it enables me as a researcher to make reflective decisions overall and work more circularly instead of linearly in terms of these seven principles. Working circularly with the empirical collections makes it possible to be critical and insightful at different stages, and thereby make modifications after completing one interview, but before doing another one. The seven research principles are therefore considered one by one, on what to do at the different stages, but at the same time viewed holistically, in the sense that decisions and choices made at one stage affect the other stages.

Field observations were used as an additional qualitative method to in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The purpose of the field observations was to “check” and learn about different activities or situations, the participants discussed in both the interviews and the focus groups discussions, in their natural settings.
2.4. Theoretical reflections

Andersen (2005) defines theory as a set of concepts that determine how, and to a certain point, different elements are connected and under which terms the theory is valid. Throughout the entire thesis, the theories of branding and psychology are used as support, which has also been autonomous in the in-depth interview- and focus groups guides, and in the way, interpreted in the empiricism.

The focus for this thesis is to understand what aspects affect women and what happens psychologically when they purchase products, and in this case, fitness brands. In order to investigate this phenomenon, different theories about branding, psychological concepts as self/identity and consumer behavior have been used.

The framework of Douglas B. Holt (1995) which explains how consumers consume baseball with four different consuming metaphors is the theory used in order to understand how consumers consume consumption object. Additionally to establish how consumers use different aspects like accounting, assimilation, classifying through actions, objects as resources and more to consume a consumption object.

My primary researcher used to define the aspect of branding is Kapferer (2005), who talks about brand image and brand identity, and defines the brand identity prism. The purpose of this framework is to help companies understand the complex nature of the brand. Since the purpose of this thesis is to investigate consumers brand choices, the framework will be used in order to understand how different features of a brand affect consumer behavior in relation to fitness.

Higgins (1987) and Sirgy (1982) will be the primary researchers in terms of explaining the self-concept and Jørgensen (2008) will be the primary researcher with clarifying identity. These theories explain the different self-representatives, which symbolize consumers' thoughts, feelings and goals about themselves and the narrative stories they tell to display their identity. The purpose of these theories is to explain how women's perception of themselves in terms of their different selves can affect their brand purchase.

Belk (1988) and McCracken (1986) theories have been incorporated in order to explain how people use possession to extend their selves and how they transfer the cultural meaning of the goods to themselves. These theories establish why consumers seem to need possessions and how they use different rituals to transfer the meaning of products to themselves.
2.5. **Sub-conclusion**

This chapter has now clarified that this thesis will have a hermeneutic approach and the data collection will be qualitative as in-depth interviews, focus groups interviews and field observation. Furthermore, the different researchers and their theories that will be used in order to investigate the subject for this thesis have been established.

The following chapter explains the theoretical aspects regarding branding and consumption. More specifically, the theories by Holt (1995), Kapferer (2008) and others will be explained.
Chapter 3: Branding and Consumption

This chapter gives a theoretical description of different concepts under the areas of branding and consumption. The focus is to achieve an understanding regarding the research questions about how consumers consume objects and how different aspects of brands can affect brand purchase. This part covers the following aspects:

- An introduction of consumers’ motivational needs and the start of marketing/branding
- The research by Holt (1995) about how consumers consume
- Branding
- Kapferer’s (2008) Brand Identity prism

3.1. Introduction

Since this thesis examines how women’s perception of themselves and more, affect their brand choices, this chapter will start with a description of how marketing and branding started, as this has affected how and why consumers consume specific products/brands.

According to Levy (1959) consumers were apt as an “economic man”, who was more or less careful of how he distributed his pennies. Consumers paid close attention to the concrete value of what he bought, to the durability of the fabric, the quantity of the food, the sturdiness of the building materials. This indicates that goods tended to mean some essentials of food, clothing, and shelter, practical matters were very important.

The philosophy of business was also oriented around these issues, and the market place was largely occupied with the things sold and bought. These were often neither packaged nor advertised. Consumers were customers, not audiences. (Levy, 1959, p. 118).

Nevertheless, around the 1950/1960’s consumers were no longer just customers, but started to be an audience with feelings, meanings and emotions. This happened because marketing and branding became a part of the market place. Gone was the economic man, who only bought goods because of their functional value, and in with the more “uneconomic man” who now also bought products because of their social, personal, symbolic and emotional value that marketing claims that brands/products contained (Arons, October 3. 2011). This also meant that companies could start differentiating their products from their competitors, which marketing and branding could help them accomplish. They could now advertise their products as
objects with social meaning and emotional value that only their goods/brands could give to the consumers (ibid). Consumers still purchase products because of their functional value because they still need the more tangible features, like the warmth from a coat or the sharpness of a knife. However, now consumers do not only buy a coat to keep them warm, they also buy it because it becomes of the emotional and symbolic values that companies “claim” that it contains.

The shift from the “economic man” towards the “uneconomic man” also meant a change in the motives behind consumption. According to Maslow, human beings are driven by particular needs at different times, and he established humans’ needs as a hierarchy that arranges from the most to least pressing needs (Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman, & Hansen, 2009). Maslow’s hierarchy of needs can be viewed below:

Before marketing and branding, consumers bought products because they satisfied their physiological and safety needs, as hunger, safety, transportation etc. A family would buy a car because the man of the house needed transportation to go to work, the housewife would buy flour, butter, milk, sugar, meat and clothing because the family needed to eat food to survive and clothing to keep them warm. However, this all changed. Because of marketing and branding, goods could now also satisfy the social needs, the esteem needs and the self-actualization needs that people also have. A family would now not only buy a car because of its functional value, but also buy a specific type of car because it could satisfy their needs of belonging to a group, status, recognition and realization, in the sense that they would “someone” because they drive this car to work. A housewife did not just buy groceries because of physiological needs, now she bought a specific milk, specific flour, and specific type of soap so she would be recognized as being a terrific mother, a loving wife and perhaps showcase status because she can afford to buy these products.
This gives the indication that consumers’ motivational needs and purchasing habits correlate, in the sense that consumers buy a product to fulfill any given motivational need that they have or wish to achieve.

3.2. How consumers consume

Since this thesis is interested in understanding consumer behavior, and what affects women into purchasing different gym clothes, an important aspect to consider is how consumers consume and what they do when they consume.

In order to understand how consumers consume, the framework of Douglas B. Holt will be used. As Figure below shows, Holt (1995) categorizes consumption in a typology organized around the structure of consumption and the purpose of consumption. The structure of consumption refers to two ways of consuming. One way where the consumers are directly engaged with the consumption object (object actions) and another one where the object works a resource in interactions with other people (interpersonal actions). In regard to the purpose of consumption, consumer’s action can be both an end in itself (autotelic actions) and means to some further ends (instrumental actions) (Holt, 1995).
Taken together, these dimensions are presented by the following four metaphoric meanings of consumption: consuming as experience, consuming as integration, consuming as play and consuming as classification. Holt draws on three of the metaphors: experience, integration and classification from consumer research and uses his own study about baseball spectators to refine these perspectives and identify a fourth metaphor – consuming as play. The four metaphors are explained below in combination with different examples.

3.2.1. **Consuming as experience**

Focuses on the consumers’ subjective, emotional reactions to consumption objects. This means the ability to interpret the object: make sense out of the “object”, what is it, how it works, what conventions are applicable, the evaluation of the object against standards, expectations, previous experience and emotional appreciation (Holt, 1995). An example of this could be someone going on a cruise for the first time. This consumer will have an anticipatory view of the experience of a cruise, which can be an elaboration of previous images collected from the social environment, as well as produced images from advertising and movies. Later the consumer will tend to elaborate further on these constructed images into an anticipated im-
age of a cruise. When the cruise experience is over, they may then be either satisfied or dissatisfied, resulting in their desire to either go on new cruiser or seek other experiences.

3.2.2. Consuming as integration

“Describes how consumers acquire and manipulate object meanings” (Holt, 1995, p. 2). Alternatively said, how consumers actively engage in the process of creating and transferring social meanings (Holt, 1995). Within this type of consumption, consumers try to integrate the objects’ various elements into their own identity, either by reinforcing or reshaping. To facilitate this metaphor, the consumers can use the assimilating practices, which means that they consumers will become an expert. Producing practices, which means that the consumers’ actions contribute to the creations of the object and personalize practices where the consumers modify the “object” to assert the uniqueness of the link they have with it (Holt, 1995). Fitzgerald and Dr. Drennan (2003), who talk about mobile phones, state that the specific brand and model of the mobile phones are important to consumers and that image and personality for younger customer is associated with specific phones. In case of assimilating practices, mobile phone users could become an expert in using a specific mobile model, like knowing how to text, download apps, talk about functions of the phone with only other users of that specific model (Fitzgerald & Dr Drennan, 2003). In terms of producing practices, the users of the mobile phones can choose specific services like music functions, news popping up right when they happen and decide which payment options they want themselves. Examples of personalizing mobile phones include a specific background picture, specific and personalized ring tones, a personalized carry pouches that can reflect the consumers’ perceive image among friends and family (ibid).

3.2.3. Consuming as classification

This metaphor discusses the ways in which consumers use consumption objects to classify themselves in relations to other, by affiliation or distinction practices by using either objects or actions (Holt, 1995). When classifying through objects baseball spectators have adopted a variety of classificatory practices that serve to demonstrate their association with these objects to self and others. Spectators have adopted a number of practices to enhance their ability to communicate their affiliation and distinction beyond just attending a game. Objects used to classify them are clothing, souvenirs and photos as they add credibility to their owners and serve as conversation pieces for sharing stories with other people (Holt, 1995, p. 10). In terms of classifying through actions, the aspects that matter are how the spectators interact with the object. The meaning of action is conveyed to others through participating in conversations, predicting, mentoring, and expressing tastes. Examples of this could be spectators predicting that a specific player will make a fault
because of experiences with previous games or express their tastes by supporting and cheering for a specific baseball team (Holt, 1995).

3.2.4. Consuming as play

This autotelic dimension is considered by Holt, (1995), an important aspect of consuming, since it captures the consumers’ use of consumption objects as a source to interact with fellow consumers, whereby the interaction has no ulterior end (just interaction for interaction’s sake (Holt, 1995, p.3). Two types of playing practices belong to this metaphor, which is communing and socializing. In communing, consumers share experiences with each other through the object, and in socializing, consumers use their experiences with the object to entertain each other (Holt, 1995). Again, the mobile phone can be used as an example of this metaphor. Mobile phones make the consumers able to play in the sense that they text, facetime, send pictures and movies to each other and play games. In case of socializing, consumers can use their cell phones to text each other with different emoji’s, videos and other functions of the phone to entertain each other. With consuming, the user can use the phone to play games and discuss their enjoyment or disappointment with their friends (Fitzgerald & Dr Drennan, 2003).

These “consuming practices” occur in variable relationship. One important implication in terms of consuming is that it is never an experience, a disinterested end in itself. Consumers actions directed toward consumption objects have many faces. They are experiences that enlighten, bore, entertain or frustrate consumer, but they are also means that they use in order to draw themselves closer to consumption the value objects and resources that use to engage other by either impress, befriend or simply to play (Holt, 1995, p.15).

3.3. Branding

As the introduction showcases, branding is a concept that can help a company to differentiate their products from their competitors. The way, they differentiate is by using unique symbols, designs or images that can only symbolize their specific product. This also correlates with Kotler’s et.al definition of a brand: “A brand is a name, symbol, logo, design or image, or any combination of these, which is designed to identify the product or service” (Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman, & Hansen, 2009, p. 425). This way of thinking can be related to identity concerning the fact that a company wants to display specific characteristics, self-image, attributes and values that correlate with aspects that consumers want to portray themselves through.
However, according to the thesis of Hansen (2009), branding is still a name, symbol or logo, designed to differentiate a product, but at the same time, a very abstract phenomenon that contains many different aspects and definitions as well. Hansen (2009) argues that a brand is an extension of a product/service that assigns feelings, meanings and associations to the product/service and that a brand therefore is a product that consists of different layers of both material and non-material values that need to be a part of the entire product/brand. This is very crucial for brands, and thereby logo, quality, packaging are “just” the basic elements for the brands. She also states that the meaning constructions consumers may not always reflect the intention or expectations of the brand owner. “The reality of brand is that human beings create their meanings. Brand owners do not. Of course, brand managers are responsible for sending out signals about the brand, but the way these signals are put together and interpreted are often not the same as that which was intended. Brands live in people’s heads and hearts” (Cordes-Hansen, 2009, s. 54). This actually indicates that the identity, or more specifically brand identity that companies want to signal, may not always match the image, or brand image that the consumers interpret or perceive from ads, ambassadors, social media, distribution etc.

As the explanation indicates, both brand identity and brand image are two very essential concepts to look at, when you are trying to investigate, how motives, perceptions, social norms affect the consumers’ choices of brands. Brand identity refers to the way that a company positions itself or its product to their consumers. Brand image, on the other hand, is the visual or verbal expressions of a brand, which leads to emotional and psychological associations that the consumers have in mind, when they think of a specific brand (Kotler et.al, 2009).

3.4. Kapferer’s brand identity prism

In order to investigate brand identity and brand image, I will use the framework of Jean-Nöel Kapferer (2008), who really focuses on brand identity and brand image, and discusses the distinction that exists between these two concepts. Kapferer (2008) defines brand identity in the following way: “A brand is not the name of a product. It is the vision that drives the creation of products and services under that name. That vision, the key belief of the brands and its core values is called identity. It drives vibrant brands able to create advocates, a real cult and loyalty” (Kapferer, 2008, s. 171). This indicates that the brand identity comes from the company, and the purpose of brand identity is to specify the brand’s meaning, aim and self-image. It is important here not to confuse the word image with brand image, which in this case means the image that the identity wishes to project out to the public. Instead, brand image is the way a certain group perceives the product/brand.
More specifically, it refers to the way in which consumers decode all of the signals emanating from the products, services and communication covered by the brand (Kapferer, 2008, p. 174).

Probably the most important aspect of Kapferer’s framework is his brand identity prism, which is a model that integrates the complex nature of brands. The strength of Kapferer’s brand identity prism is that it incorporates both the physical aspect of brands – the products, but at the same times take into consideration the more social constructed aspect of a brand as personality and reflections, as it depends on who is looking at the brand.

Brand identity consists of six facets, which elect: physique, personality, relationship, culture, reflection and self-image. View the figure below

As the figure illustrates, a hexagonal represents the brand identity prism. The prism is composed of different factors, and one of them is the sender and the recipient. The sender is the brand owner, and therefore affects the physique and the personality prisms, since they determine which sounds, qualities, packaging, color etc. The recipient is the consumers or audience, and two facets important here are the reflection and self-image. The recipient can therefore determine, by including all aspects of the brand, if he/she wishes her self-image to reflect the brand meaning or be just like the stereotype of the brand. The last two facets, which are relationship and culture, bridge the gap between the sender and the recipient.

As seen in the figure, the brand identity prism also includes a vertical division. Physique, relations and reflections are a part of the externalization dimension, which represents the social facets of the brand. Per-
sonality, culture and self-image are a part of the internalization dimension, which is incorporated within the brand itself, within its spirit (ibid). The six facets are described below:

3.4.1. Physiques

This is the brand’s physical features, which are evoked in people’s mind when the brand name is mentioned. This facet is the basis of the brand and thereby its tangible benefits and the backbone of the brand. Key questions concerning this aspect are: what does the brand look like? What can consumers do with it in terms of functionality? Kapferer states that no brand is able to do without drawing attention to its materials’ benefits, which means that even strong brands like Max Factor and Coca Cola have to express in advertising that they sell cosmetics and soft drinks (ibid). Different examples of the physiques of a brand could be the taste of coca cola, the price and position of a grocery store and the fit of a pair of jeans.

3.4.2. Personality

This facet is built up by the communication of the company. The way the company speaks about its products or services shows what kind of person it would be, if it was human (Heding, Knudten, & Bjerre, 2009). An example is used to describe and explain this prism. We have a person named Lizzy, she is young, student, likes to party, be spontaneous and just have fun with her life and she is a customer at Danske Bank. If you had to explain which person Danske Bank would be, you would probably say male, traditional, rational, old fashion and probably works as a lawyer, banker or in the financial sector. Often when discussing the aspect of personality, you often assume that consumers always choose brands that correlate with their personality, but in this case, this does not happen because you can clearly state that Lizzy’s personality is very different from that of Danske Bank. So why does she choose to be a customer in this bank then? One of the reasons for this is that brand personality also depends on the product category that a brand belongs to. Consumers often want a bank that gives security, and that is probably why Lizzy chooses Danske Bank because she wants “someone” rational and responsible to look after her finances than someone, like herself, who might be too irrational and spontaneous. With this said, it should also be stated that consumers can also purchase brands because they think the brand matches their own personality, but again it depends on the product category and the self-image of the consumer (ibid).
3.4.3. Culture

This facet is the system of values and basic principles on which a brand has to base its behavior (products and communication). Culture is the direct link between the brand and organization (ibid). The associations linked to this facet, often relate to the country of origin: Mercedes appeals to German values, H&M to Swedish values and Peugeot to French ones. The researcher Ciceo Andreea (2013) did a study, where the purpose was to explore Kapferer’s brand identity prism in terms of theatre. This study showcases that the culture for these three different theatres is very much reflected in the other prisms, as theatre 1 overall is viewed as a classic, cultivated, trustful, which is the same word used for the culture. Theatre 2 has a culture that is very traditional and commercial, which reflects the overall view of the brands. The third theatre is viewed as a brand that is friendly, cool, young and vibrant, which is also reflected in the culture view of the brand, as they are seen as entertainment through art (Andreea, 2013).

3.4.4. Relationship

In this facet of the prism, the focus is on the relationship between the brand and the consumer. According to Susanne Fournier (1998), brand relationships are quite complex, individual and changeable, depending on which stage consumers are in their lives. A relationship between a brand and consumers can both be negative and positive. This will now be demonstrated with different examples of relationships between consumers and products/services. An example could be with a consumer and his/her hairdresser; this is a very personal relationship that might have been happening for years, as the consumers might have gone with their parents and now comes there themselves and later with their children. This relationship embodies relations, knowledge, friendship; stability and familiarity, as the consumer knows the quality, is safe with the hairdresser and perhaps has built a personal friendship with the hairdresser. Another relationship could be negative, in the sense that a consumer no longer wishes to purchase or be associated with the brand. A consumer receiving bad services from their phone operator and therefore terminating their subscription or a consumer not wanting to fly with a specific travel agencies again because of loss of luggage, bad services etc.

3.4.5. Reflection

This prism is concerned with the consumers’ reflections of the people using the brands or to say it another way, the stereotypical user of the brand. The stereotype of the brand user does not necessarily have to coincide with the target group (Kapferer, 2008). Examples could be McDonalds whose target groups are
families and young people, with values such as fun, fast and easy, while the stereotypical reflection of the user is far broader, as almost “everyone” purchases McDonalds.

3.4.6. Self-image

A very important thing about brands is that they have to speak to the consumers’ self-image, and therefore this prism is concerned with how the consumers view themselves (ibid). This aspect of the prism relates to the construction of identity and the concept of self, as mentioned under personality. Self-image is the way consumers see themselves and their internal mirror, in the sense that it is how I feel, view and look at myself through my own eyes (ibid). Brands are important here because they can help us establish and develop the identity and the self-image that we want to portray and display to the rest of the world. The next chapter discusses these aspects more in-depth.

These six facets constitute Kapferer’s brand identity prism. It is important to state that all the prisms interrelate with each other, and all are important aspect for companies to consider when building a strong brand. Nevertheless, the aim of this thesis is to understand how different aspects concerning the gym affect women’s brand purchase, so the focus will be on the recipient instead of the sender. The purpose of this framework is therefore to establish different facets of the complex nature of brands that might affect women’s brand purchase.

3.5. Sub conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to highlight different aspects regarding branding and consumption. First it was demonstrated that consumers’ motivational needs correlate with purchase, and that the rise of marketing and brands have made it possible for consumers to fulfill more psychological needs like status and acknowledgement through purchasing. Additionally to achieve an understanding of how consumers seem to consume consumption objects and the complex nature of brands.

The framework by Holt (1995) concerning how consumers consume was explained. This theory established four predominant metaphors used to describe consuming, which were consuming as experience, consuming as integration, consuming as play, and consuming as classification.
Furthermore, the brand identity prism by Kapferer (2008) was used to explain the complex nature of brands. This framework demonstrates that brands consist of six different prims, which both individually and combined have an impact on the brand image.

The different theories and concepts have added to the part of the research questions concerning the complex nature of brands and consumer behavior. It highlights that, when consumers consume different objects they use different practices like accounting, assimilating, evaluating and socializing in order to draw him or herself closer to the consumption object. Besides, the theories about branding demonstrate that many different aspects like physique, relationship and culture of brands can have an impact on consumers’ brand purchase.

The following chapter seeks to establish a deeper understanding of psychological concept regarding the concept of self and identity. Furthermore, this chapter also incorporates researchers who discuss how consumers use possession and transfer meaning from goods in order to support their selves.
Chapter 4: Identity and self-concept

This chapter will try to explain the psychological aspect, self-concept and identity. The purpose is to achieve an understanding, in regards to the research questions about aspects concerning consumers’ perception of themselves, their identity, how they use possession to support their selves and the way they transfer the cultural meaning of products to themselves. This chapter will incorporate the following aspects:

- Introduction about the self-concept and identity
- A definition of the concept of self and explanation of consumers’ different self-representatives
- A definition of identity
- Belk’s (1988) and McCracken’s (1986) theories about the extended self and meaning transfer

4.1. Introduction

According to Susanne Friese (2000) the two terms: self-concept and identity are difficult to define because they are social constructions, meaning that they do not really exist. However, it is still useful to employ such concepts since they describe important parts of human experience and behavior. Individuals make use of them to grasp the phenomena that really do exist like inner thoughts, feelings and desires.

In literature, the self or the sense of self has been termed either self-concept or identity. Thus, the self is different from both the self-concept and identity since the self can never be known directly, but both of the latter are by definition those parts of self that can be known directly and hence are accessible through a person’s consciousness. However, is there a differentiation of these two concepts, or are they synonyms? For researchers who write about the self-concept or about identity, you can say that psychologists and social psychologists mostly refer to the construction of the self-concept, whereas sociologists, anthropologists, or philosophers refer to the construction of identity. The distinction between the two concepts is not clear-cut because social issues are equally intertwined with the construction of self-concept as issues of psychology with the construction of identity. Therefore, before a person can acquire a sense of identity, certain cognitive abilities have to develop first. This means that one has to venture into the areas of psychology in order to learn something about how identity is formed. This is also true for the self-concept, as it develops through the process of socialization, interaction and social comparison with other people.

In conclusion, it can be said that the difference between the two concepts rests on the disciplinary divide between psychology and sociology. Therefore, to answer the question before – the two concepts are often
used interchangeably as synonyms. Nonetheless, in the following, the two concepts will be explained separately, in order to establish a better understanding (Friese, 2000, p. 43).

4.2. The self-concept

Since self-concept is a social construction, there are many different definitions, components, and dimensions to the phenomenon.

“Self-concept denotes the totality of the individual’s thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object” (Sirgy, 1982, p. 287). Markus & Wurf (1987) view “the self-concept as an active, dynamic, forceful and capable of change. Grubb & Grathwohl (1967) state that the concept of self is more restricted than personality, which facilitates measurement and centers on the critical element of how the individual perceives himself. In addition to this, they emphasize, “on the concept of the self as an object which is perceived by the individual. The self is what one is aware of, one’s attitudes, feelings, perceptions, and evaluations of oneself as an object. The self represents a totality which becomes a principal value around which life revolves, something to be safe-guarded and, if possible to be made still more valuable” (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967, p. 24). Both Cooley (1902 in Friese, 2000) and Grubb & Grathwohl (1967) specify that the self develops not as a personal, individual process, but it evolves through social experiences and reactions from people.

All these different definitions indicate that the self-concept is a dynamic phenomenon that is only able to evolve and change through social interaction from people, as friends, family, idols etc. In addition to this, the self is also the totality of an individual’s thoughts, feelings, perception and evaluation of oneself as an object.

The self-concept is complex and consists of a number of different selves. Since all of these selves represent different sides of the self, they are generally referred to as self-representations, and those that are subject to conscious reflections have been named self-conceptions (Friese, 2000), (Markus & Wurf, 1987). Not all of these self-representations are alike, and some are important and more elaborated with behavioral evidence than others. Some are positive, some negative, some refer to the individual’s here- and- now experience, while others refer to past or future experiences. Moreover, some are representations of what the self actually is, while others are what the self would like to be, could be, is afraid of being or ought to be (Markus & Wurf, 1987).
William James was one of the first to write about self, and he distinguished between two parts of the self: one that can and one that cannot be known directly. He calls these I-self and the Me-self. The I-self is the self-as-subject and the creator of the Me-self. The Me-self is an empirical aggregate of things that can be known objectively, or the totality of what one knows of one’s self. The Me-self can be divided into three dimensions; the spiritual self, the material self and the social self. The spiritual-self constitutes one’s emotions and desires. The material self is described as the “The sum total of all that he CAN call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses and yacht and bank account. All these things give him the same emotions. If they wax and prosper, he feels triumphant, if they dwindle and die away, he feels casts down”. (Ibid) Hence, the material self is an extended self, which includes all that a person can call me and mine (Belk, 1988). The social self relates to one’s social roles and includes the perception others have about oneself (Friese, 2000).

Tory Higgins (1987) distinguishes between three basic domains of the self: the actual-self, which represents the attributes that someone believes that you possess. The ideal-self, which represents the attributes that someone, would like you to possess. The ought-self, which represents the attributes that some believe you should or ought to possess. Higgins also argues that it is not enough to just distinguish between different dimensions of self, as one must also discriminate among self-state representation by considering the context that the self is involved in. There are two basic standpoints on the self, where a standpoint is defined as a point of view from which you can be judged that reflects a set of attitudes or values. These standpoints are either your own personal standpoint or someone significant, called others. By incorporating this distinction between one’s own standpoints and those of others, we are able to relate different emotional/motivational conditions to different self-state conditions (Higgins, 1987, p. 321). By combining the three dimensions with the standpoints, six different self-state representations occur: actual/own, actual/other, ideal/own, ideal/other, ought/own, and ought/other. The two self-state representations, more specially actual/own and actual/others constitute, which can be associated with a person’s self-concept. The four others are self-guides that an individual might acquire in order to achieve or change something about themselves (Higgins, 1987). Higgins claims that if individuals have a large difference between one of these self-representations and dimensions of self, self-discrepancy occurs. This means that if an individual perhaps perceives a large difference between two or three dimensions of self-conceptions, this discrepancy is associated with feelings of discomfort. For example discrepancy between your actual self and your ideal-self will be associated with depression, and an actual or ought self-discrepancy with anxiety (Higgins, 1987) (Friese, 2000).
M. Joseph Sirgy (1982) refers to three domains of self, where two of them are identical to Higgins, which is the Actual-self, which refers to how a person perceives himself, whereas Ideal-self refers to how a person would like to perceive herself. Instead of the ought self, Sirgy refers to the third self as the social-self, which is how a person presents herself to others. He argues that there appears to be consensus regarding the existence and independent influence of two distinct self-concept motives: self-esteem (or self-enhancement) and self-consistency (Choi & Rifon, 2010), (Sirgy, 1982). The self-esteem motives refer to the tendency to seek experiences that enhance self-concept and the self-consistency motive denotes the tendency for individuals to behave consistency with their view of themselves (Sirgy, 1982).

Nonetheless, Sirgy (1982) has also employed the constructions of self-image values, which is the degree of value attached to a specific actual self-concept and self-image belief, which is the degree of belief or perception strength associated with a self-image. In addition to these self-image values, Sirgy (1982) goes beyond the duality dimensions, by referring to actual self-image, ideal self-image, social self-image and ideal social self-image. The social self-concept defined as the image that one believes others hold, while the ideal social self-concept denotes the image that one would like others to hold.
Markus and Wurf (1986) suggest that individuals both have negative and positive self-conceptions, even if they have high self-esteem. The negative self-conceptions may be important to initiate change and to cope with the contradictions of life. Self-conceptions can also be distinguished between whatever or not they have actually been achieved, or whether they are possible selves or hoped-for-ideals. These self-conceptions that present hopes-for-ideals serve as incentives for behavior by providing images of potential future selves. In addition, these images provide an interpretative and evaluative framework for one’s actual self because they allow a comparison between one’s current state and possible future outcomes, which may both be desirable or undesirable, and thereby affect consumption behavior (Markus & Wurf, 1987).

4.3. Identity

Identity derives from the Latin word idem, which means sameness or continuity (Jørgensen, 2008). This means that a person needs to possess attributes that establish differentiation and that a person needs to be able to form a coherent and meaningful story (Friese, 2000). In addition to this, it is also important to mention that you can distinguish between two types of identity: object-identity and subject identity. The object-identity refers to the identity that others might identify you with, whereas subjective identity is the individual’s own subjective experience of himself or herself (ibid).

Just as with self-concept various ways of defining identity have been made. However, mostly the differentiation between the definitions relate to the researchers’ aim, educational background and point of view. Identity refers to a biography and a narrative story that consumers tell, and consists of past, present and future I’s (Friese, 2000) (Jørgensen, 2008). Identity consists of all our social and personal characteristics, which help others and the individual to understand who you are. Markus and Wurf (1987) also argue that
identity is an image of the self that one tries to convey to others and thereby can also be called a social construction because people themselves construct the identity that they want others to portray of them (Friese, 2000) (Jørgensen, 2008).

As Higgins (1987) stated, human beings experience discrepancy, if one of their selves do not correlate with another self. For example if your actual self is overweight, but your ideal self and ought self wants you to be skinny, you will often become depressed, angry, sad etc. because your selves do not match each other. Marketing and branding can use these discrepancies to sell consumers products by promising to solve these inner struggles, like being overweight, unattractive, depressed etc. By using or purchasing a specific brand, the consumers think they might able to reach their ideal self, social self, ought self or ideal-social self-image according to advertising. This indicates that consumers, in some way, “need” products/brands, in order to achieve their different self-representation and solve the discrepancies that they experience through their life.

4.4. The importance of goods in relation to self-extensions and meaning transfer

Two of the many researchers who also discuss the importance of goods in relation to self-concept and identity, are Belk (1988), who looks at possessions and the extended self, and McCracken (1986), who examines correlations between culture and consumption.

Belk (1988), states that possessions are important to use because we regard them as parts of ourselves. More explicitly, “Our fragile sense of self needs support, and this we get by having and possessing things because to a large degree, we are what we have and possess.” (Belk, 1988, s. 139). According to Belk, the premise in regard to seeing possessions as a part of our selves is not new, and other researchers have argued that a man’s self is the totality of all he can call his, not only his body and physic powers, but also his clothes, friends, house, children, pets etc. All these things give the same emotion, and he will feel triumphant, if they disappear out of this life. This means that we are the sum of our possessions (ibid). In addition, Belk (1988) also argues that possessions are not only a part of the self, but also an instrument to the development of the self. The more we believe we possess or are possessed by an object, the more a part of the self it becomes.

In order to understand the research by Belk (1988) we can take a better look at which possessions are important senses of self, the functions that the extended self have and the process consumers go through in order to make this extension.
The notion of the extended self is a masculine and a western metaphor comprising not only that which is seen as me (the self), but also which is seen as “mine”. The empirical self of each of us is all that he is tempted to call by the name of me. However, it is clear that between what a man calls me and what he simply calls mine the line is difficult to draw. McClelland (1951), in Belk (1988) suggested that external objects become viewed as part of self when we are able to exercise power or control over them, just as we might control an arm or a leg. We may impose our identities on possessions and possessions may impose their identities on us – the more we believe we possess or are possessed by an object, the more a part of self it becomes. Apparently, in claiming that something is “mine”, we also come to believe that the object is “me”. McCarthy (1984), in Belk, 1988) concludes that such objects act as reminders and confirmers of our identities, and that our identities may reside in objects more than they do in individuals. Potential parts of the extended self: body, internal processes, collections, ideas, money, and experiences, and those persons, places, and things to which one feels attached. If possessions are viewed as part of self, or follows that an unintentional loss of possessions should be regarded as a loss or lessening of self. Home and neighborhood are strong sources of personal identity – they contribute to a sense of self to the degree that a person feels control over them (Belk, 1988).

The extended self can have different functions, in the sense that possessions can be a symbol that allows consumers to convince themselves that that they can be a different person than they would be without the possessions. To exemplify this type of behavior, we can take high-heeled shoes for women. When a women puts these shoes on, she becomes powerful, confident, sexy and an object to men that she would not have been, if she had just worn ballet flats or sneakers.

There are according to Satre (1943), in Belk (1988), three ways in which we make an object as part of our self. The first one is by controlling an object for own personal use. One example of this can be gift giving, since this is also a form of control. When giving a gift, the present will always be associated with the giver, which means the contributor’s identity extends to the recipient. The second way of having an object and incorporating it into the self is by creating it. Whether the thing created is a material object or an abstract thought, the creator retains an identity in the object for as long as it retains a mark of some other associations with the person who brought it into existence. The last way goods become a part of the self, is by knowing them. Whether the object known, is a person, place or thing. The reason why knowing the object is so important is that it inspires a sexual desire to have the object. To sum this up means that making objects a part of the self is controlling, creating or knowing it (ibid).
Therefore, Belk (1988) is talking about how we use possessions to extend our selves, McCracken (1986) talks about the constant transfer of cultural meaning. What he says is that the traditional movement starts by transferring the cultural meaning from a culturally constituted world to the consumer good. Then the meaning of the good is transferred to the consumers (McCracken, 1986).

According to McCracken (1986), movement of transfers consists of three location of meaning and different instruments that transfer meaning to the next meaning location. This movement of transfer is showcased in McCracken’s own model below:

![Movement of Meaning Diagram](image)

As seen in the figure, the first location called: Culturally Constituted world represents the everyday experience of the individual, who senses the world with the beliefs and assumptions of his/her culture. This meaning can be characterized in two concepts: cultural categories and cultural principles. What cultural categories do is that they help organize the society by dividing the world into different segments, like nature, space and people. Categories also comprise people, in groups as, gender, class and occupation. What categories do is that they help people understand the world they live in, and their meaning substantiates through the visible consumption of goods and services. Cultural principles on the other hand are the ideas that help guide the construction of cultural categories. This can be illustrated with clothing, in the way that women often use clothing to communicate feminism, whereas male clothing needs to display masculinity. To sum it up, cultural principles give us the reasons for performing the segmentation, and cultural categories provide useful description for these segments (Kardes, Cronley, & Cline, 2011).

For the meaning to transfer from the culturally constituted world to the consumer goods, the instruments of advertising and fashion systems are used. These two concepts are important in transferring the meaning
to consumer goods, as they inform the consumers about the cultural meanings in the products (ibid). Advertising captures the cultural meaning and includes it in the consumer goods, and therefore can be able to innovate new cultural meanings and reassign old ones (McCracken, 1986). Fashion system on the other hand is more complex. It transfers meaning through magazines, whereas the fashion world associates certain styles of consumer goods with established cultural categories and principles. What the fashion system also does is it transfer meaning, through what McCracken calls opinion leaders, who help shape and refine the cultural meaning with their insight into cultural innovations, changes in style, value and attitude. As mentioned many times, consumers use consumer goods to construct their lives. That goods possess cultural meaning is sometimes evident to the consumer and sometimes hidden. Consumers may consciously see and manipulate such cultural meanings as the status of a consumer item (ibid).

This is the last transfer from consumer goods into the life of the consumer. These instruments appear to qualify as special instances of symbolic actions or rituals. What rituals are social actions devoted to the manipulation of cultural meaning for purposes of collective and individual communication and categorization. Rituals are a way of affirming, evoking, assigning or revising the conventional symbols and meanings of the cultural order. There are four different types of rituals, which help transfer cultural meaning into the life of consumers: exchange-, possessions-, grooming- and divestment rituals. The exchange ritual relates to gift giving, which means that gifted possession includes properties that the giver wishes to transfer to the receiver. An example of exchange rituals could be that your best friends give you a sexy dress because they want the sexiness, confidence etc. from the transfer to you, so you can become these things. Possession rituals are concerned with claiming ownership over the possessions in the sense that consumer spends a lot of time cleaning, discussing, comparing and showing them off. Possession rituals are often those that consumers use to move cultural meaning out of their goods and into their lives. The usages of this ritual are very much seen in today’s society, in the sense that almost everybody posts and shows off their possessions on Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat and Facebook. Examples of this would be people showing off their new purchased clothes, their way of decoration their house, their boyfriend and friends. Grooming rituals on the other hand relate to going out, cleaning your car, getting ready for a party or getting dressed in general. The last ritual divestment is related to removing ownership of something we have bought from someone, and then redecorating or cleaning it in order to free it from its previous meaning (ibid). All of these rituals are probably also important in the meaning of transfer of consumer goods to individuals, regarding fitness and sportswear.
4.5. Sub conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to investigate the psychological aspect concerning self-concept and identity and to incorporate researchers who have implemented these psychological concepts into consumer behavior. The chapter demonstrates that both self and identity are social constructions, human beings have created in order to understand and make sense of inner thoughts, feelings and goals.

Higgins (1987) and Sirgy (1982) in correlation with other researchers, demonstrate that the self-concept consist of many different self-representatives that all affect consumers view of themselves. These self-representatives could be future, present and past self, but also ideal-self, actual-self or social-self-image. Additionally, Higgins (1987) introduces the term self-discrepancy that he states occur if individuals experience discomfort or inconsistency between their different self-representatives and can thereby affect individual’s perception of themselves.

Belk and McCracken’s theories add to the understanding of consumer behavior, since they elucidate that consumers transfer the cultural meaning of the products to themselves by using different rituals and that they purchase and possess goods in order to support their fragile selves.

These aspects add to the understanding of this phenomenon in terms of giving knowledge about how women’s perception of themselves is affected by their different self-representatives and the discrepancies they might experience between them. Furthermore, women’s brand purchase concerning fitness might be to align with discrepancies between different selves, to support their fragile self or, transfer the meaning of the products to themselves by using different possession rituals.

Both the concept discussed in this chapter and the previous chapter have added to the understanding of this phenomenon, in the sense that self-image, as stated under my pre-understanding might not be the only factors that have a say in how women’s perception of themselves, their self-image, other women and other aspects affect their brand purchase, regarding fitness.

The next chapter will be a more detailed explanation of the empirical investigation. Here choices regarding selection of respondents, development of interview-guides, exercises used etc.
Chapter 5: Empirical investigation

This chapter will give a more detailed description of how the empirical investigations were developed, collected and transcribed. This chapter contains the following aspects:

- The purpose of the interviews, focus group discussions and observations
- Selection of respondents
- The development and structure of interview-guides and observations
- How the findings were collected
- Validation of the findings

4.1. The Purpose of the interviews, focus group discussions and observations

The purpose of doing the interviews, focus groups discussions and observations was to understand the topic of how women’s perception of themselves, other women and more affect their brand choices in regard to fitness clothes.

The empirical investigation consisted of a first round with three in-depth interviews, a round of two focus group interviews and a second round of three in-depth interviews. The reasons for doing the collecting of empiricism this way were to be reflective after each interview and make modification and changes, if needed, to the interview guides based on the new understanding, knowledge and experience that happens after conducting an interview. The field observations were made throughout the interview period in order to understand the world of fitness better, the mind of the women and add to the understanding of the subject. Additionally, the purpose of the field observations is to be used as support to different aspects discussed by the participants, and therefore increase validation.

4.2. Selection of respondents

In order to select the most reliable respondents, different criteria were established. They need to be women, they needed to work out at the gym, and they needed to use either Adidas, Nike or H&M. Another important criterion was that none of the participants were friends and/or relatives to me. However, age, fitness level, occupation or other brand usages, were not important criteria, since the purpose is, to understand different women, and thereby increase validity and reliability.
The study consisted of 16 different women, scouted either at the gym or with help from family and friends, in order to meet the important criteria of not being my friends or family, which succeed. Their ages range from 16 – 27; they were students, workers or jobseekers. They all used more than one of the brands Adidas, Nike and H&M. However, it was often in combination with other brands.

All the respondents will be anonymous, which means that those participating in the in-depth interviews will be named either respondent one, two, three, and the respondents participating in the focus groups will be referred to as participants of either focus group one or two. However, the respondents from the focus groups were asked if it was okay that their names were visible in order keep a track of who was saying what and when, which was okay with all of them.

4.3. Development and structure of interview-guides and observations

The developments of the interview-guides for both the in-depth interviews and the focus groups interviews are based on the understanding achieved from the theoretical concepts in chapter two and chapter three. Both interview-guides were semi-structured, which meant that there were different topics that the respondents needed to discuss. However, there was room to deliberate on new point of views and new information explained by the respondents and modifying questions or leaving some of them out (Andersen, 2005), (Haug & Heldbjerg, 2010). In addition to being semi-structured, both interview methods consisted of different interviewer questions as open questions, follow-up questions, probing questions after an answer, indirect questions, provoked questions, and they were met with silence and nodding (Kvale, 2007). The reason for using these different questioning techniques was to get more detailed and explorative answers to the questions. The development of field observations was based on the statements from the in-depth interviews and the focus group discussions. There were different situations, differences and behaviors that needed to be observed, however there was room for deliberation in terms of observing other aspects that might not have been mentioned explicitly.

The in-depth interview guide contains questions about the participants’ associations with fitness, usage and relationship with the gym, description of themselves, brands and the usage of the brands outside of the gym\(^1\). Each interview started with an introduction in order to explain the purpose, content and format of the interview. Afterwards the participants introduced themselves in terms of age, occupation, how long they have been going to the gym, which brands they use and how often they work out. Then the interviews

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\(^1\) Appendix 1: Interview-guide for the in-depth interviews p. 2 - 10
took off and the participants discussed the different topics about fitness, brand and themselves. Some of the questions were “What associations do you have when I say the word fitness?”, “Do you remember your first time at the gym?”, “How would you describe yourself?” and “If H&M was a person, would it then be a man or a woman?” All of the interviews ended with a debriefing by asking the respondents if they had anything to add and ask more overall questions about usage of brands outside the gym. Additionally, one exercise technique was used during the interview, photo sorting. The photo sorting was a power point illustration of different types of women, in different situations. The respondents were asked to describe the different women, in terms of occupation, what she did at the gym, what brands she wore and so on. Afterwards they were asked, based on their description, to say which of these women reminded the most and the least of themselves. The purpose of this exercise was to implicitly get the respondent to talk about themselves, how they view and see themselves, and to some extent their ideal person in a fitness center and in general.

Before each interview, in both the interview rounds, the respondents filled out some pre-casting questions about their daily routines, their goals, important values to them and more, to get to know them better and incorporate some of their answers into the interview.

The development of the interview guide for the focus group was established after the first round of in-depth interviews, in order to incorporate new achieved knowledge and understanding of the subject. This guide contained questions about their associations with fitness, the importance of appearances and brands usage and symbolic value. The structure of the guide was the same as for in-depth interviews, so by starting out with an introduction of the format and purpose and respondents’ presentation of themselves, then moving on to discussions about the different discussions and then debriefing the focus groups by asking if they have anything more to add. Questions asked in the focus groups were “Do you care about your looks, when you go to the gym?”, “Why does this brand attract you the most” and “Why do you think people purchase brands?” However, the focus group interview guide contained more exercise techniques in order to encourage and increase discussions among the participants. The focus group contained two different exercises techniques, photo sorting and brand planet. The “photo sorting” was a power point presentation, with two different slides. The first slide consisted of two pages. On one page, there were pictures of women in no branded jogging clothes and on the other side pictures of women wearing branded fitness clothes. The second slide contained new pictures of women wearing branded fitness clothes, and no branded fit-

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2 Appendix 2: Photo Sorting p. 10 - 11
3 Appendix 3: Precasting p. 11 - 15
4 Appendix 4: Interview-guide for Focus Group p. 15 - 20
ness clothes⁵. The purpose of this exercise was a follow-up and a “test” to see if the answers they had made in the previous discussion about “how much they care about how they look at the gym” correlate with the answers they gave during this exercise.

The brand planet technique was an exercise that the respondent had to do about Adidas, Nike and H&M. The respondents were told that they were going to travel on a spaceship to a new planet, and then asked to think about how this planet looked, what smells it had, what people lived on this planet, if they liked the planet and if it had anything unique that no other planet had. This exercise was done three times for each of the three brands, and afterwards the respondents were asked to explain which one they liked the most and which one the least. The purpose of this exercise was to see if their planets actually correlated with their description of the brands done earlier, and thereby create a general discussion about why they use the brands they do in regards to symbolism, image, perception, society etc.

The field observations incorporated different topics that needed to be investigated in order to understand behaviors, situations or different context discussed by the participants. The aspects observed: what do women wear, what do men wear? Correlation between fitness level and clothing? What brands were mostly worn? Is there a specific culture in a fitness center? How do fitness practitioners behave, in terms of interaction, socializing etc.?

4.4. Collecting the empirical findings

The completion of all the three different interview rounds took place from the 26 of October to the 23 of November 2015 and was done in Danish. All interviews were recorded with a microphone in order to increase accuracy, but notes were still taken in terms of security and the ability to remember important statements that needed further elaboration. The transcription process was also completed during this period, and both the in-depth interviews and focus group interviews were transcribed word by word and in Danish. Laughter and pauses were also incorporated, as they may be important in terms of the analysis, interpretation and conclusion. Field observations took place from November 1 to December 5 2015, and were done while working out, in order to blend in.

The first round of in-depth interviews took about 1h45m – 1h26, and the respondents were a 26-year-old student, a 25-year-old master thesis student and 22 year old forward trainee, interviewed in that order. The two focus group interviews happened after the first round of in-depth interviews. The first focus group lasted around 2h38m, including breaks, and consisted of five women, ages 25-27, two doing internships,

⁵ Appendix 5: Brand/No brand Exercise p. 20 - 21
one student, one fitness instructor and one jobseeker. The second focus group lasted around 2h50m, including breaks with also five women participating, age 21-23, four students and one jobseeker.

The second round of in-depth interviews lasted around 1h20 m – 1h09, and the respondents were 22-year-old student, a 16-year-old high school student and a 20-year-old student, conducted in that order.

The field observation consisted of five rounds of observations lasting approximately 1 hour each. The first observation happened after the first in-depth interview, the second two observations happened while completing the rest of the interviews and focus group discussions, and the last two took part afterwards.

Throughout the entire process of collecting the empiricism, different modification and changes were made for both guides. The in-depth interview guides were modified two times. After performing the first interview, to some extent a pilot interview, with the “original” guide, different modification occurred. Some questions were added and others deleted and the photo sorting exercise was changed a little bite. The respondent clarified that some of the pictures were too similar, which lead to changing some of the pictures and decreasing the number from fifteen to fourteen. The interview guide was changed a second time, after completing the next two interviews and the two focus groups, in order to compensate for the newfound knowledge and understanding.

The focus group guides were modified after performing the first focus group interview, but only in terms of the exercise “photo sorting”. The respondents were very critical about the pictures used, and thereby had a hard time discussing the questions asked. They were not able to ignore the pictures and then just talk generally about choosing no brands over brands or the other way around, so in order to avoid this, the pictures were changed before the next focus group, after guidance from the first group, on which pictures to add instead.

4.5. **Evaluating the empirical investigation**

In this section, the empirical investigation will be evaluated in terms of four different assessment criteria regarding qualitative methods. These are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Haug & Heldbjerg, 2010).

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6 Appendix 6: Interview-guide for in-depth interview two p. 21 - 29
7 Appendix 7: Photo Sorting two p. 29 - 30
8 Appendix 8: Interview-guide for in-depth interview three p. 30 - 38
9 Appendix 9: Brand/No brand Exercise two p. 38 - 39
4.5.1. Credibility

The findings’ credibility was ensured by transcribing everything stated by the participations. This secures that the information acquired is the same through the entire process and not just based on different aspects remembered from both the in-depth interviews and the focus groups.

In terms of viewing the credibility of the participants, there was a focus throughout the entire investigation to secure that the respondents’ statements and answers were as credible as possible. This was done by using probing questions and asking “provocative” questions in order to get as truthful answers out of them. Since some of the questions were personal and this might inhibit the respondents in terms of asking honestly and openly, by securing anonymity and telling them in the introduction that the interest is not what they think I wish to hear, but their true opinions and feelings concerning the topics.

However, some of the participants from the second focus group’s credibility have been questioned a little bite. The reason for this was that this focus group consisted of five women, where four of them were close friends. The though was that if they were friends, the focus group would be more dynamic and energetic because of their knowledge and relationship with each other, and therefore not afraid to speak their mind and engage in meaningful discussion. Instead, the participants seemed inhibited by this, and therefore some of their statements were lost because of laughter or shyness because what the others might say or think. However, after a while the participants’ inhibitions disappeared, which increased the credibility.

Overall, the respondents, based on their statements and behavior are viewed as credible.

4.5.2. Transferability

The findings for this thesis can, to some extent be transferred to other contexts in regards to brand purchase, as how women’s perception of themselves, their self-image and further in terms of fitness, can explain brand choices in other situation or towards other consumption objects. Some of the results can be transferred in collaboration with others results to say something general about why women purchase brands and how their perception of themselves, their image, other women and others factors affect this. Additionally, the findings from this thesis can be used as the foundation to a more quantitative and objective examination of the subject.

4.5.3. Dependability

The findings for this thesis is very much dependent on the choices of the respondents chosen. The respondents have all lived up to the criteria established in terms of selection participants. However, a greater number of in-depth interviews and focus groups would only have added to the transferability and the understanding of the subject, as the validation of the thesis would have increased. Furthermore, going
through the findings, other users of the gym should also have been a part of the investigation. These are women, who are new users of the gym, older women using the gym, women who compete as fitness models, and women who use the gym in addition to sports activities. Their reasoning for purchasing brands would only have added to the understanding of this subject.

4.5.4. Confirmability

In terms of confirming the findings by others, this will to some extent be difficult because this thesis has an hermeneutic viewpoint, which means it is constructed based on subjective interpretations and understanding. However, throughout the process there has been a great focus on being as critical towards own pre-understanding, knowledge and prejudices and thereby not let it affect the question asked during the interviews and impact the statements of the respondents, and thereby the findings.

Based on the above description of the four assessment criteria, the findings are validated as good, as the focus throughout the process has been to receive as credible statements from the participants and setting up criteria’s in order to select as efficient respondents as possible. Nevertheless, since the findings are based on subjective interpretations and understanding, confirming them might to some extent be difficult since it is subjective and not objective, which is easier to measure.

Sub-conclusion

This chapter established the criteria behind the selection of participants, how the interview-guides were developed, how the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, how the observations were planned and the modification made throughout the process. It also concluded that the findings were validated as good in terms of credibility, dependability and confirmability, but transferability was harder to verify as this thesis is subjective and based on my own interpretation.
Chapter 6: Analysis

After that the theoretical concepts and the collections of the findings have been described, it is time to create a coherent picture of the link between the different theories and the statements and attitudes from the respondents. This combined provides a nuanced and an overall analysis of this research. The analysis has been divided into the following themes:

- Women’s perception of themselves
- Women’s relationship with and usage of fitness
- Differences between men and women,
- The usage of brands and different aspects of them
- The importance of image.

6.1. Women’s perception of themselves

Based on the different participants, the way they see themselves has a great impact on purchasing fitness clothing/brands. Many of the respondents seem to have discrepancies, as Higgins (1987) talks about, between their different self-representatives. In order to demonstrate these discrepancies, a figure has been developed based on Sirgy’s (1982), Higgins’ (1987) theories about different selves and on the respondents’ statements.
As the figure illustrates, the discrepancies the respondents’ experience are between their actual selves and their other three selves. Many of the participants describe themselves as someones, who just want to have a great time, hang out with friends, party and eat what they want, however their other selves want them to work out, be trendy, have the “so-called ideal body” established by society and humans and eat healthy. Their actual selves do not correlate with their ideal-self, ought-self and ideal-social-self-image, as who they are does not fit in with the picture of how they think others want them to be, who they want to be and how they wish others to see them. Their perceptions of themselves are therefore to some extent more negative, in the sense that who they are, does not relate to “who they wish to be both in terms of image and ideal”.

“..I was happier, when I was fitter. Because then I looked more attractive.. But not that I should be that way because I have a boyfriend, but.. It is just for me..”\(^{10}\) Nevertheless, the participants who are more aligned with their different selves, even though they also experience discrepancies, are also more positive to who they are. “I am comfortable with the way I am. I have a nice body. I do not want to be skinny, of course I

\(^{10}\) Appendix 16: Second round of interview: Respondent four p. 115
could lose a couple of kilos here and there, but overall I am very satisfied with the way I look, also the way my body looks”\textsuperscript{11}.

Additionally, an aspect that also affects women’s perception is identity, in terms of strong or weak identity. Women with weak identities are more affected by others, as to what you do, how you should look, what you should wear, how you should be/behave and how you should be in a given situation compared to someone, who is more balanced in their identity. “I do not. I think I have an Instagram profile, but I do not use it. I am a person who get easily affected, and I cannot separate the manipulated reality with the true reality. It is the best choice for me. I get really confused (Laugh). However, of course I have some I follow on Facebook, and they affect me, I hope can that I can just pass by their post, but I can feel that something in my unconscious mind sticks. Therefore, in some way they do. I cannot help myself”\textsuperscript{12}. This indicates that women with weaker identities will be more affected by others, and therefore have a need to adapt the behavior from everyone else, because they do not have the strength or courage to show who they really are, because “they may not know, who they are”. Whereas, women who have a strong identity seem to be more secure with themselves and therefore want to “stand out” a little bit more, instead of looking like everyone else. “I am opposite. The other day at the gym, I saw someone who had the same top as me. I thought, thank god I did not wear that today because then I would want to hide”\textsuperscript{13}. Moreover, fitness level and knowledge about fitness also affect identity and perception. Women with a consistent workout routine and knowledge about exercise, behavior and clothing are less affected by others, more balanced in their “fitness identity” and aware of who they are at the gym. Whereas women who are less sure of themselves at the gym, and might perceive themselves as “beginners”, “duty user” or “common user” have a “weaker fitness identity”. They will be more affected by what others do and trends mean because of their ignorance and insecurity\textsuperscript{14}.

Furthermore, it is not obvious that women’s perception of themselves is black or white; they are not just affected by experiences with discrepancies or having a weak or strong identity. Perception also seems to depend on who consumers should be and how to behave in a given context. “I also think that it is not something unique about it. I think, when I go to the gym, I want to blend in there, and do what you do there. If I go out, then I want to look the way you do, when you go out and blend in, and the same with University, then I want the same Mac Book, as everyone else. Like. I just think it is like that. You do what it is correct in the situation you are in and go all in there”\textsuperscript{15}. This statement still gives an indication that most consumers

\textsuperscript{11} Appendix 20: Second round of interview: Respondent six p. 153
\textsuperscript{12} Appendix 16: Second round of interview: Respondent four p. 118
\textsuperscript{13} Appendix 23: Focus Group two p. 201
\textsuperscript{14} Appendix 10 – Appendix 23 p. 39 - 221
\textsuperscript{15} Appendix 22: Focus Group one p. 193
have insecurities and “weak” identities. But it also demonstrates that women just want to be perceived the way they are supposed to be at a gym. When they are at the gym, they want to be viewed as serious, active and healthy, who see this as an important part of life because that is “what fitness is about”, and when they are exposed to the fitness culture through social media and friends. “...When I work out sometimes, I think why do I not care more about this. However, as soon as I am out of the gym and home again, then I am fine with that to. So it might be that just in the work out situation you like being there and be that way”\textsuperscript{16}. Nevertheless, who they are at the gym, and how much they have synchronized their identity with fitness also affect their perception of themselves.

6.2. Women’s relationship with, experiences and usage of fitness

Since the purpose of this thesis is to investigate different factors behind brand purchase concerning fitness, examining these women’s relationship and usage of fitness is also important, as this might have an impact on their brand purchase. In order to analyze this theme, the theory of Holt (1995), explained earlier, will be used. Fitness is the consumption object and will be analyzed in terms of how women use different consuming practices to experience, integrate, play or classify.

6.2.1. Consuming as experience

The interesting question here is how do women experience the fitness consumption object based on the interpretive framework that they apply to engage the object. The participants see the consumption object as an “experience”, where they can work out, get in shape, lose weight, “achieve their goals”, be social, something you are supposed to do and “an escape place”\textsuperscript{17}. Additionally, they also state that there is a certain way of “behaving” or a “fitness culture” at the gym, and in order to learn the “correct behavior”, they used different accounting practices like hiring personal trainers, going with friends the first couple of times, asking people how to do different exercises and workouts or joining fitness classes. “...there is a certain culture to how you work out, first you go there and then there, and do specific things, and if you walk around like you are confused then, that is just not nice”\textsuperscript{18}. “...It is just nice knowing which exercises that are the best, and when you start at a new gym, you may not know all the different machines, and then it is nice to get some guidance”\textsuperscript{19}.

\textsuperscript{16} Appendix 22: Focus Group one p. 193
\textsuperscript{17} Appendix 10 – Appendix 23 p. 39 - 221
\textsuperscript{18} Appendix 10: First round of interview: Respondent one p. 41
\textsuperscript{19} Appendix 20: Second round of interview: Respondent six p. 151
As already stated most of them go to the gym in order to work out, get in shape and achieve their goals: however, their appreciations for the object fitness differ. Some of the participants see the fitness consumption as fun, egocentric and an important part of their lives and identity, whereas others see it as a burden or “thing I have to do”, in order to be healthy, lose weight, “pressure from society and peers” or be able to go out and drink beers and eat junk food. “I work out to lose weight. Because it is so easy to say, I know that I am healthy and that I have a healthy lifestyle, however, I still have some extra kilo on my body, so I only do it to lose weight, and not have a bad conscience, when I drink beer during the weekends (laughs)”20. “A duty. Just something that you have to do sometimes. It just needs to be done after a long day”21.

6.2.2. Consuming as integration

In contrast to how these women experience the fitness object, integration is an instrumental act pursued to facilitate the symbolic use of the object. According to the participants, they can integrate a variety of elements of the fitness world into their own identity: their lifestyle choices, clothing, individualized workout schedules, “fitness gurus”, social media etc. The participants who want to integrate themselves in the world of fitness did different things. Some for example hired personal trainers in order to achieve knowledge, others read about different exercises and workout schedules in order to enhance their performance and knowledge about working out. “I started at a new gym, so I got one of the trainers there to make a program for me, in order to know which exercises were the best, and when you start working out at a new gym, you might not know all the machines and all the stuff, so it was nice with some guidance.”22. ..I could not get any result with my training, and I was just not satisfied, so I wanted something new, and then I tried a personal trainer, where I had a meal plan and workout schedule”23. Besides, to look like and feel like a fitness practitioner, almost all of the participants bought new clothing in order to become a part of the constituted fitness world. “In the beginning I always wore high knee socks, when working out, but then I noticed everybody wearing ankle socks, and that is just it. When you look at a real fitness girl, they wear tights, tank tops and ankle socks... Now I always wear ankle socks, I do not know why, it just fits better. In the beginning, you could see that I was a handball girl. Since I wore knee high socks, but I am not a handball girl anymore, now I go to the gym, so that has changed”24. “I wore some clothes, and then I went into the fitness center with those clothes on, but it was

20 Appendix 22: Focus Group one p. 173
21 Appendix 23: Focus Group two p. 195
22 Appendix 20: Second round of interview: Respondent six p. 151
23 Appendix 12: First round of interview: Respondent two p. 68
24 Appendix 20: Second round of interview: Respondent six p. 152
not the same, as the people there, so later I purchased new clothes that looked like the ones from the gym”25.

Another way of integrating the constituted elements of the fitness world to the consumers’ identity is through social media. Both in the focus group interviews and in the in-depth interviews, the participants argue that almost all of them follow different “fitness people” and that it is “common behavior” in today’s society to post pictures of your healthy lunch/dinner, your fitness clothes or newly purchased fitness clothes and of yourself at the gym26. This gives a picture that women use possession rituals to transfer the cultural meaning of the fitness world to themselves by displaying that they are integrated in the world of fitness. They post pictures of their food, clothing, themselves at the gym, and work out is an important part of their integration (McCracken, 1986).

In addition to transfer meaning through possession rituals, grooming rituals also seem to matter when it is about being a part of the “fitness world”. “I also think it is dependent on which fitness center you go to and where you are at. You adapt to it, it is extreme here in Aarhus, with some centers. There is filled with students our age, and it just them who are there. When I work out at another gym, then I might not care, when I get up in the morning. I look like a look. That is how I am when I am home in Tønder working out, and there is old people. It is very cozy, and it does not matter what you look like. There is a difference there”27. “You have to wear cool clothes in some fitness center, depending on where you are. You have to look good when you go to the gym. You have to put on makeup that is how I feel”28. These quotes demonstrate that another way of becoming a part of the fitness world, is to fit into the different gyms and “have the right look” for the specific gym. Women do not only have to integrate in order to fit the fitness trend, they also have to integrate in terms of which gym they go to and are a member of. If you go to a gym, where women wear makeup and use specific brands, you have to assimilate to be part of the center and “their society”.

6.2.3. Consuming as play

Using consumption object as a resource to interact with fellow consumers, in terms of communing and socializing seems be an important in terms of consuming the fitness object.

Many of them discuss that a gym is a social place, where you can meet people, get a date, hang out with your girlfriends, meet new acquaintances or get other people’s attentions. There are different quotes that demonstrate the socializing practices: “But, I think that because. Even though the gym is mostly for working

25 Appendix 10: First round of interview: Respondent one p. 42
27 Appendix 23: Focus Group two p. 200
28 Appendix 23: Focus Group two p. 200
out. It is also a social place, in some kind of way. There are many people. People you do not know. Who sees you for the first time, every time you come there? I just think that, then it might not be a night out, but you still want to look nice because you meet new people that you do not know. “... Have makeup on, tight ponytail, some people have at least, I have notice. To get some attention, probably from guys.” These quotations show that women also use the fitness object as a resource in order to interact with friends, get attention, “hang out” and get to know other people.

Different discussions in both the focus groups and in the in-depth interviews imply that sharing your experiences about fitness is an important part of consuming fitness. The social media can also be applied in this case, as many of them state that they like to follow other people on Instagram and Facebook, either fitness trainers, people who have lost a lot of weight or others who are trying to accomplish their “fitness goals”. One of the respondents argues that the reason why she follows people on Instagram is to motivate herself because they are similar to her, and then she can apply their experiences to her own life. Another respondent says: “... You have to show your result and post pictures of yourself, when you are the gym, and other stuff. I just think that it has to do with why I do not want to be there as much because... This goal you have, that you need to different things and post pictures of yourself...” Additionally, indicated by the respondents is that they like to share their own experience with others, discuss new exercises and more. “I think it is really cool because I am so fascinated by this world, so when people come up to me and ask me if I am on a diet or what workouts I do, how long have I been exercising, do you have diet plan or workout schedule. I think it is interesting to talk about, and I am always very open about it, when my classmates ask me because they to some extent find it interesting because not many of them are really that into it. I just really like to talk about. It is cool.” Fitness is no longer just a place people go to in order to “improve body parts” or weight loss, it has become so much more. Fitness is now a consumption object that women use to hang out with friends, to socialize with different people, get attention from people, a resource to start conversations, a common hobby/interest with friends and so on.

6.2.4. Consuming as classification

“I think there are more and more women who have started going to the gym now because we want to demonstrate what we can and become strong and independent.”

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29 Appendix 10: First round of interview: Respondent one p. 44
30 Appendix 14: First round of interview: Respondent three p. 93
31 Appendix 10: First round of interview: Respondent one p. 49
32 Appendix 12: First round of interview: Respondent two p. 64
33 Appendix 18: Second round of interview: Respondent five p. 132
34 Appendix 18: Second round of interview: Respondent five p. 131
it seems strange, it is a part of society”\textsuperscript{35}. These two quotations demonstrate that women use the consumption object fitness, in order to classify with other women, since “everybody” is a member of a gym, so in order for “them” to be a part of this category of women, they need to be a member of the gym. This also correlates with the aspect discussed on \textbf{women’s perception of themselves}, when it is about women wanting to behave the proper way in a given situation. Women need to be a member of a gym because this seems to be the acknowledged method in the context of “weight loss” and “body improvement”. As stated under \textit{consuming as integration}, almost all the participants changed their “gym style” after being to the gym a couple of times: they want to “look like a fitness girl”. However, in terms of classification just looking like a fitness girl is “not enough”. Based on the sayings from both the in-depth interviews and the focus group discussions, there seem to be different types of women at the gym, and classification very much depends on whom you are fascinated by, wish to just be like, relate the most to, wish not to be compared to or your own identity. Women seem to classify through their “fitness style”, their “work out habits”, their behavior at the gym, their “lifestyle choices in and outside the gym”, their usages of social media relating to the fitness world and their “appreciation” of fitness\textsuperscript{36}. For example, respondent five has a desire to become a fitness model in the future, so she works out 6 times a week, follows fitness models on Instagram, likes to talk about fitness and purchases clothing that is associated with fitness models and “heavy users” of fitness\textsuperscript{37}. Many of the participants state that there is an ideal for women right now, which is: You need to go to the gym, work out “like men”, be healthy, have a strong and fit body, and the right clothes that symbolize their seriousness and strength as woman both in and out of the gym. “The ideal body image has changed. You do not need to be super skinny models, now you need to have muscles, and all this about bikini fitness, which has been super known. Everybody knows somebody, who works out for that. So the ideal human body has changed, you need to be strong and not skinny”\textsuperscript{38}. Additionally to this, many of the participants imply that they want to be viewed as this “ideal woman”. They do this by purchasing specific products that are classified as “fitness clothes”; they talk about fitness with their friends, send pictures to their friends via social media to display that they workout and eat healthy and talk about their accomplishment\textsuperscript{39}. Nevertheless, many of them admit that the way they wish to position themselves is often a distorted truth, when they want to belong to a specific class of people which they find relevant,. “I think you can see this on snap, which friends who cares a lot about health, and those you send pictures of candy, party every weekend. I

\textsuperscript{35} Appendix 22: Focus Group one p. 171
\textsuperscript{36} Appendix 10 – Appendix 23 p. 39 - 221
\textsuperscript{37} Appendix 18: Second round of interview: Respondent five p. 130 - 146
\textsuperscript{38} Appendix 22: Focus Group one p. 172
\textsuperscript{39} Appendix 22: Focus Group one p. 39 - 60 and Appendix 23: Focus Group two p. 195 - 221
just think. I know that the ones, who send me healthy pictures, will not be the ones where I will tell that I am going to be lazy all weekend. I think about that\textsuperscript{40}. This relates to the different concepts discussed under women’s perception of themselves; they want to portray a specific ideal-social-self-image and ought/social-self to the outside world that might not dissociate with their actual selves. Surprisingly, identity also seems to matter in terms of classification, in the sense that having a strong or weak identity affects the participants’ classification “behavior”. The participants who have “stronger identities” seem to want to distinct themselves from those with “weaker identity” that cheat their image, not the same fitness level as themselves or just want to “blend in”. They thereby classify through distinction by purchasing other products, buy products that display who they are, act and behave differently at the gym, care more about being fit and focus on quality etc. “I actually do not care, it just need to fit probably. If it fits, as I want it to do, highlights the assets I wish. Then I really do not care about brands, color…”\textsuperscript{41}, “I think it is just. I do not know. I spend a lot of time at the gym. So most of the time I wear sports clothes. I have more tights then I have jeans. Soo. I do not know. In order for me not to just wear the same black tights every day. Maybe for me because I spend so much time there, it is nice to have something that really showcase my personality”\textsuperscript{42}, “I probably also focus on brands in some kind a way. However, for me it is more about movement. What is comfortable to wear, when I need a new tank top? I think about how it fit me when I do biceps or something…”\textsuperscript{43}

In terms of classification, the two rituals: grooming and possession from McCracken (1986) also apply to consuming through classification. The grooming ritual in the sense that they transfer the meaning of the products in order to distinct themselves or classify to a specific group of women at the gym. They can do this by dressing a certain way. Possession rituals are used to showcase their possession like clothing, behavior, work outs, eating habits through social media or at the gym in order to be part of class.

6.3. The usage of brands and others aspects of brands

In order to analyze women’s usage of brands, their relationship with different brands, their associations with different brands and other aspects, the three brands Adidas, Nike and H&M will be showcased in Kapferer’s (2008) Brand Identity prism. The brand identity prism for each of these brands is developed based on all the participants’ associations, feelings, experiences etc. about the three brands. See next pages.

\textsuperscript{40} Appendix 23: Focus Group two p. 199
\textsuperscript{41} Appendix 23: Focus Group two p. 201
\textsuperscript{42} Appendix 22: Focus Group one p. 174
\textsuperscript{43} Appendix 22: Focus Group one p. 173
(Developed based on Appendix 10 – Appendix 23)

**NIKE**
- **Physique**: Quality, innovative - first movers, trendy, shoes, just do it
- **Personality**: Male, A winner type, businessman, attractive, hot, trendy, social/reserved
- **Relationship**: Just do it, motivator, trustful, known, fitness buddy
- **Culture**: American, competitive, cold, individual
- **Reflection**: Fitness people, women, young, active & serious, healthy, everybody
- **Self-Image**: I am a fitness person, I am aware of trends, I am active, healthy & serious

(Developed based on Appendix 10 – Appendix 23)

**ADIDAS**
- **Physique**: Stripes, quality, a style, old-school
- **Personality**: Male/female, sports freak, trendy, fun to hang out with, relaxed
- **Relationship**: Local sport, relaxation
- **Culture**: German, female values
- **Reflection**: Male sports freak, not fitness clothes, sweat pants, style outside the gym
- **Self-Image**: I am sporty, I am relaxed, I am modern, I want to have a good time

(Developed based on Appendix 10 – Appendix 23)
The three figures show the different ways, which the participants view and think about the brands. In order to analyze the usage of brands and different aspect of them, an interesting fact is: Which brands do these participants mostly use and find the most “attractive” to purchase? The answer is Nike\textsuperscript{44}. Why is Nike the most attractive brand to purchase? What different factors might cause this specific brand choice? Why is Nike “better” than Adidas & H&M? What is it that Nike can do that the other brands cannot do – in these women’s minds?

According to the participants brand choices seem to depend on different aspects already discussed like classification, integration, “blending in behavior”, discrepancies experienced between different selves, identity. On the other hand production categorization, trends and styles, product quality, price, noticeability in terms of branding and promotion, knowledge, relationship etc. are also important when it comes to brand usage and purchase.

Product categorization is a part of the personality prism, and according to these women, a brand needs to promote a personality that correlates with the world of fitness. "When I think of Nike, I think of fitness"\textsuperscript{45}. “

\textsuperscript{44} Appendix 10 – Appendix 23 p. 39 - 221
\textsuperscript{45} Appendix 20: Second round of interview: Respondent 6 p. 157
also think if H&M prices were the same as Nike, then it would say something about quality, and it might be as good, however H&M is still not a sport brand, Adidas and Nike are sports brands and known for making sportswear. They also make other things, but H&M produces every day clothing, and then they also make sports clothes, so that is why I would pick Nike and Adidas to H&M even though the quality would be the same.  

This indicates that in order for women to purchase brands they must symbolize values that the consumers associate with fitness, which are health, performance, sociality, active life, serious behavior, results, bodies, individualization, exposure and “me time”, to name a few. Nevertheless, even though Adidas is a sport brand, just like Nike, according to these women the personality and promotion of Adidas does, to some extent, not fit in the “category” of fitness. “When I think of Adidas, I think of my comfy pants at home...” “More a sport brand, football brand, handball brand, not really a fitness brand”. The personality prism is therefore important concerning brand choices, as women choose brands that symbolize the world of fitness and “themselves”, instead of the sports world or the everyday world.

Different aspects under the relationship prism like familiarity, knowledge and relationship with a brand also seem to matter when using a brand. “I think your comment were genius about why you should visit H&M, and if you had to live there if you can afford anything else. I think that is the whole essence behind H&M. I like.” “It is just like going to Netto” “Because I know it works, and I know it will last. I do not have to go and shop again and try other clothes. I know it will not break, and I feel comfortable in it. And then I do not want to try other stuff on that might fit alright.” Knowledge and “your personal relationship” with the brand also matters, as it provides a form of “safety” for the women, because they can depend on the brand to be “there” for them in different situations. Another concept that belongs to the relationship prism that also is of interest is “nostalgia”. In this case, “nostalgia” is the participants’ old associations with the brand that they cannot seem to forget. “I associate them with local sport, when you were younger. Everybody wore Adidas.” “I also think in a couple of years, when you have a steady job, and then you might not buy as much H&M anymore.” Both Adidas and H&M are brands they used in “other situations”, when they were younger, did local sports like handball or soccer, and bought H&M because they cannot afford anything else. Now they do not see themselves as sports practitioners anymore, or young girls who cannot

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46 Appendix 22: Focus Group one p. 189
47 Appendix 10 – Appendix 23 p. 39 - 221
48 Appendix 23: Focus Group two p. 212
49 Appendix 18: Second round of interview: Respondent five p. 138
50 Appendix 22: Focus group one p. 189
51 Appendix 23: Focus group two p. 207
52 Appendix 23: Focus group two p. 206
53 Appendix 22: Focus Group one p. 181
54 Appendix 23: Focus Group two p. 214
afford to buy expensive clothing, they see themselves as young women, who are about to start careers, and who work out at the gym. They have “outgrown” the brands, in the sense it was a part of their past and not part of their future. It does not mean that they dislike the brands, it is just, to some extent, something that belonged to another part and another time of their life, which they can detach from the brands. In her research “Consumers and their brands” Susan Fournier (1998) states that the relationship between consumers and brands is a process phenomenon, as they evolve and change over a series of interactions in response to fluctuations in the contextual environment.

The usages of brands also seem to depend on noticeability in terms of promotion and branding, trends and styles, quality and price, which is a part of the prism physique. Adidas, Nike and H&M all use advertising and promotion; however, it seems that “relatedness” and “content” of the advertisements are important factors. “Relatedness” relates to who these women classify as, their identity, relate to or wish to/or not wish to be associated with. “Content” relates to what you are promoting, how you are promoting it, where you are promoting it and who is a part of the advertisement. “I think it is definitely the way they use promotion, it has so much to say that Nike is so trendy and modern” and “Adidas sponsors football games and different teams, it is not something that affects me. It is their clothes. When I think of Adidas, I think football, whereas Nike, it just a little bite more fitness and running clothes”. In order for women to be “affected” by or give attention to an advertisement, it needs to contain “content” that relates to them, in terms of association, classification and identity. According to the participants, Adidas advertises themselves as a sports brand or style, in their commercials and sponsorships. H&M almost never advertises their sportswear, but more often their everyday wear. Nike advertises themselves as running and “fitness brand”.

This correlates with the personality prism, more precisely product categorization, in the way that it seems as if women pay attention to advertising, promotion and branding that relate to the way they see themselves in a product category. “I do not know. I think again it comes from handball, and I think it is therefore. You see different sports practitioners wear it, and then. That is why you choose Adidas.”. Most of these women classify themselves as “fitness women”, and therefore implicitly stated by almost all of them, they do not notice or pay attention to Adidas or H&M, because the “content” of their advertising does not correlate with the “aspects” they associate with the fitness culture. “It might be because I do not see Adidas, as a fitness brand. I would not think that I could go down to an Adidas store and find fitness clothes. It might be because I look for fitness clothing, and then it might be a brand like better bodies, which is only a fitness

55 Appendix 23: Focus Group two p. 215
56 Appendix 23: Focus Group two p. 216
57 Appendix 10 – Appendix 23 p. 39 - 221
58 Appendix 20: Second round of interview: Respondent six p. 160
brand, then it obvious that I would look for that. Of course you can go in there and find original things, but I think I would notice them more, if they started selling fitness clothing and you got inspired by it”. This indicates that brands’ advertisements need to contain “content” and “relatedness”, associated with aspects related to the fitness object.

When looking at advertisements from both Adidas and Nike, it is quite interesting that the participants have so different views on the brands’ advertisements. Nike’s advertisement is just as sports oriented in their ad campaigns as Adidas is, as they also sponsor basketball, football, tennis etc. (Adidas, 2015), (Nike, 2015). Why is it then that women view their promotion so differently? This is because they differ in their advertisement towards women. Nike seems to be a little bit more noticeable in terms of promoting their clothes to women, and focusing on areas like running, fitness etc., whereas Adidas’ commercials towards women are still very much associated with female athletes (Adidas, All Adidas), (Women, 12.04.2015).

Quality and price of the brands are also important to these women, as they state that the clothes need to fit right, support different body parts, highlight their different body parts and be created in a “breathable” material. “I do not think it is as much the brands. It is just often that the quality is different. Especially with no brands. You can see sweat, or it breaks or the pants are see-through. Quality really does matter”. “If I had to go shopping for sports clothes, then I would like to buy Adidas. However, I could also find something by going into an H&M store because it is cheaper. It depends on what you need. If I really need some new tights or top, then I would definitely go after Adidas, however if I just want something and have others at home, but have a desire for something new, then I would buy H&M because it is cheaper”. This indicates that if women are in the need of something new they will buy quality and little more expensive brands because it lasts longer; however, when something is bought because of a “desire for additional consumption” then price is more important.

As stated earlier Nike was the most preferred brand of the three, but also among all the other brands, and the prism, reflection, might be one of the major reasons for this. As already implied earlier in the section, women’s perception of themselves, one of the participants said that most of the time people just want to blend in, in the way they act, behave and look the part in a given situation. Additionally to this, most women, and men, are gregarious animals, because we do what others do in order to “survive”. “..We know that there is this health trend going on, and we are a part of it. I think it is basically to symbolize that you

59 Appendix 18: Second round of interview: Respondent five p. 143
60 Appendix 23: Focus Group two p. 211
61 Appendix 20: Second round of interview: Respondent six p. 160
62 Appendix 22: Focus Group one p. 168 - 195
know what is trendy at the moment” 63. “Yes I can be inspired. There were a time, when everybody had the same top on, and it was really nice, so I also wanted to get it” 64 and “I also think that most of us are followers, so we do what others do” 65. Since most women are followers, trends, style, opinion leaders, fashion, society and behavior of others, affect them. According to the women, Nike is the brand right now, that is most stylish, the trendiest, present everywhere, and something everyone wears both inside and outside the gym. Belk (1988) states that a reason for wanting an object to become a part of the individual’s self is that it is known. When an object is known, individuals and consumers will have a greater desire to want the object than when something is unknown. “I also think it is something psychological, more exposure. If you see something many times, it sticks. In regards to this. Famous people or commercial for iPhone, this is where brands have something. When I stand in the supermarket and are about to buy toothpaste, I would choose to the one I have seen the most because then I feel that I have a relation to it, and that is the same with sportswear. When I see my friends wearing something particular, or seen it in commercials, then I feel like I know it better, and then it must be something for me, then it is probably good. I think it is very unconsciously also because it is not often that I make my decision based on a brand, but I think when I am out shopping, I pick something I know” 66. Most of the women are not opinion leaders, which means they are affected by what trendsetters or opinion leaders in a given product categorization do. They see women wearing Nike at the gym; Nike is on everyone’s feet and Nike is Christmas presents, birthday presents and “wanting presents”. Nike is everywhere, Nike is modern, Nike is “women’s fitness-fashion”. Nike is KNOWN. “One thing is that it is as modern as it is. Nike is acknowledge by other people. It is something everybody knows and it is cool, and I think everyone can find something that they like” 67. It seems that women want Nike to be a part of their extended selves in order to support their fragility when doing fitness. Many of these women seem “fragile” and not heavy users at the gym, so in order to compensate, they purchase brands that others know and are “appropriate” for the gym, in order to blend in and “be like everyone else”. Respondent six, establishes the importance of something being known and trendy when using brands. She is a sports girl, and really likes to wear the brands that symbolize that she is a sports girl and a fitness girl. She was asked to decide which brand she prefers most, and she states Adidas because then she can symbolize handball, sports and status in terms of knowing what is popular. Her least favorite brand is Hummel. The interesting aspect here is her description of both these brands which are very similar as to symbolic value, stereotype - but she still prefers Adidas. The reason for this is that Adidas is modern, gives status and is acknowledged

63 Appendix 16: Second round of interview: Respondent four p. 124
64 Appendix 23: Focus Group two p. 201
65 Appendix 22: Focus Group one p. 191
66 Appendix 22: Focus Group one p. 190
67 Appendix 18: Second round of interview: Respondent five p. 137
to wear at the fitness center, which Hummel is not. Nevertheless, she states that she would not mind wear-
ing Hummel in a local sport center because there Hummel is acknowledged and popular. This means that
when a brand is known and acknowledged by others, it is more desirable to incorporate into women’s self
and identity, whereas it is not enough that a brand is just acknowledged generally, it has to be acknowl-
edged in the given situation, and in this case: the gym.
Moreover, doing what other women do is also a sign of these women’s ignorance in terms of what to wear
at the gym. Most women are “common users” of the gym; in the sense that they are not very knowledgea-le and it is something, they do a couple of times a week because of “duty”. They therefore look to what
other women do, who “are or seem to be” more knowledgeable, brands they know, which brands that
advertise their products to women and fitness and what women wear on social media. They then buy the
same as everybody else because if everyone else is using it, it must be good and something women wear at
the gym “…If I was ask if I wanted to buy these pants from Escalas or these from Nike. I think I would choose
the ones that had the best quality, then I would not pick Nike over another brand with better quality. But I
think it is because I do not have any knowledge of other brands”68, “I think I need to go home at investigate
which different brands there are, and not just go for the one you know”69.

In addition, brand usage also seems to correlate with the aspects discussed under Women’s usage of
brands, experience and relationship with fitness. Under consuming as play, it was established that fitness
has now become a social platform for both men and women, it is the place to hang out, meet friends, meet
new people and perhaps get a date. Brands can be used as first impressions when someone wants to show
that she knows what is trendy, gives status, has style and quality and so on. It is therefore important for
women to look good, because they might meet people they know from school, or a guy they find interest-
ing.

According to the participants, they also use brands as motivators. “I find it very motivating. Not the brand
itself. I often consider, often, a little bite embarrassing to admit. However, if I have one of those mornings,
where I really need to get to the gym or go for a run, then I put on my work out clothes. And then I think I
am ready. Physically ready for it. Now I just need to adjust my own attitude. It is much easier. If I walked
around in sloppy sweats, then I would not be so motivated to go for a run. For me, my gym clothes really
motivate me to get going. I think you have a point in that, that I want to represent something, but not
something that I actually am, but want to be. I am not at all a Nike girl; I do not want to live on Nike. It is

68 Appendix 22: Focus Group One p. 178
69 Appendix 22: Focus Group One p. 190
not me at all, but I like their clothes and I like the fact that they symbolize performance and activeness, and it motivate me. I can set goals for myself and go to the gym to work out. Because now I am wearing the clothing, absolutely, I think. It is about what you want to achieve and portray.”

To some extent brands and products can be symbols or possessions that allow women to convince themselves that they can be a different person, when they put specific brands and products on (Belk, 1988). This correlates with the discrepancies and identities, already discussed, in the sense that these women use brands to support their fragile self. By using specific brands, which symbolize what they want to portray to the outside world, it can help to support them, and become the person they wish to be in a given situation. In this case, an active fitness girl who is serious about working out, who eats healthy food and knows how to look and behave.

Furthermore, as stated earlier many of the participants preferred Adidas’ symbolic value to Nike, but they would still purchase Nike when choosing fitness clothes. The reason for this might be related to the context where they use the different brands. The respondents were asked to describe their associations with fitness, and some of them said that fitness is hard, a duty, something you have to do, demanding, not fun etc. Their relatively negative view of fitness has perhaps been transferred unconsciously to the products they use at the gym. Their associations and perceptions of Nike are still extremely positive, as they see it as a brand of winners, active and hot people; but at the same time, Nike also symbolizes the gym. “I was just thinking. Yeah. I think I was thinking of my Adidas pants, they are so nice, whereas my Nike clothes, then I had to. Yeah work out. I just think it is nicer with Adidas and Handball”.

Adidas, on the other hand, is associated with relaxation, lying on the couch watching a movie with friends or boyfriend on a Sunday or changing into after a long day of work or school. Their perceptions of Adidas are therefore more positive, as they subconsciously relate this brand to situations associated with having a good time and doing something they enjoy. This also correlates with the planet exercise, the focus groups participants had to do. Here most of them actually preferred the planet of Adidas to Nike because Adidas was a place where young people had fun, went out, watched a lot of sport and everybody was welcome, whereas the Nike planet was more ambitious, healthy, competitive, superficial etc. “I also think that a visit to the planet Nike, is like a visit to the gym. It fits right in because they have performance and efficiency, and all that. Where. The rest of the time, I just want to feel good and have a good time.”

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70 Appendix 22: Focus Group one p. 192
71 Appendix 10 – Appendix 23 p. 39 - 221
72 Appendix 23: Focus Group two p. 195 - 221
74 Appendix 22: Focus Group One p. 188
When looking at the different prisms for the three brands, it is actually quite interesting that Nike is the preferred brand choice for women. Women are often associated with female values, because they want everybody to be a part of a team - without discrimination, and it is more important to be a part of a team than winning etc. Nevertheless, the description of Nike is that they see it as competition, winner types, individualists, mostly male etc., which is a contrast to female values. The interesting aspect here is that many of the participants actually prefer Adidas to Nike, in terms of symbolic values and meanings; but they will still purchase Nike instead of Adidas if they had to choose at a store. When deciding choice of fitness clothing, it seems that culture aspects, some personality characteristics and other symbolic values do not matter that much to women when purchasing fitness clothing. Concepts like what do others do, the context of brand usage, knowledge about the brands, trends, style, product categorization, classification and noticeability seem to have a greater impact on brand purchase for women.

6.4. Differences between men and women

Another aspect that also affects women’s brand purchase, is what men do and what women do. Most of the participants say that Nike and Adidas can be both genders, in terms of their personality. However, the majority describes them as male, whereas H&M is female\(^75\). Surprisingly, when the participants were asked about stereotypes and brand users, they stated that users of Nike are young people, mostly women, whereas users of Adidas were men and sports freaks. Moreover, users of H&M are often young girls and students\(^76\). The stereotypical associations the participants have, often arise from their experiences with the brands and the products. Women see men wearing Adidas at the gym, Adidas often addresses their ads to men or sports practitioners and they sponsor big football-, handball-, and basketball events and sports teams. Whereas they see other women, wearing Nike at the gym, and they see women in Nike campaigns. Women seem to purchase brands that they can classify with, they can relate to and aspire to be. This refers to the statements earlier that most consumers are just followers. So when women go to the gym, see ad campaigns on television or browse through social media, in short they are attentive to what other women do, both those they classify with, those they aspire to be and those they try to distance themselves from. This tendency could be confirmed by the field observation, as the majority of men seemed to be wearing Adidas, Hummel and no brands, whereas women seemed to be wearing Nike in relation to brands like Kari Traa and H&M.

\(^{75}\) Appendix 10 – Appendix 23 p. 39 - 221

\(^{76}\) Appendix 10 – Appendix 23 p. 39 - 221
6.5. The importance of image

Based on the participants’ sayings, image has a great impact on brand purchase. It seems that all the different aspects already discussed like, classification, integration, product categorization, perception, identity, motivation, brand usage, knowledge and “nostalgia” and so on, are associated or, to some extent depended on the image women want to portray or viewed as to the outside world. “I also think that it is fine. To be associated with being active and inspiring, and then. Yeah. High performance and like that. Off course, I am someone who wear Nike clothes because I am active and ambitious and I am healthy, good lifestyle and I am never bored, and sometimes you are. You like that to, but it is not a problem to have this picture sometimes, maybe it might be a little bit for myself, so I can motivate myself”77.

In correlation with the theories related to identity and self-concept, women seem either to purchase brands that display who they actually are, who they think they should be or who they want others to think they are. Additionally, fitness level or the incorporation of the fitness lifestyle into the lives of women also has a saying in this. Women with strong selves and identities, and being integrated and enthusiastic about the whole world of fitness, purchase brands or products that symbolize their personality, differentiate themselves from others, who they are and who they might soon be. “I think it just. I do not know. I spend a lot of time at the gym. So most of the time I wear sports clothes. I have more tights then I have jeans. Soo. I do not know. In order for me not to just wear the same black tights every day. Maybe for me because I spend so much time there, it is nice to have something that really showcase my personality”78. I think people who do not care about fitness, do not know these brands very well. However, it is popular in the fitness world because they also make things for men, and they have really cool stuff. It is a little bite more truck, like gaps. Many people who compete, use these brands because it is truck and expensive, and cool”79. Furthermore, women who are more secure about themselves and their fitness level, care about brands and their symbolic value, but quality and movement are also important. “I probably also focus on brands in some kind a way. However, for me it is more about movement, and what is comfortable to wear, when I need a new tank top. I think about how it fit me when I do biceps or something...”80 and “I actually do not care, it just need to fit probably. If it fits like I want it to do, highlights the assets I wish. Then I really do not care about brands, color”81. Whereas, women with weaker identities and selves and which are more fragile, purchase brands, which can help them, portray the image or the ideal-social-self-image they wish to be

77 Appendix 22: Focus Group one p. 173
78 Appendix 22: Focus Group one p. 173
79 Appendix 18: Second Group of Interview: Respondent five p. 139
80 Appendix 22: Focus Group one p. 173
81 Appendix 23: Focus Group two p. 201
associated with. This is often someone who is active, knows what she is doing, eats healthy, knows what is trendy and knows what to wear at the gym.

6.6. Fitness segments for women in relation to brand purchase

Brand purchase tends to depend on different aspects like: who do women classify with, their appreciation and passion for fitness, reasons for going to the gym, perception of themselves, the context and situation of brand usage, discrepancies between selves, what others do, strength in identity, who they are at the gym, fitness level, self-image and so on. Based on these different influential factors, there seem to be different types of women going to the gym, and the segment a woman belongs to determine her brand usage and choices. Five different segments have been established and they are “The opinion leader/fitness lifestyle”, “The fitness liker”, “The Trend Adapter”, “The common user” and “The sporty”. They are explained one by one below.

“The opinion leader/ Fitness lifestyle”:

- Fitness instructor, fitness model or aspires to be, “Fitness lovers”, body builder, fitness instructor or personal trainer
- Have integrated a lot of aspects from the fitness world into her own identity
- Fitness is a part of her identity, so this will be showcased in her image to the outside world
- Eats healthy almost everyday, and have both work out plans and dieting plans she follows, if “needed”
- Wears brands that symbolize who she is and how integrated she is in the fitness society and her fitness level
- She will wear brands that distinct her from “common people” at the gym, and wear brands that only enthusiastic and “well-established” fitness people will know
- Will be an opinion leader in terms of style, exercises and behavior at the gym.

“The Fitness liker”:

- An active fitness practitioner
- She has a strong identity, and does not mind standing out at the gym
- Is knowledgeable to some extent on what to wear and which exercise to use
- Enjoys talking about the gym and standing out to some extent, in the sense that she does not need to hide because she knows what she is doing
- Enjoys going to the gym to sweat and interacting with her “fitness friends”
- These women are not interested in becoming fitness models, however still want to experience weight loss, body improvement and “dream body”
- Being active is a part of the life, however eating junk food or a piece of chocolate never killed anybody
- Brands are used because of quality, as motivators and portrayal of personality and identity, however brands will often be worn in combination of no brands and old sloppy t-shirts
- Can still be affected by what others wear
- Looks at other women and men as inspiration when it comes to fitness clothes and exercises

“The common user”:
- Goes to the gym because of weight loss, trends and social pressure
- Being active is not an essential part of life and her identity
- More insecure and ignorance in terms of exercise, behavior and clothes so looks to others
- The gym is not an enjoyment or duty for them. It is more something they just need to do. Sometimes they might think it is really fun, other times they skip the gym and do something else
- Needs to work out because “society” and people have determined that everybody needs to go the gym to lose weight and work out, so that is what you do
- Purchases brands that are worn by other women or friends, in order to blend in at the gym, because nobody needs to pay attention to her because “she is just a common user” and because of ignorance
- Wants to be classified as someone who works out, eats healthy and exercises even thought it is often not the case.
- Very sensitive to what others do at the gym, in terms of behavior, clothing and fitness trends

“The trend adaptor”:
- Trend follower – right now fitness is “in” in terms of exercise
- Not very knowledgeable about exercise and working out, but very knowledgeable about behavior and clothing
- The gym is the new hang out place, in the sense that this segment uses the gym to hang out, make a statement, meet guys, get attention from other people and take and post selfies of herself at the gym to portray “a manipulated image”
- Typically go to the gym with her girlfriend to talk and hang out, and look at boys and get attention
• Will spend more time on hair, makeup and clothing then on actually working out
• Social media is very important
• She works out a little bite, however being spotted at the gym is what counts
• Brands are used to establish a certain image to the outside world
• Much affected by what others wear at the gym, or the ones, she wishes to classify with, wears at the gym. Wants to classify with “the opinion leader/fitness lifestyle” and “the fitness liker” even though she is nothing like them, but wants everybody else to think she is
• Will buy expensive brands and specific fitness brands, even though she does not work out a lot but just to post a picture or be associated with someone who is very active, trendy and so on.
• However, will also buy the brands that other women uses in order to integrate and classify as a fitness woman
• If another trend becomes more “acknowledge” or popular than fitness, she will start doing that instead

“The Sporty”:
• She is a sports practitioner or previous sports practitioner
• Knowledge about exercise and work out because of her sport
• The gym is used as additional training mechanism or a replacement because she do not have the time or the skills to be doing sports anymore
• She likes to be active and enjoys it
• Purchase more sports brand like Adidas, Hummel and Puma then fitness brands like Nike, Better bodies etc. because she classifies with handball women and tennis players more then with fitness girls
• However, will adapt a little bit, in order not to stand out that much as a sports girl, however the sports girl in her will never go away, so she will prefer the brands that are associated with that world

The five different segments establish the different types of women that seem to be users of fitness and showcase which factors from the analysis that seem to be the most influential for this segment in terms of brand purchase. But it is also important to state that these different descriptions of the segments are not definitive, in the sense that women can belong to one segment, but still be influenced by aspects relating to the other segments. For example, a woman belonging to the segment “fitness liker” is someone who loves
being active, improve her body and is knowledgeable about fitness and exercise. But at the same time can be going to the gym because it is trendy, simulates her body and image a little bit on social media, use fitness, not hang out, get attention from guys despite she is still enjoying being active and improve her body. So the picture is not clear-cut.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

In the last couple of years, the sign-ups for fitness have increased year after year in relation to the massive health trends going on. Especially, women’s intake on the whole concept of fitness and purchase of brands related to the health trend, have increased the last couple of years. The purpose of this thesis was therefore to achieve a greater understanding of which different aspects affect women’s brand choices and their sudden interest in consuming fitness.

This led to the following research question how women’s perception of themselves, their self-image, other women and other aspects, affect their brand choices in relation to fitness.

In order to achieve an understanding of this phenomenon, different theories by Holt (1995), Kapferer (2008), Higgins (1987), Sirgy (1982), Belk (1988) and McCracken (1986) about consumer behavior, branding, concept of self and identity were established as the main theories for this thesis.

The methods used to investigate the research question were qualitative, consisting of six in-depth interviews, two focus groups discussions and field observations. Sixteen women from Aarhus, ages of 16 - 27, participated in the interviews.

The analysis established how women’s perception of themselves, their self-image, influence of other women and others aspects in relation to fitness is quite complex phenomenon. The analysis highlighted that women’s perception in relation to brands purchase was affected by their experiences with discrepancies, who they are in the fitness situation, how much they have integrated their identity with fitness and who they should be or behave like in the fitness center. Brand purchase is used to portray women’s personality, their knowledge of trends, who they classify with, or “desire” to classify with or who they want others to think they are at the gym. Other women also influence brand purchase in terms of what is “appropriate” to wear at the gym, new styles, need for classifying with specific group of women, wanting to distinct themselves from other women and gregarious behavior. Other aspects that also influence women’s brand purchase, when it comes to fitness, are context of brand usage and the situations, brand noticeability, quality, “content” and “relatedness” of advertisement, brands that are acknowledged in the fitness, fitness competences and their experience, history and relationship with the different brands.
Based on the analysis, five different segments of women were formed: “The opinion leader/Fitness lifestyle”, “The fitness liker”, “The common user”, “The trend adapter” and “The sporty”. These segments determine why women purchase brands in terms of image, self-perception, other women and other factors.

Furthermore, the thesis concludes that fitness is no longer just a place to lose weight; it has become a society-determined part of most consumers’ lives. Fitness and health are now a conversation starter, a way of life, a place to hang out with friends, and a social place where women can meet boyfriends, friends and new acquaintances.

7.1. Further discussions

The purpose of this thesis was to understand how perception, image, other people and other factors affect women’s brand purchase in relation to fitness. The conclusion was that women’s perception is affected by their identity, their need for classifying, and their need for integration, their usage of fitness and more. Self-image depended on how women want others to perceive them. Do they just want to fit in with the rest of the other women or do they want to stand out by showing who they are or who they are pretending to be. Other factors that also affected brand purchase were popularity in terms of what other women do, behavior in terms of clothing and exercises, their gregarious behaviors, brand noticeability in terms of commercials and promotion and the context brands were used in.

This thesis establishes that there are many different factors influencing women’s brand purchase, when it comes to consuming fitness. The additional purpose for this thesis is to provide companies with information about what causes women to choose the brands they do, and what aspects they need to take into consideration in terms of marketing mix.

However, companies like Nike and the Danish fitness chain, Fitness World are already aware of some of the factors that influence female behavior in relation to consuming fitness. Nike launched in 2015 a new campaign targeting women called “Better for It” (Women, 12.04.2015). The campaigns show women in different work out situations, at home, at the gym, at a spinning class, at a yoga class or out running, while hearing their inner thoughts. The inner thoughts display the different feelings women have in terms of working out, like taking the “best” seat at spinning class where no one can see you, why are there so many mirrors at the gym and come on legs you can do this (Ibid). These campaigns establish that Nike is already aware of how women use products as motivators, the insecurities that women have about themselves while working
out, female behavior at the gym, their relationship with the gym and how they view others and use them as motivators.

Fitness World also launched a campaign in 2015 targeting women, called *what’s up girls? What do you want to be called in 2015?* (Thorup, 03.01.2015). Fitness World used different hashtags to determine how women want men to see them at the gym, and if you want to be viewed this way, sign up at Fitness World. The different hashtags were snack, bootylicious, babe etc. Fitness World establishes that they are aware of the fact that going to the gym is no longer just a place to lose weight or improve different body parts, but a place where a social place where fitness users can meet potential boyfriends/girlfriends or get attention.

Further research would be to incorporate quantitative methods and ethnography into this research in order to validate the findings. Furthermore, this thesis has only investigated women living in Aarhus, so talking to different women from the rest of Denmark would also be interesting to see if the findings would be the same. Another interesting aspect would be to investigate these aspects in terms of men’s brand purchase in regards to fitness. Are men affected by what other men do, their perception of themselves in regards to fitness, who they are in the product category and of the context, they use the brands?
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