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Adaptation of Trade Promotion and Advertising - Attitudes Towards Sexual Appeals

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Acknowledgements

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_______________________     _______________________
Anna Friberg        Lotta Laakso
Abstract

Standardization and adaptation of marketing strategies have been extensively studied for decades. However, the debate between the two schools is still ongoing, and thus further research should be done especially concerning the marketing mix elements. This dissertation does not only focus on the standardization and adaptation decisions regarding marketing strategies in general, but emphasis is placed on the use of sexual appeals in advertising as well, as the use of sexual appeals has been found to be a common technique of marketers. Thereby, the purpose of the dissertation is to measure the effects of promotional material on perceived brand image and purchase intention of consumers; to evaluate the effect of trade promotion and promotional material on retailers’ purchasing behavior; and lastly, to find out whether marketing strategies should be standardized across markets. To this end, the research questions (RQ) are:

RQ1. To what extent do international fashion companies adapt and/or standardize their trade promotion and promotional strategies, and why?

RQ2. What influence does trade promotion, and more specifically images featuring sexual appeals have on retailers’ purchasing behavior?

RQ3. What effects does advertising featuring sexual appeals have on consumers’ purchase intention and perceived brand image?

RQ4. What are the differences in the effects of advertising featuring sexual appeals between Sweden and Italy?

In addition, nine hypotheses (H) are generated from both the theoretical framework and the focus group data.

A mixed method including the following data collection techniques is used in the study: participant observations, focus groups, interviews and a cross-country experiment. Moreover, the research questions are answered through a combination of a single case study, a multiple case study and an experimental study, the findings of which are also analyzed across countries, Sweden and Italy, for a cross-cultural research.

The use of sexual appeals in both trade promotion material and in advertising, does not increase the purchase intention of consumers or fashion retailers, for that matter. The purchase intention of consumers towards brands using sexual appeals in advertising is found to be negative in both Italy and Sweden. In addition, the use of sexual advertising damages the brand image. Furthermore, by considering and understanding cultural differences marketers are able to create and maintain strong relationships with retailers.

Keywords: trade promotion, promotional mix, advertising, sexual appeals, standardization, adaptation.
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1. Introduction

This chapter introduces the background to the study, identifies the problem and purpose following with the key concepts used, and lastly the disposition of the dissertation.

1.1. Background

The debate over standardization and adaptation of marketing activities has been on-going for several decades, and many researchers stress that advancements in technology, the increasing trend of traveling, and low transportation costs to be the reasons behind companies’ standardization efforts (Levitt, 1983; Kreutzer, 1988; Hollensen, 2011). Producing large volumes of standardized products in a centralized production facility decreases costs and increases efficiency, as the economies of scale and learning curve effects take place (Samiee, 1982; Levitt, 1983). In particular, the use of Internet and global media outlets have greatly influenced on the creation of homogenous market demand. Moreover, as the product market becomes more transparent, the adoption of lifestyles, preferences and values contribute to the development of homogenous and global market segments (Laroche, Bergeron, & Barbaro-Forleo, 2001).

The researchers that are advocates of adaptation of international marketing, on the other hand, argue that due to differences in, for example cultures, customer perceptions, political and legal systems, economics as well as marketing infrastructures, organizations need to adapt their marketing strategies (Douglas & Wind, 1987; Zou & Tamer Cavusgil, 1996; Vrontis & Vronti, 2004). By adapting to a local market a marketer is able to maximize its flexibility and responsiveness (Vrontis & Vronti, 2004). However, it is also argued that in reality, organizations should aim for finding a balance between standardization and adaptation (Vrontis & Vronti, 2004; Douglas & Wind, 1987; Hennessey, 2001; Vrontis & Papasolomou, 2005; Svensson, 2002). For instance, a study done about Levi’s jeans concluded that, even though there is a global market for jeans, a complete degree of standardization is not feasible to achieve, thus adjustments are to be done in accordance to the micro and macro environments beyond national borders (Vrontis & Vronti, 2004).

More specifically, when it comes to global advertising, Domzal and Kerman (1993) state that global advertising is not necessarily fully standardized, for instance when the language of the ad is changed. Instead it is highlighted that standardized advertisement is something that is directed simultaneously in several countries. Moreover, a need for building a global brand image and identity are recognized when it comes to standardized advertising (Link, 1988). Whereas, researchers belonging to the adaptation school argue that in order to have an advantage over other global marketers, local sensitivity needs to be considered. What’s more, advertisement has been found to be more dependent on culture compared to the other marketing elements. Hence, the use of local models, language and scenery increase the probability of an ad to be effective (Hite & Fraser, 1990).
In terms of cultural differences between different countries, Hofstede’s (1989, 2007) extensive work in categorizing national cultures into five dimensions: individualism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity, power distance and long term orientation, has had a significant impact on international business studies. As Hofstede’s study deals with management cultures, it might not therefore be possible to apply his findings directly to consumer behavior, however it is possible to consider the implications of his study in the field of marketing (Solberg, 2000).

As mentioned above, when operating internationally, marketers need to consider where they can use standardized advertising and where they need to adapt to the local culture and language. In many occasions international marketers encounter similar types of problems because of cultural differences. Advertising appeal, for instance, is often times interpreted differently by consumers with different cultural backgrounds (Sawyer & Howard, 1991; Belch & Belch, 2004). In particular, the use of sexual appeals in advertising of brands is a common advertising technique. Findings from a cross country study done by Liu, Cheng, and Li (2009), for instance, indicate that marketers should be careful when using the same ads containing sexual appeals in different countries, as differences in cultures have a significant impact on how the ads are perceived. To further support this, a study done by Garcia and Yang (2006) concludes that a standardized advertisement using sexual appeals will be more effective when the cross-national consumers share the same or similar cultural values.

1.2. Problem Discussion
An interesting area of research for this dissertation was found through the authors’ mutual interest: fashion. Furthermore, North Box, the company, where one of the authors is currently employed and has been employed throughout the study, provided the specific problem for the dissertation. Having a close relationship with the company made it easier to get access to a great amount of resources both in terms of information and contacts relevant to the study. In addition, the authors did a lot of research looking into relevant studies to find the most appropriate ways to approach the problem and conduct the research. To provide the reasoning behind the problem; first a short background to North Box, and Fashion Box is presented and then a theoretical reasoning is provided.

North Box, a fashion sales agency, was established in 1999 in Sweden by its two owners. The agency has an exclusive contract with Fashion Box to sell its brand, Replay, in Sweden, Finland and in the Baltic countries. Fashion Box has its heritage in Italy, thus not only the Italian culture but also the organizational culture of the company and ways of operating differ greatly from its Swedish agent. Therefore, the differences in culture need to be considered throughout the study. When it comes to the main issue expressed by North Box the standardization and/or adaptation of trade promotion and advertising strategies, come to play.

Most of the marketing related decisions are made in the headquarters, in Italy. Hence, the problems arise, for example when the Swedish retailers decline to take the trade promotion images provided by Fashion Box to be displayed, for example in their stores and websites. There are various reasons for this, the biggest one being the provocativeness, and this year specifically the sexual appeals, used in the images. This in turn, according to the owners of
North Box, can possibly have negative effects on the quantity of pieces they are able to sell to the retailers. Consequently, the retailers also worry that the lack of appropriate images displayed in stores might have a negative effect on the sales to the end customers, as the visibility of the brand suffers. To further clarify, Fashion Box uses the same images in its trade promotion material and promotional material, thus when referring to an image featuring sexual appeals it can be related to either trade promotion or promotional content.

Moreover, retaining a good relationship with retailers is of high importance to North Box as it is trying to reach 20 MEUR in sales revenue by 2019, and after that the aim is to maintain the sales on the same level. Lastly, North Box voiced their concern in terms of Replay’s brand image, which does not seem to be the same in Sweden and Italy. Hence, considering everything mentioned above it was decided together with North Box that the dissertation should research whether there is a need to adapt Fashion Box’s trade promotion and advertising strategies when operating in Sweden. Special emphasis is paid into finding out whether images featuring sexual appeals have an influence on retailers’ purchase behavior as well as on consumers’ purchase intention and perception of the brand’s image, in order to determine if there is a need for adaptation. Figure 1 presents an illustration of the empirical problem explained above.

![Figure 1. Illustration of the Empirical Problem.](image)

In terms of theoretical aspects, many researchers have addressed the standardization and adaptation issues, however the topic still remains under researched in the field of international marketing. Thus, it is suggested that further research should be done, for example in terms of marketing mix elements (Solberg, 2000). Also, when it comes to the use of sexual appeals in advertising, it is suggested that further research should be done concerning cross-cultural research that takes into consideration for example sex related attitudes, product relevance and dependent variables (e.g. purchase intention) (Garcia & Yang, 2006). Moreover, future research is recommended to be done quantitatively and concerning other markets/countries when it comes to advertising featuring sexual appeals (Lass & Hart, 2004; Hultin & Lundh, 2004). Furthermore, more recent studies have found that consumers perceive and behave towards brands similarly to how they would towards people (Fournier, 2009, Kervyn, Fiske, & Malone, 2012). Kervyn et al. (2012) created the Brands as Intentional Agents Framework (BIAF), which is used as a tool to understand the perception of a brand and its position in a specific market. Being a relatively new model, it is used in this study to understand the effects of advertising images featuring sexual appeals on Replay’s brand image in consumers’ minds.
1.3. Purpose
The purpose of the dissertation is to measure the effects of promotional material on perceived brand image and purchase intention of consumers; to evaluate the effect of trade promotion and promotional material on retailers’ purchasing behavior; and lastly, to find out whether marketing strategies should be standardized across markets. Furthermore, the study aims to give both managerial implications to North Box, and possibly also to the management of Fashion Box. In terms of theoretical contributions, the study aims to contribute to the international marketing literature. In order to fulfil the purpose, the following research questions are to be studied:

**RQ1. To what extent do international fashion companies adapt and/or standardize their trade promotion and promotional strategies, and why?**

**RQ2. What influence does trade promotion, and more specifically images featuring sexual appeals have on retailers’ purchasing behavior?**

**RQ3. What effects does advertising featuring sexual appeals have on consumers’ purchase intention and perceived brand image?**

**RQ4. What are the differences in the effects of advertising featuring sexual appeals between Sweden and Italy?**

The preceding research questions are to be answered in the following manner. RQ1 is studied by collecting data through participant observations and interviews, while RQ2 is answered through interviews. RQ3, in turn, is researched through an experiment conducted in both Sweden and Italy. Lastly, RQ4 is answered by qualitatively analyzing the data collected through the experiment (see Table 1).

### Table 1

*Methods applied to answer the research questions*

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<tr>
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1.4. Key Concepts

Marketing mix – Marketing mix is a marketing programme including the following 4Ps: product, price, place and promotion (McCarthy, 1964). Marketing mix is regarded as the basic model of marketing (Grönroos, 1994).

Promotional activities – Promotional activities can be divided into personal and non-personal activities, the former includes, for example advocate, expert and social channels; the latter, in turn, for example advertising through television, billboards, and newspapers (Rowley, 1998). In this study, the following advertising channels are considered when discussed about promotional activities: billboards, social media, and magazines. Moreover, the words advertising and promotion are used interchangeably throughout the study.

Promotional material – In this study, promotional material is considered to be the images and videos used for promotional purposes and communicated through the channels mentioned above.

Sexual appeal – Sexual appeal is defined as “a persuasion attempt that uses words, images, and/or actions by models appearing in ads to deliver an explicit or implicit sexual message designed to evoke sexual thoughts, feelings and/or arousal in a target audience” (Wirtz, Sparks, & Zimbres, 2018, p. 169).

Trade promotion activities – Trade promotion is defined as “any promotions that are provided to the downstream channel members by vendors to incentivize them to either purchase their products or to do some specific brand-building activity on behalf of the vendor” (Poddar, Donthu, & Parvatiyar, 2013, p. 45). This research considers specifically the following trade promotion activities: in-store competitions, clinics (i.e. presentations of a fashion company’s products including information given about the technical features of the products and the inspiration for the collection), and provision of ad/display materials.

Trade promotion material – In this study trade promotion material is considered to be logo blocks that represent the brands, materials to decorate the windows, point-of-purchase (POP) materials, images and videos used in particular for in-store consumer promotion purposes (Park, 2004).

Promotional support – Promotional support is defined to be the support manufacturers give to their retailers. Furthermore, if the trade promotion activities and the relationship with the vendor satisfies the retailers, they are more receptive to the trade deal (Poddar et al., 2013).

Brand image – Brand image is formed in the mind of the receiver, and it is defined as beliefs held by consumers about a specific brand (Kotler, 1988).

Brands as Intentional Agents Framework (BIAF) – The framework is based on the Stereotype Content Model. It considers the consumer’s assessment of brand’s perceived ability and intentions and whether these bring out both distinct emotions and brand behaviors (Kervyn et al., 2012).

Standardization – Globalization and improvements in technology call for standardization of marketing activities (Levitt, 1983). More specifically, international advertising standardization
refers to applying common advertising messages when promoting the same product across borders (Papavassiliou & Stathakopoulos, 1997).

**Adaptation** – The adaptation approach is the opposite to standardization, acknowledging that consumers have different preferences (Fournier, 1998), thus implementing universal marketing standardization strategies imply that the activities pursued by a company are not based on a customer behavior analysis or the market characteristics (Douglas & Wind, 1987). Moreover, culture, and differences in government regulations and climates pressure companies to adapt their marketing strategies when operating internationally (Papavassiliou & Stathakopoulos, 1997; Kotler, 1986).

**1.5. Disposition**
The dissertation has been organized in the following way. The first chapter provides the background, the problem, the purpose, key concepts, and the disposition of the study. The second chapter, in turn, gives a theoretical background to the study starting from the marketing mix, then moving on to brand image and cultural considerations, and finally covering standardization and adaptation concepts. The third chapter describes the methods used in the study in detail. In the fourth chapter, the qualitative empirical data gathered through participant observation and interviews is presented. While, in the fifth chapter the quantitative analysis and results are demonstrated. A qualitative analysis is then derived in the sixth chapter from the empirical data and the theoretical framework presented earlier. Lastly, in the seventh chapter discussion, conclusions, managerial implications, limitations and suggestions for further research are presented.
2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents a theoretical framework from which several hypotheses are derived. The theories and concepts chosen are not only relevant to the purpose of the study but they have also been used in other standardization and adaptation of international marketing studies. First, the marketing mix with an emphasis on advertising featuring sexual appeals and trade promotion are introduced, following with brand image theories. Then, cultural considerations and standardization and adaptation theories are presented.

2.1. Marketing Mix: the 4Ps

Borden (1964) was the first to introduce the marketing mix in the 1960s, although to him the mix was only a combination of elements to be used in the creation of a marketing programme. He introduced the following 12 marketing mix elements in his study: product planning, pricing, branding, channels of distribution, personal selling, advertising, promotions, packaging, display, servicing, physical handling as well as fact finding and analysis. However, McCarthy (1964) developed the mix further by reducing these 12 elements only to a four-element framework, the marketing mix, namely: product, price, place and promotion. McCarthy’s 4Ps have since then been considered as the basic model of marketing (Grönroos, 1994).

The product variable is defined to be the actual offering in the market (McCarthy, 1964). It considers, for example the following characteristics: size, design, brand, packaging, and labelling (Akaah, 1991). The price variable can be either a fixed or discounted price, or in some cases a customer is offered different payment options. When making pricing decisions, several variables should be considered, such as distribution costs, price elasticity, competition in the market, and product image. In terms of place, decisions should be made about distribution channels and networks, locations, availability, and transport and logistics (Kotler, 1976). Promotion, in turn, can be divided into personal and non-personal communication activities, such as advertising, direct marketing, sales promotion, public relations and publicity, personal selling and sponsorships (Rowley, 1998). The promotional mix used by companies includes one or more of the above-mentioned activities. All in all, the marketing mix is a combination of all the factors marketing managers is in charge of in order to meet the needs of the consumers (McCarthy, 1964).

Besides being widely used and valued by marketing practitioners, the marketing mix has received a fair amount of critique too. The main disagreement being the variables included in the framework (Rafiq & Ahmed, 1995). Marketing mix has been, for example argued to be too simple and misleading (Kent, 1986). Many authors also suggest adding more Ps to the mix, for instance PR (Mindak and Fine, 1981), packaging (Nickels and Jolson, 1976), or people, in order to make the mix fit into industrial marketing as well (Judd, 1987). More specifically, several industrial researchers argue that industrial marketing differs greatly from consumer marketing, as the products and the buying processes are more complex, making the buyer and the seller more dependent on each other. Thus, Webster (1984) argues that industrial marketing should focus on buyer-seller relationships instead of products. Also, Gummesson (1987) emphasizes
the importance of long term relationships as they most likely last longer than loyalties towards products and brands.

2.1.1. Promotional Mix
As the current study focuses mainly on the promotional side of the marketing mix, a further understanding of promotional mix is provided. Companies use promotion to communicate their product offering to the customers. Advancements in technology have significantly not only changed the marketing communication environment but also the way people interact and communicate (Keller, 2009). Marketing communications are defined by Keller (2009) to be “the means by which firms attempt to inform, persuade and remind consumers – directly or indirectly – about the products and brands they sell” (p. 141). Furthermore, Keller (2009) continues, “marketing communications represent the ‘voice’ of the company and its brands and are a means by which it can establish a dialogue and build relationships with and among consumers” (p.141). More specifically, by implementing different marketing communication activities brands can be linked to other people, places, events, brands, experiences, feelings as well as things (Keller, 2009).

The objectives of a promotional strategy are related to the following factors: increase in sales, maintenance or improvement of market share, creation or improvement of brand image, education of the market, creation of a competitive advantage, and/or improvement of promotional efficiency. As mentioned above, promotional activities can be either personal or non-personal. The personal communication channels consist of advocate channels (e.g. the sales people of a company), expert channels (e.g. independent experts), and social channels and consultants (e.g. friends, co-workers, and personal networks). Non-personal channels, in turn, include communication through other means than person-to-person, for example through television, radio, posters on billboards, or newspapers (Rowley, 1998).

From all the promotional mix activities, advertising is one of the most visible marketing activities (Buil, de Chernatony, & Martinez, 2013). In general, advertising is considered to be any paid of non-personal presentation of ideas (Rowley, 1998). From the beginning of the 1990s, mass media advertising has been found to be dying, as digitalization in forms of new communication platforms has taken place (Rust & Oliver, 1994). The previously mentioned advertising channels (radio, television, and magazines), are losing their power, as the new media environment allows consumers to decide when, where and how they process communications (Keller, 2009). Moreover, advertising does not only convey the messages companies send to consumers, but advertising can also be used to create strong and unique brand associations (Kotler, 2000). As the study concentrates mainly on the advertising featuring sexual appeals, a review of sexual appeal studies is also provided.

Advertising Featuring Sexual Appeals
Sexual appeals are considered to be a subset of provocative appeals, as provocative appeals often refer to other issues too, for instance race and politics (Vézina & Paul, 1997). Wirtz et al.
(2018) define a sexual appeal in advertising to be “a persuasion attempt that uses words, images, and/or actions by models appearing in ads to deliver an explicit or implicit sexual message designed to evoke sexual thoughts, feelings and/or arousal in a target audience” (p. 169). Generally, the sexual content in advertising includes an attractive model wearing clothes that reveal or accentuate his/her body (Biswas, Olsen, & Carlet, 1992; Reichert & Ramirez, 2000) or scantily clad models embracing or kissing (Reichert, Childers, & Reid, 2012). Soley and Reid (1988) classify the style of clothing worn by adult models to four categories: demure (e.g. everyday dress), suggestive (e.g. partially exposed upper body), partially clad (e.g. models wearing underwear or bathing suits), and nude (e.g. models covered in a towel or shown as a silhouette). Apart from the way the model is dressed, Reichert and Ramirez (2000) discovered that the respondents consider, for example a model making eye contact with the camera, giving fleeting glances or tilting her head to also be sexual in an advertisement.

Researchers have studied sexual stimuli in advertising for decades. Furthermore, the effectiveness of sexual stimuli in commercial messages seems to be determined on the dependent measures used (e.g. purchase intention (Dudley, 1999; Wyllie, Carlson and Rosenberg, 2015) or attitude towards the ad (LaTour, 1990; Jones, Stanaland, and Gelb, 1998)), the advertised product and the gender of the receiver (Belch, Belch, & Villarreal, 1987). Purchase intention, for instance, has been found to be positively associated with actual behavior (Webb and Sheeran, 2006), and therefore researchers often use it as a dependent variable when studying sexual appeals in advertising (Dudley, 1999; LaTour & Henthorne, 1994; Wyllie et al., 2015). Studies have also shown sexual appeals used in advertising to increase purchase intention (Severn, Belch, & Belch, 1990).

In terms of the degree of congruence between the product and the sexual appeals, the congruence has been found to mediate with the effectiveness of the ad (Vézina & Paul, 1997). To further support this, one of the findings of a study conducted by Courtney and Whipple (1983) discovered that, if the product advertised is not sexually related, the use of sexual appeals must be questioned. In particular, it was discovered by Putrevu (2008) that women, specifically, respond more positively to sexual appeals, when the fit between the brand and the ad is strong. Men, on the other hand, were found to respond positively to sexual appeals apart of the level of fit (Putrevu, 2008).

When it comes to gender as a moderating factor in sex appeal studies, heterosexual males have been found to prefer female nudity and vice versa (LaTour & Henthorne, 1993; Smith, Haugtvedt, Jadrich, & Anton, 1995). In the case of ads portraying heterosexual couples in various stages of nudity (partially nude and fully nude) and suggestiveness (weak and strong), men respondents found the ad more interesting and appealing and less offensive compared to women respondents. (Belch, Holgerson, Belch, & Koppman, 1982). In more recent studies, researchers have found theoretical support for men’s and women’s differing reactions to sexual appeals in advertising. For instance, culture and socialization of the expectations about gender and sexuality (Dianoux & Linhart, 2010; Liu, Cheng, and Li, 2009), and the values of men and women shaped by the evolution (Lull & Bushman, 2015; Kyrousi, Panigyriakis, & Panopoulos, 2016) have been found to be some of the factors explaining the differences between genders.
It is generally accepted by academicians that purchase decision of a brand or a product differs according to the level of consumer’s involvement in making that decision. More specifically, the involvement is influenced by the attitudes formed and held towards the product or brand (Percy & Donovan, 1991). Rossiter and Percy (1987) define low-involvement to be a situation where the consumer perceives the risk of purchasing a product or brand fairly low and the consumer is ready to try the product/brand without further investigation. In a situation where the consumer is highly involved, the risk perceived is much higher and, for example ads portraying that brand are processed in more detail. In terms of sexual appeals in fragrance ads, it was discovered that sexual appeals lead to a higher brand recall, better brand recognition, more cognitive responses, and superior attitudes and purchase intent when it comes to low-involvement consumers. High-involvement consumers, in turn, were found to evaluate both sexual and non-sexual ads more in detail, and superior attitudes and purchase intent were directed towards the non-sexual ad. In addition to the negative attitude toward the sexual ad, high-involvement respondents also found the ad distractive (Putrevu, 2008).

**Reactions to Advertising Featuring Sex Appeals: Sweden and Italy**

From the other promotional mix activities, advertising is the most connected to culture as it is based on language and communication (Usunier & Lee, 2009). Moreover, culture has an effect on both consumer behavior and mass media; therefore a successful advertisement needs to consider cultural differences (Hill, 1999). In addition to the consideration of cultural factors, marketers should also consider several laws and regulations when it comes to advertising. The International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) established in 1919 is the most important international body that influences self-regulation in advertising. The ICC deals with both “hard” issues, such as the deceptive character of an advertisement and the substantiation of advertising claim, and “soft” issues, such as decency, taste, public opinion and social responsibility in advertising. These “soft” issues, though, are difficult to define, as they are personally subjective, related to cultures, and historically changing values and attitudes. Furthermore, the “soft” issues are often found in self-regulatory codes and regulatory guidelines of advertising (Boddewyn, 1991). Self-regulation has been strengthened in terms of voluntary codes and guidelines concerning sex and decency used in advertising in various countries, Sweden being one of them, by creating an Ethical Council (Boddewyn, 1986, 1988). Due to voluntary self-imposition of standards, the quality of advertising and its responsiveness to current concerns can be addressed (Boddewyn, 1991). However, because voluntary codes and guidelines highlight that ads should not show certain behavior, for example overindulging, embracing, undressing, they are then instead endorsing the view that “advertising shapes general behaviour” instead of promoting a specific brand (Boddewyn, 1991, p. 32).

In particular, when it comes to sexual appeals in advertising, one of the findings of an exploratory study done by Lass and Hart (2004) was that Italians have a higher acceptance, overall, when it comes to sexual imagery in advertising of alcohol compared to German and English consumers. Even if, Italy is the most conservative country among the three and follows strong Catholic traditions making it the least sexually permissive in Europe (Bosveld, 1996). Another finding regarding the Italian respondents of the study was that when shown a
suggestive ad portraying a woman licking a bottle of alcohol, the Italians found it not that suggestive as they are exposed to similar advertisement on regular basis. An ad portraying a semi-nude woman was found to be rather boring by Italian women, since they are fairly used to being exposed to similar imagery. Moreover, an ad portraying a nude couple was found to be stylish and beautiful by both Italian men and women. Overall, the opinions of the respondents of the three countries varied and possible reasons for this are, for example the way sex is portrayed in media (Lips, 1988) and differently portrayed gender roles in a society (Bosveld, 1996). However, overall, men were found to react more positively towards sex in alcohol ads compared to women.

In terms of Swedish consumers, an exploratory study done through interviews and focus groups consisting of high school students found that young men believe that there is too much sex in advertising and that nudity in advertising is very common. Also the male respondents indicated that sexual advertising might change their attitude towards the brand but not their buying behavior. Young women, on the other hand were found to change their purchase behavior, if they find the ad too sexual, bad or corny (Hultin & Lundh, 2004).

2.1.2. Trade Promotion

Moreover, as the second research question considers the agent-retailer relationship, an overview of trade promotion is provided. Trade promotion is widely used by companies, however it has not been extensively researched by academics (Poddar & Donthu, 2011). Previous research on trade promotion has focused mainly on price reduction as a trade deal (Blattberg & Wisniewski, 1987; Curhan & Kopp, 1988; Mulhern & Leone, 1991). However, price promotions are found to be fairly ineffective or not very profitable in the long-term (Shutt, 1995). Poddar et al. (2013) define trade promotions as “any promotions that are provided to the downstream channel members by vendors to incentivize them to either purchase their products or to do some specific brand-building activity on behalf of the vendor” (p. 45). Trade promotions differ from consumer promotions, which are targeted for the end consumer, such as coupons, promotional packs or buy two get three deals (Poddar et al., 2013). More specifically, trade promotions allow manufacturers to affect the retail price and retail sales (Ailawadi, Farris & Shames, 1999). Other ways of increasing the attractiveness of trade deals are promotional allowances, provision of ad/display materials and other sales supporting materials/activities. Display material promotions, in particular, play a significant part in consumer promotions, and introduction of new product and line extensions. Other advantages of display promotions are the possibility to implement them quickly, and the support they give to consumer promotion and advertising at the point of purchase (Park, 2004).

Promotional support is a trade promotion tool used to make the trade deal more attractive and increase the consumer demand through store merchandizing (Park, 2004). Park (2004) defines the cooperation with promotional support to be “retailers’ collaborative acceptance of the promotional support offered by the suppliers” (p. 413). He further continues “retailers will have different preferences on manufacturers’ provision of promotional supports because they have their own promotion strategies depending on their defined customer and product offering” (Park, 2004, p. 413). Moreover, if the retailer is satisfied with both the trade promotion activities
and the relationship with the vendor they are more receptive to the trade deal (Poddar et al., 2013).

2.1.3. Trade Promotion in the Fashion Industry
As fashion goods are mostly sold in retail outlets, the relationship between the manufacturer and retailer is important (Park, 2004). In the case of retailers dominating the relationship with the manufacturer, the promotional strategies of the manufacturer tend to concentrate on push promotional strategies, such as trade promotions and personal selling, whereas retailers focus on pull strategies, such as consumer ads and sales promotion (Erdem & Harrison-Walker, 1997). In this study North Box, the agent, is seen as a representative of the manufacturer, Fashion Box, and therefore when talking about manufacturer and retailer relationships, the agent is seen to be part of that. Previous research has identified a number of trade promotion activities, for example price-offs (e.g. discounts based on the quantity), advertising and promotional allowances, in-store promotion and display material (e.g. display fixtures and visual display materials), consumer incentives, and training and providing incentives to sales people (Rogers & Gamans, 1983; Shim & Drake, 1991; Wingate & Friedlander, 1978).

In terms of fashion retailers, the retailer defines the image of the store and the target customer. Thus, the retailer also has great influence on the promotional material displayed in the store (Frings, 1987). A study done by Baker, Grewal and Parasuraman (1994), proposes that store environment, merchandize quality, and service quality are antecedents of store image with the latter two serving as mediators. In addition, Baker et al. (1994) suggest that retailers need to align their decisions about atmospheric (i.e. ambient, design and social) elements with their marketing and store image objectives. Spies, Hesse, and Loesch (1997) found a positive relationship between consumers spending more money at a retailer when they found the environment pleasant. Although the customer is not always the only one affected by actions of a manufacturer. For instance, in an extreme case regarding the fashion organization Benetton, its retailers sued the company because they believed Benetton’s provocative advertising style was driving the customers away (Ganesan, 2002).

2.2. Brand Image
Before making decisions about the marketing mix, brand image strategies should be developed in order to position the product (Roth, 1995). As mentioned above, creating or improving brand image is one of the objectives of a promotional strategy. Thus, it is important to understand how brand image is defined and how it can be communicated, for example through advertising (Roth, 1995). Brand image is formed in the mind of the receiver, and it is defined as “the set of beliefs held about a particular brand” (Kotler, 1988, p. 197), whereas brand identity, which is controlled by a company, is defined as “the sum of all the ways a company chooses to identify itself to all its publics” (Marguiles, 1977, p. 66). As brand image is shaped in the consumer’s mind, it is important to understand the social signals and symbolism related to brands “people buy things not only for what they do, but also for what they mean” (Levy, 1959, p.118). Broadbent and Cooper (1987) further continue “in order to be successful, images and symbols
must relate to, and indeed, exploit, the needs, values and life-styles of consumers in such a way
the meanings involved give added values, and differentiate the brand from other brands” (p.3).
Moreover, Dobni and Zinkhan (1990) highlight factors affecting the development of brand
image: product attributes, marketing mix, modes through which people tend to perceive values,
and people associated with the use of the brand. For example, Levi’s adapts its brand image to
different markets. In the United States the brand image is very social and group oriented, while
in Europe it is more individualistic and sexual. On the contrary, some brands, such as Nike and
Coca-Cola, have been successful in using the same brand image cross nationally, however it is
still necessary for managers to not only identify and assess global market conditions, but also
to respond to them when making decisions concerning brand image strategies (Roth, 1995).

2.2.1. The Social Perception of Warmth and Competence
The Stereotype Content Model that considers how people perceive social groups on two
dimensions of social perceptions: warmth and competence, has been extensively researched by
social psychologists (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). For
example, paternalistic stereotypes (e.g. older people are not as competent as younger people,
but instead they are kind), stereotypes regarding ethnicity (e.g. Jews are viewed as competent
but not warm), and envious stereotypes (e.g. non-traditional women, such as career women,
feminists and athletes are considered competent in what they do but not warm) have been
studied earlier by several researchers (Cuddy & Fiske, 2002; Bettelheim & Janowitz, 1950;
Glick, Diebold, Bailey-Werner, & Zhu, 1997; MacDonald & Zanna, 1998). Later research has
found an assessment of warmth and competence to be also important when it comes to
consumers’ perceptions of both organizations and brands (Fournier, 1998, 2014; Aaker,
Fournier, & Brasel, 2004; Aaker, Vohs & Mogilner, 2010; Kervyn et al., 2012; Bennett & Hill,
2012). A study done by Aaker et al. (2010), for instance, concludes that, if an organization is
perceived both warm and competent the customer is more likely to buy from that organization.

Warmth dimension typically includes perceptions of generosity, kindness, honesty, sincerity,
helpfulness, and trustworthiness. The perceptions of the dimension answer to the question
“What intentions does this entity have?” The competence dimension, in turn, includes
attributes, such as confidence, effectiveness, intelligence, and competitiveness. The perceptions
of this dimension answer the question “Is this entity capable of carrying out its intentions?”
(Aaker, 1997; Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima 2005; Yzerbyt, Provost, & Corneille,
2005; Kervyn et al., 2012). Both dimensions result in different types of behavior, for example
warmth is associated with cooperation and helping others, whereas competitive and exploitive
intentions refer to a cold perception. In terms of competency, the dimension is associated with
the ability to do something or, on the contrary, being unable to do something, thus perceived
incompetent (Cuddy et al., 2007).
2.2.2. The Social Perception of Brands and BIAF

As mentioned above, it has been discovered that consumers relate to brands the same way they relate to people (Fournier, 1998). BIAF, a model proposed by Kervyn et al. (2012), is based on the Stereotype Content Model. The framework considers the consumer’s assessment of a brand’s perceived ability and intentions and whether these bring out both distinct emotions and brand behaviors. In the model, warmth and competence dimensions are replaced with “intentions” and “ability”, respectively, to make the model a better fit to measuring brand perception. More specifically, this is done to highlight the way these perceptions suggest a corporate entity to have intentions and the ability to act on those intentions. Furthermore, the framework is partly used in the analysis later.

The authors, thus, propose a framework (see Figure 2) that posits brands in accordance to how well or ill-intentioned they seem to be as well as how able they are perceived to be (Kervyn et al., 2012). The model is divided into four different clusters. The first one includes brands that are perceived as able and well-intentioned (Popular brands) and are expected to elicit admiration. The second one includes brands that are unable but well-intentioned (Paternalized brands) and are expected to elicit pity. Whereas, the third cluster includes brands perceived as able but ill-intentioned (Envied brands) and are expected to elicit envy. Lastly, the fourth cluster includes brands that are both unable and ill-intentioned (Troubled brands) and are expected to elicit contempt. The studies done by the authors support their identification of different brands belonging to different clusters. Popular and successful brands were found to belong to the first cluster. Whereas, luxury brands were found to belong to the second cluster, as they specifically target more wealthy consumers. The third cluster, in turn, included the brands that need to be supported by the government. Lastly, troubled but well-known brands that have struggled with bad press in the past were found to belong to the fourth cluster (Kervyn et al., 2012).

![Figure 2. Brands as Intentional Agents Framework dimensions, clusters and emotions. Adapted from “Brands as intentional agents framework: How perceived intentions and ability can map brand perception,” by Kervyn et al., 2012, Journal of Consumer Psychology, 22(2), 167.](image)

According to Kervyn et al. (2012), BIAF can be used, for instance in creating comprehensive maps of brand’s perception in a particular market or category. The maps can then be used by managers in understanding how a brand is positioned relative to competitors, which dimensions need to be improved, and what are the emotions the brand is likely to elicit (Kervyn et al., 2012).
A study done by Aaker, Garbinsky, & Vohs, (2012), found the purchase intent for brands that are posited in the popular brand quadrant, warm and competent, to be higher compared to brands that are perceived as high in only one of the dimensions. In a case where a brand is perceived high in warmth it is possible for the company to communicate competence to its customers by, for example offering high quality products. Consequently, if a brand is perceived high in competent, it could change its perception and communicate warmth by showing that it cares for others. As an example, a pharmaceutical company communicated in their motto that patients come first, which is an indication to the consumer that the company cares for their customers (Aaker et al., 2012). Another study done by Bratanova, Kervyn, and Klein (2015) researching the influence of brand perception on experienced taste and consumer behavior towards tap water and a branded chocolate, further supports the findings that purchase intention of a brand perceived as both warm and competent is greater.

2.3. Cultural Considerations
Cultures are very complex to understand and most people have very superficial knowledge about other cultures than their own. Culture reflects on the reality people live in and it can be at the same time constraining, but still full of opportunities (Usunier & Lee, 2009). According to Hofstede (1991), culture is regarded to be something that does not change over time, or even if it does change, it takes a lot of time for that to happen, as cultures are imprinted in people’s minds. The core element of culture is values, which are defined to be “broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over other” (Hofstede, 2007, p. 413). Relationships in a society are affected by the values programmed in people’s minds (Hofstede, 2007). Laurent (1983) divides culture into two different entities: national and organizational cultures. From which national culture is learned through interaction in society, while organizational culture considers values and norms obtained in organizations (Laurent, 1983).

Culture influences the behavior of an individual but it does not determine it (Usunier & Lee, 2009; Hofstede, 1994). Furthermore, consumption and personal preferences are always going to differ between countries (Usunier and Lee, 2009; Roth, 1995), as people are motivated by different needs, making decisions in a different way, and valuing different leadership styles (Lee, Kim & Park, 2015). Culture is hard to isolate, and therefore international marketers use national borders as a way to segment different cultures. When two cultures collide people from both cultures often realize that what they consider to be “right” might not be considered “right” in another culture. This, in turn might then lead to hostility and annoyance. Thus, it seems that cultures are non-negotiable in nature (Lee et al., 2015). In the case of violation of cultural norms, an ad might be mildly disapproved, but in an extreme case it can be even banished. For example, in Malaysia, where many people follow Quran; women are expected to cover their whole body, thus an ad showing a half-naked woman would be strongly disapproved (Mastor, Jin, & Cooper, 2000).
2.3.1. Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions

Hofstede defines culture as “the collective programming of the mind, which distinguishes the member of one human group from another” (1984, p. 82). Furthermore, Hofstede (1984) continues “culture is reflected in the meanings people attach to various aspects of life; their way of looking at the world and their role in it; in their values, that is, in what they consider as ‘good’ and as ‘evil’; in their collective beliefs, what they consider as ‘true’ or ‘false’; in their artistic expressions, what they consider as ‘beautiful’ and as ‘ugly’ (p. 82). The following five dimensions: individualism vs. collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity vs. femininity, and long term orientation, are identified by Hofstede (1984, 2007) to explain differences between cultures. Each dimension is measured on a scale from 1 to 100 (Hofstede, 2007). This study, though, considers only the first four dimensions, as they are seen to be the most relevant for the study.

Individualism is defined to be a social framework, where individuals within the society are supposed to take care of only themselves and their immediate family. Freedom, and experiences are factors valued in an individual culture and decisions are often times made independently (Hofstede, 1984). Variety, novelty and experiential needs are to be emphasized in an individual society, when it comes to brand image strategies (Roth, 1995). Collectivism, on the other hand, is defined to be the total opposite, where individuals can expect their relatives, clan or any other in-group to take care of them in exchange for their loyalty (Hofstede, 1984, 1989). In addition, in collectivist cultures group and collective thinking are not only emphasized in general, but also when it comes to creating brand images (Roth, 1995).

Power distance is seen as the amount of unequal distribution of power in an organization or in a society individuals are willing to accept. In high power distance societies a hierarchical order is in place and, for example managers and lower level employees are well aware of each other’s roles. Also, wealth and prestige are emphasized when establishing boundaries between social and economic classes, for example between rich and poor people (Hofstede, 1984, 1989). When it comes to brand image strategies, in a high power distance society social and sensory needs of brands should be emphasized (Roth, 1995). In low power distance societies, in turn, people are less concerned about differences in social classes. Tasks in organizations are delegated and managers and employees feel more equal and close to each other (Hofstede, 1984, 1989). In terms of brand image strategies, the functionality instead of the social roles or group affiliations of a brand should be emphasized (Roth, 1995).

When it comes to uncertainty avoidance, societies with high uncertainty avoidance are aiming for reducing uncertainty by, for example employing rigid codes of belief and behavior. In addition, people from high uncertainty avoidance culture are fairly risk averse and possess a low tolerance to ambiguity. On the contrary, people from lower uncertainty societies believe that uncertainty is inevitable and that the future is unknown (Hofstede, 1989). Furthermore, innovativeness and entrepreneurship are described to characterize the individuals from lower uncertainty societies (Hofstede, Steenkamp, & Wedel, 1999).

Masculinity can be defined as an emphasis on assertiveness, money and being less concerned about the well-being of others. In turn, individuals belonging to a feminine society are more sympathetic, and caring of others. Furthermore, more feminine societies have quite developed
welfare systems, educational organizations are free for the members of the society, and problems are openly admitted. (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2002). Lastly, in a society where long-term orientation prevails, individuals value persistence and thrift, while individuals belonging to the short-term orientation value “face” and respect for tradition. Most of the Asian countries scored high on the long-term orientation in comparison to many Western countries that were placed in the medium-term (Hofstede, 2007).

Hofstede’s cultural dimension framework is the most extensively used cultural framework in psychology, sociology, marketing and management studies (Søndergaard, 1994; Steenkamp, 2001). According to Smith, Dugan, and Trompenaars (1996), when it comes to the number of national culture samples Hofstede’s framework is the strongest and the most comprehensive compared to any other cultural framework. However, the framework has also received criticism from multiple scholars for the process of identification of the dimensions empirically rather than theoretically (Albers-Miller and Gelb, 1996), constituting a subjective and arbitrary aggregation of items (Fernandez, Carlson, Stepina, and Nicholson, 1997), and being non-exhaustive (Schwartz, 1994).

2.3.2. Differences in Cultural Dimensions Between Italy and Sweden
The cultural dimension scores in Italy and Sweden can be described to be fairly different. As shown in Table 2, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity dimensions all scored quite low in Sweden compared to Italy. While, individualism and long-term orientation dimension scores do not differ significantly between the two countries. As mentioned above, the study only concentrates on the first four dimensions and this is done for two reasons. Firstly, there are significant differences between most of the four dimensions. Secondly, even though, both countries are individualistic and have almost the same score. Individualism together with power distance, were found to have a significant impact on the performance of brand image strategies (Roth, 1995), and as this study looks into Replay’s brand image, it is important to include the individualism dimension.

Table 2

| Hofstede’s Cultural Dimension Scores: Sweden & Italy |
|-----------------|-----|-----|
| Individualism   | 71  | 76  |
| Power Distance  | 31  | 50  |
| Uncertainty Avoidance | 29  | 75  |
| Masculinity     | 5   | 70  |


Low power distance in Sweden could be explained, for example through the Swedish management style, which is very decentralized, democratic and non-hierarchical. The
employees take initiatives and managers also give them a fair amount of liberty (Tixier, 1996). Low uncertainty avoidance, in turn, indicates that Swedish people feel comfortable with living in a changing environment where the future is unknown (Hofstede, 1989). In terms of masculinity, Sweden scored very low in this dimension (Hofstede, 1989). Therefore, Sweden can be seen as a more feminine society, where people have been, for example taught from a young age to never show that one is the best, the richest, or more gifted than the other. It is also not accepted to talk about one’s fortune or good performance or success in public. In addition, as Sweden is a social welfare state, where many social services are provided for the citizens free of charge, such as education and health care, show that Swedish people are caring for others (Tixier, 1996).

Italy, in turn, scored high in uncertainty avoidance, which indicates that Italians need rules and laws to structure their society and to increase predictability. As an example, Italy has twice as many laws than Germany and three times more than the UK (Hooper, 2015). Masculinity also scored high, meaning that emphasis is placed on being assertive and less concerned about other people’s well-being (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2002). Furthermore, when it comes to power distance, Italy has a more hierarchical management structure compared to Sweden. Lastly, both countries can be described to be highly individualistic as people are mostly concerned about themselves and their immediate family. However, as mentioned above Sweden being a social welfare state it does then consider other individuals on a state level. This in turn, does not apply to Italy, where the social system is not as developed (Saraceno, 1994; Graziano, 2009).

2.4. Standardization vs. Adaptation of Marketing Activities

Globalization, continuous integration of world’s major economies, and the increase in world trade make standardization and adaptation of marketing strategies an important matter for academicians and practitioners years to come (Viswanathan & Dickson, 2007). The debate whether the key to success in executing international marketing strategies is through the means of standardization or adaptation of marketing strategies in accordance to the characteristics of a specific market has been on going from the 1950s (Levitt, 1983; Fisher, 1984; Jain, 1989; Ryans, Griffith, & White, 2003; Birnik & Bowman, 2007). There are three major perspectives on the issue, which are the standardization approach (Jain, 1989; Levitt, 1983), adaptation approach (Douglas and Wind, 1987; Zou and Tamer Cavusgil, 1996), and the contingent framework that deals with different levels of standardization (Porter, 1986; Jain, 1989; Craig & Douglas, 2000). Historically, academicians and practitioners have had different views about international advertising. Academicians have tended to favor adaptation and contingency approaches, as more studies about international consumers were conducted revealing both similarities and differences between countries. Whereas, practitioners have shifted their focus back and forth from standardization to adaptation. The reasons behind the shifts are proposed to be cost reductions achieved when standardizing marketing activities, increasing global competition and the need for a global image (Agrawal, 1995).
2.4.1. Standardization Approach to International Advertising
According to Levitt (1983), since globalization is driven by advancements in technology, markets are becoming more homogeneous. Thus, marketers need to take advantage of the homogenized markets by adapting to a standardized marketing strategy (Levitt, 1983). Specifically, international advertising refers to “using a common approach (i.e. common advertising messages) to promote the same product across national boundaries” (Papavassiliou & Stathakopoulos, 1997, p. 504). Some of the reasons for standardization of advertising are: to be able to keep a consistent image and identity around the world, decrease of confusion among travelers, and save in costs of the production of advertising and the illustrative advertising materials. Standardization takes place mainly when there are great similarities in cultures and economic conditions across countries, and when decisions are made centrally (Papavassiliou & Stathakopoulos, 1997).

As mentioned above, consumer involvement has been found to have an effect when making purchase decisions. Moreover, low-involved consumers make a decision to try a product without having much knowledge about it (Rossiter & Percy, 1987). Consumer involvement can also be related to standardization decisions, as standardization is more appropriate when consumers are low-involved. Furthermore, massive advertising is considered to be effective when advertising is standardized, as the objective there is to get high exposure for the message in order to maintain the attention of the audience and become well recognized (Papavassiliou & Stathakopoulos, 1997). As mentioned earlier, a study done by Putrevu (2008) found sexual appeals used in advertising to lead to a higher brand recall, better brand recognition, more cognitive responses, and superior attitudes and purchase intent when it comes to low-involvement consumers.

2.4.2. Adaptation Approach to International Advertising
In response to the standardization approach, it is argued that standardization is not a necessity to compete in global markets (Boddewyn, Soehl, & Picard, 1986). Furthermore, Fournier (1998) argues that even though consumers in, for example the EU might have similar needs, it does not mean that all the consumers make their decisions in a similar way. Universal standardization of marketing strategies seems to ignore the complexity of operations and activities across countries. Using a universal strategy implies that the activities pursued by a company are not based on a customer behavior analysis or the market characteristics (Douglas & Wind, 1987). Moreover, differences for example in cultures and the economic environment encourage companies to adapt their advertising activities (Papavassiliou & Stathakopoulos, 1997).

There are situations where companies can benefit from product and marketing mix standardization, but there are also circumstances that require companies to adapt to the market characteristics. According to Kotler (1986), there are three factors pressuring companies to adaptation when operating internationally: the requirement of product differentiation by customers, customers’ varying amount of resources and buying behavior in different countries, and the environmental factors, for example government regulation, climate and competition. A study done by Bartlett and Ghoshal (2002) shows how, for example Unilever had to adapt their
marketing strategy in order to follow the rules and regulations of the country of their operations. In Germany, for instance, the use of coupons and refunds were illegal in the late 1970s. Thereby, letting local businesses make decisions independently from the headquarters was a natural fit for Unilever.

When it comes to involvement, as mentioned above, high-involved consumers seek for information before making a purchase decision (Rossiter & Percy, 1987). Therefore, the content of the advertising message becomes important. Niche advertising is used when adapting advertising, because the objective of the advertising is to obtain high exposure and recall of the message to maintain attention, become well recognized and communicate new ideas (Papavassiliou & Stathakopoulos, 1997). In terms of sexual appeals used in advertising it was found that high-involved consumers perceive sexual appeals distractive, as they pay more attention to the ads compared to low-involved consumers (Putrevu, 2008).

2.5. Hypotheses Generation

The rationale behind the hypotheses of the study has been developed from both the preceding section of theoretical concepts and by going through the data from the two focus groups organized prior. In addition, a definition for the word “cool” is provided, because of it being one of the main attributes mentioned by the focus group participants when shown an ad featuring sexual appeals. In the following section the rationale behind the hypotheses is explained and the hypotheses are presented.

As mentioned above, studies have shown sexual appeals used in advertising to increase purchase attention (Severn et al., 1990). In terms of gender, it has been discovered that men respond more positively towards ads portraying suggestively dressed heterosexual couples than women (Belch et al., 1982). However, as the study done by Belch et al. (1982) was done in the beginning of the 1980s, it would be interesting to see whether these attitudes have changed. Regarding purchase intention, Webb and Sheeran (2006) found it to be positively associated with actual behavior, and therefore researchers often use it as a dependent variable when studying sexual appeals in advertising (Dudley, 1999; LaTour & Henthorne, 1994; Wyllie, et al., 2015). Furthermore, culture has been found to be connected to advertising (Usunier & Lee, 2009). In terms of advertising featuring sexual appeals, specifically, Lass and Hart (2004) found that Italians have higher acceptance for sexual imagery used in advertising than German and English consumers. More specifically, men were found to react more positively towards sex in ads compared to women (Lass & Hart, 2004). Whereas, a study done by Hultin and Lundh (2004), discovered that sexual appeals in advertising might change mens’ attitude towards the brand but not their buying behavior, while women were found to change their purchase behavior, if the ad is portrayed too sexual, bad or corny.

Therefore, it is hypothesized:

H1: A brand using advertising featuring sexual appeals in a form of a heterosexual (suggestively dressed) couple leads to higher purchase intention of consumers than a brand using advertising without sexual appeals.
H2: A brand using advertising featuring sexual appeals in a form of a heterosexual (suggestively dressed) couple has a positive effect on the purchase intention of Swedish men.

H3: A brand using advertising featuring sexual appeals in a form of a heterosexual (suggestively dressed) couple has a negative effect on the purchase intention of Swedish women.

H4: A brand using advertising featuring sexual appeals in a form of a heterosexual (suggestively dressed) couple has a positive effect on the purchase intention of Italian men.

H5: A brand using advertising featuring sexual appeals in a form of a heterosexual (suggestively dressed) couple has a negative effect on the purchase intention of Italian women.

As mentioned above, according to a study done by Putrevu (2008), sexual appeals lead to a higher brand recall, better brand recognition, more cognitive responses, and superior attitudes and purchase intent when it comes to low-involvement consumers. Whereas, high-involvement consumers were found to evaluate both sexual and non-sexual ads more in detail, and superior attitudes and purchase intent were directed towards the non-sexual ad. In addition to the negative attitude towards the sexual ad, high-involvement respondents also found the ad distractive (Putrevu, 2008). As the current research considers a clothing brand and not a fragrance, it is interesting to find out whether the results would be similar in terms of purchase intention. Thus, it is hypothesized:

H6: Low-involvement consumers (i.e. consumers to whom trial experiment is sufficient) will have higher purchase intention of a brand using advertising featuring sexual appeals.

H7: High-involvement consumers (i.e. consumers seeking information and conviction prior purchase) will have lower purchase intention of a brand using advertising featuring sexual appeals.

Finally, the last two hypotheses were derived from the conclusions made from the focus group data. Regarding to the reactions of the participants of the focus groups to the image featuring sexual appeals were: cool, rough, insecure, and showing off skin. Cool is defined by Pountain and Robins (2000) as being self-confident, not caring about what others think and being perceived as effortless. This definition is thus used in the study. Since the sexual images were defined by the focus group respondents as “cool”, the authors assume that an ad featuring sexual appeals is rated higher in competence, in terms of its confidence trait. Therefore:

H8: By using advertising featuring sexual appeals, a brand is rated higher in competence than by using advertising without sexual appeals.

The reactions to the image featuring sexual appeals mentioned above do not relate to the traits describing warmth (i.e. generosity, kindness, honesty, sincerity, helpfulness, and trustworthiness). Meanwhile, the reactions to the non-sexual image included not tough (which can be seen as non-aggressive and more related to kindness and helpfulness) and a lot of denim.
Hence, due to the absence of warmth traits in describing the image featuring sexual appeals, it is assumed that:

**H9:** By using advertising featuring sexual appeals, a brand is lower in warmth than by using advertising without sexual appeals.

### 2.6. The Conceptual Framework

To answer RQ3 concerning the effects of advertising featuring sexual appeals on consumers’ purchase intention and perceived brand image, a conceptual model is developed (see Figure 2). As mentioned earlier, it has been found that advertising featuring sexual appeals increases purchase intention (Severn et al., 1990). In terms of men, it has been found that the effect on purchase intention is positive, while the effect on purchase intention of women has been found to be negative (Belch et al., 1982; Lass & Hart, 2004; Hultin & Lundh, 2004). Therefore, in the framework it is assumed that there is a causal relationship between advertising featuring sexual appeals and purchase intention. Moreover, gender is expected to act as a moderator in the relationship.

Regarding consumer involvement, it is generally accepted by academicians that purchase decision of a brand or a product differs according to the level of consumer involvement in making that decision. Highly involved consumers have been found to react more negatively on advertising featuring sexual appeals, as they pay, for example more attention to how the product is advertised. By contrast, low involvement consumers have been found to react more positively, because they are ready to try the product without putting too much thought into the purchase decision (Putrevu, 2008). Hence, involvement is also seen as a moderating effect when it comes to the above mentioned causal relationship between advertising featuring sexual appeals and purchase intention.

When it comes to brand image, it has been found that creating or improving brand image is one of the objectives of a promotional strategy (Rowley, 1998). Also, it is important to understand how brand image can be communicated through advertising (Roth, 1995). Hence, brand image can be measured through warmth/intentions and competence/ability dimensions (Kervyn et al., 2012). In the framework it is assumed that there is a causal relationship between advertising featuring sexual appeals and perceived brand image. Lastly, the framework also considers cultural aspects, as cultures have been found not only to reflect the reality people live in, but also to have an effect on consumption and personal preferences of consumers (Usunier & Lee, 2009; Roth, 1995). Thus, the authors assume that culture can partly explain consumer behavior in terms of purchase intention and perceived brand image in relation to advertising featuring sexual appeals, and therefore act as an important factor in the framework.
To conclude, advertising featuring sexual appeals is considered to be the independent variable, while both purchase intention and brand image are seen to be the dependent variables. Involvement and gender, in turn, are considered to be the moderators of the relationship between advertising and purchase intention.

*Figure 3. Conceptual Framework.*
3. Methodology

This section explains how the study was conducted. After presenting the research purpose and a short explanation of the research philosophy guiding the authors and their approach to theory development, the research design is discussed in two separate sections: research method and research strategy. Subsequently, ethical issues considered before and during the research are reviewed, followed by collection methods of primary and secondary data. Finally, data analysis processes, validity and reliability of the results as well as trustworthiness and authenticity are described.

3.1. Research Purpose

The present study’s purpose is to measure the effects of promotional material on perceived brand image and purchase intention of consumers; to evaluate the effect of trade promotion and promotional material on retailers’ purchasing behavior; and lastly, to find out whether marketing strategies should be standardized across markets. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016) define five distinct purposes for academic studies: exploratory, descriptive, explanatory, evaluative and combined. Considering the purpose of the study and the four research questions developed to fulfil the purpose, this research is considered to be exploratory and explanatory.

Firstly, the study seeks to answer questions starting with “what”, which is a characteristic of an exploratory purpose (Saunders et al., 2016). An exploratory study aims at gaining deeper knowledge about a subject, the nature of which may be unsure or not well explained (Saunders et al., 2016). Despite a large amount of existing studies regarding marketing adaptation/standardization, the study has an exploratory nature as it is trying to investigate possible unknown issues in the implementation of both trade promotion and promotion strategies when using sexual appeals in the promotional content.

In particular, the first part of the research is exploratory, in which data collection was conducted through participant observation, interviews and focus groups. Participant observation was conducted to understand the empirical problem from the perspective of North Box as well as its activities and strategies. The aim of the interviews, in turn, was to gain deeper insights about Fashion Box’s activities and its standardization/adaptation strategies, as well as the influence of trade promotion, and more specifically of images featuring sexual appeals on retailers’ purchasing behavior. Participant observation and the interviews were therefore used to try to answer RQ1 and RQ2. The focus groups, on the other hand, were conducted to raise the most important issues in order to develop hypotheses to be investigated with the subsequent experiment. The second part of the research has an explanatory purpose, since it is trying to find causal relationships between variables (Saunders et al., 2016). In fact, in order to answer RQ3 and RQ4 an experiment was conducted in Italy and Sweden through a web questionnaire. From the data collected an analysis was derived to identify causal relationships, and after that the analysis was discussed qualitatively to compare the results from the two countries.
3.2. Research Philosophy

The philosophy of a research are the overall assumptions and beliefs that the researchers hold regarding the creation of new knowledge (Saunders et al., 2016). The research philosophy of this study is pragmatic, because the study is sponsored by the company analyzed, North Box, so that they can use the results to gain insights about their own and Fashion Box’s strategies. In fact, pragmatism considers ideas to be relevant only, if they can be translated into action (Kelemen & Rumens, 2008). A pragmatist values knowledge when it allows to complete activities successfully (Saunders et al., 2016) and starts a research when there is a doubt or the impression that there is a problem (Elkjaer & Simpson, 2011). In fact, the authors were spurred to conduct the present study because of North Box’s concerns about the current promotional strategy of Fashion Box and its effect on purchase intention, perceived brand image and the relationships with the retailers. Therefore, the approach guiding the researchers is one that considered theories and concepts in terms of their practical consequences for the case studied.

3.3. Research Approach

There are two types of research approaches: inductive and deductive. Deductive approach refers to a research process that begins with a review of relevant literature and theoretical concepts. These are then tested with empirical analysis and they also guide the data collection process. The inductive approach, on the other hand, is the reverse process: theory is created from the results of the empirical research (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

For the present study, the deductive approach is the most appropriate. Firstly, the quantity of relevant literature about international marketing, promotional activities and the usage of sexual appeals in advertising is extensive, and allows deduction. Moreover, with the extant theories the authors found it easier to create focus groups and better interview guides, which allowed the collection of more relevant empirical data for the study. In addition, the existing theories were useful for developing the items for the web questionnaire, as they provided pre-tested constructs.

The advantage of deduction is that the research can be more structured. This was especially needed for the exploratory side of the study, which is in nature very broad and flexible, for example when creating the themes and questions for the focus groups. Additionally, a more structured methodology can make replication easier, which in turn affects the reliability of the results (Saunders et al., 2016).

The disadvantage of the deductive approach is that the researchers know what they want to find already from the start of the study (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 1994) and therefore they look for empirical data that are coherent with the theories chosen when reviewing the literature (Jacobsen, Sandin, & Hellström, 2002). Nevertheless, the authors were focused on finding data that can provide practical and managerial implications for the benefit of both North Box and Fashion Box, thus they were not biased or tempted to necessarily fit the data to the theories.
3.4. Research Method
The authors used both qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection and analysis. Qualitative studies make use of words for collecting and analyzing data and are more appropriate when there is a need to gain a deeper understanding of the practical problem. Quantitative studies instead give priority to quantification by collecting data in form of numbers (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Mixed methods research, in turn, refers to the combination of qualitative and quantitative collection and analytical methods (Saunders et al., 2016).

The first phase of the research consisted of qualitative collection methods, such as participant observation, focus groups and interviews. During the later stage of the research, an experiment was conducted in Italy and Sweden to collect quantitative data to be able to see causality relations between variables more clearly with a quantitative analysis. The data from the experiment was collected through a web questionnaire. The authors found a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to be more appropriate for the research, because of its exploratory and explanatory nature, and because it permits to analyze the two types of results simultaneously and provide more exhaustive and richer insights (Saunders et al., 2016).

3.5. Research Strategy
Research strategy refers to the plan that the authors intend to carry out in order to answer their research questions (Saunders et al., 2016). In this study, the strategy for collecting empirical data is mixed, due to the different academic purposes of the research questions. In addition, the research combines a single case study, a multiple case study and an experimental study, the findings of which were also analyzed across countries, Sweden and Italy, for a cross-cultural research. The mixed strategy for conducting the present research is illustrated in Figure 3.

A case study is defined by Bryman and Bell (2007) as the examination of one single case in a meticulous and in-depth manner. Using this strategy is appropriate when the research is focused on an issue that is happening at the same time of the study in a real-life framework over which the researcher does not have much control (Yin, 2009). Even though many scholars have claimed case studies to only be useful for exploratory purposes, which are nevertheless also included in the present research, Yin (2009) believes that there can be descriptive and explanatory case studies as well. In this research, a single case study strategy is adopted for exploratory purposes, to understand how Fashion Box is adapting and/or standardizing its marketing activities internationally. The data collected from North Box is also included in the case study, as it represents Fashion Box in the Swedish market. Fashion Box and North Box are legally two distinct entities, but in the minds of the retailers in Sweden they are one organization, and indeed they coordinate their activities and act towards a common goal. Additionally, Saunders et al. (2016) consider a single case study design appropriate depending on the nature of the case, which should either be critical, unique or typical. This specific case is a typical case of advertising standardization. The choice of Fashion Box was influenced by the empirical problem brought up by North Box, and the agency’s interest in Fashion Box’s activities, since they influence its own selling activities with the retailers.
A multiple case study, instead, is chosen when the findings from the different cases are expected to be similar to each other, and therefore replicated (Saunders et al., 2016). Hence, the authors of this dissertation chose a multiple case design for exploratory purposes, to understand the influence of trade promotion, and more specifically images featuring sexual appeals on the retailer’s purchasing behavior (RQ2). In fact, since the retailers buy Replay exclusively through North Box, findings are expected to be generally similar across the cases.

In order to answer RQ3 and RQ4, the authors adopted an experimental strategy. An experiment refers to a type of study derived from the natural sciences, where the researcher calculates the probability that an independent variable changes, causing a change in one or more dependent variables (Saunders et al., 2016). In order to test the hypotheses developed from both the theoretical concepts reviewed and the focus group data, this strategy was the most appropriate.

### Figure 4. Illustration of the Mixed Strategy Used.

#### 3.6. Ethical Considerations

Diener and Crandall (1978) define four areas of ethical issues that can occur during business research which were taken into consideration during this study: harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy and deception.

The authors of the present study ensured that the participants did not suffer from any physical and non-physical harm, such as stress, harm to self-esteem or to career prospects (Bryman & Bell, 2007). During the focus groups and interviews, participants were first of all never forced to participate, and during the sessions they were free to not answer questions that they did not feel comfortable with, or perceived as too personal. The images shown for the experimental
study in the web questionnaire featured only moderate sexual appeals (i.e. the models were only partially nude). Moreover, since the pictures are used for advertising purposes and would be published no matter the results of the study, consumers of different ages would see them in any case. Therefore, the authors of this study believe the sexual appeals of the images did not cause any harm.

Lack of informed consent can be an issue when data is collected through participant observation (Bryman and Bell, 2007), but for this research the role of the observer was disclosed. Moreover, all the participants of the interviews, focus groups and web questionnaire were informed of the purpose of the research and could freely choose to participate or not.

Even when a participant agrees on taking part in interviews or focus groups, it does not mean he/she agrees on answering to any type of questions, and often he/she refuses to provide specific information. Moreover, people have different measures for privacy and what is sensitive, so the researcher should be prepared to adapt the questions accordingly (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The authors did, therefore deal with each respondent sensitively and gave everyone the chance to withdraw.

Deception takes place when the researchers conceals the true nature of the research and presents it as something else (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The authors of this study ensured that all the participants involved knew what the research was about. The interviewees also received the transcript of the interview in order to be able to confirm that what was written is correct and approve the use of the information.

3.7. Data Collection
When doing research, there are two ways of collecting data: primary data collection and secondary data collection. Primary data refers to all the data collected directly from the primary source by the researcher, while secondary data is collected by other researchers and/or organizations and then used by a third party in their study (Bryman & Bell, 2007). For this study, both primary and secondary data were collected.

3.7.1. Qualitative Primary Data
In this study, qualitative primary data was collected through participant observation, focus groups and interviews. All the methods are explained in the following sections.

Participant Observation
Participant observation means that the researcher becomes part of the organization or community that he/she intends to research and investigate about and takes part in the activities of the individuals he/she wants to study. As a result of this deep immersion in the context studied, the researcher is able to obtain information and knowledge with his/her own experience. Moreover, he/she can gain a deeper understanding of activities as well as of the informants and their perceptions and social settings. This is one of the main strengths of participant observation with respect to other data collection methods, such as a questionnaire,
where it is more difficult to see the influence of the social context on the responses (Saunders et al., 2016).

As mentioned earlier, one of the authors was employed at North Box during the time of the study and still is, acting as a participant-as-observer, which means that she was able to take part in the activities of the organization and at the same time reveal her role as a researcher (Saunders et al., 2016). The disclosure of the role as a researcher eliminated some ethical issues, as the members of North Box were aware of the fact that their words and actions could be included in the data collection. In fact, data was collected by taking notes about activities, roles and relationships in order to describe the empirical case of this study. Conversations with employees and the owners were also source of primary data, and they were collected throughout the research.

A disadvantage of participant observation is that the observer may, consciously or unconsciously, be biased in the interpretation of events, depending on the environment. Another disadvantage can be that the informants do not behave as they would normally do when they know that they are being observed. Nevertheless, when the participant observer becomes more familiar to the informants, they will start acting as usual again (Saunders et al., 2016). The participant observer in this study had a relationship and a basis for trust with the employees of North Box before the study, so the adaptation of the informants’ behavior is not regarded here as an issue.

**Focus Groups**

In order to collect qualitative data regarding the feelings and attitudes of end consumers regarding Fashion Box’s current promotional material and to discover unknown issues or problems, two focus groups were organized. A focus group is defined as a group interview in which participants are encouraged to share their opinions and converse freely among each other about a specific topic which is presented to them clearly (Krueger & Casey, 2009). By stimulating discussions among participants and investigating each other’s perspectives, the advantage of a focus group is that it permits the researcher to understand the reasons why individuals feel a certain way about different topics (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Moreover, the participants themselves can raise and highlight questions that they consider relevant (Bryman and Bell, 2007), questions the researcher may have missed to detect.

The main topics of discussion during the focus groups were consumers’ attitudes in terms of personal preference and considering the Swedish culture towards promotional images with and without sexual appeal shown to them. The objective of the focus groups was to raise issues and gain better understanding about the research problem and hence use the information gathered from them to generate hypotheses. Therefore, in order to understand not only the perceptions towards the current advertising images, but also towards what was considered to have the ideal values for the Swedish market in North Box’s perspective, the researchers created new fictitious advertising images. They organized a photo shoot in order to create images that would ideally fit the Swedish market from North Box’s point of view. The company is in fact assumed, due to years of operating in the industry, to be a credible expert in the Swedish market, and was
therefore entitled to choose the clothes to be used in the pictures and set the guidelines that would best represent Replay in Sweden in accordance to the local cultural values. Due to a limited amount of resources, the pictures taken were not as professional as the current advertising images used by Fashion Box. This could be seen as a limitation of the research, as the professionalism of the pictures might have affected respondents’ opinions, but the authors found this irrelevant as the focus was mainly on the brand traits and the products, rather than on if the picture simply “looks good” or professional.

The focus groups were organized in Gothenburg and Halmstad. In both locations, a quiet room with no distractions was chosen. Each focus group had four participants. The normal size of a focus group is between seven and ten (Greenbaum, 1999), however according to Saunders et al. (2016) the amount can also vary between four and twelve. Thus, the authors opted for smaller groups, as the amount would still allow for extensive discussions among participants and bring up the main issues. Moreover, smaller groups take less time to be transcribed, and this can be a problem with bigger groups, since differently from one-to-one interviews, it is more difficult to recognize the voices of the different participants in the recordings (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The participants were chosen using a non-probability convenience sampling. The authors selected people they thought they could learn the most from, including both female and male genders, from the ages of 12 to 44.

A focus group is flexible in nature but needs to be structured in advance by the researchers so that all the points of interest are covered (Greenbaum, 1999). Therefore, the authors defined the themes which they wanted to gain more insight about and from them they developed specific questions. Consequently, they designed an agenda which consisted of an introduction with an explanation of the research, guidelines, and ethical issues, followed by the main discussion and finally by the collection of demographic data. Depending on the time of the day, some drinks and snacks were offered before or after the session.

The authors assumed two different roles during the focus group: one was acting as the moderator and the other one as the assistant. The moderator is a person who directs and stimulates the conversation but without intervening too much and putting too much structure (Bryman & Bell, 2007). While moderating the conversation, the researcher put more attention on the non-verbal communication, and was therefore not taking any notes. The assistant instead, took notes, recorded the session and observed not only the participants, but also the moderator, since she was not experienced. The limited experience of the moderator is a limitation of the focus groups, but the authors tried to put into practice the guidelines for conducting focus groups provided by Bryman and Bell (2007) as best as possible. To incentivize the participation to the focus groups, a lottery of a pair of jeans was organized, and this strategy seemed to be successful in increasing the motivation to join the focus group discussions.

*Interviews*

In order to gain a deeper understanding on the perspective of the retailers regarding trade promotion and advertising featuring sexual appeals, the authors conducted interviews with two retail customers of North Box. The interviewees were identified with a convenience sampling,
since, according to Bryman and Bell (2007), the sampling population becomes less important when it comes to qualitative research, due to the focus on the issues and themes to analyze more deeply, rather than on the degree of representativeness. The interviewees were chosen for convenience of location and availability, but the authors also tried to choose different types of retailers in terms of store image and size of business. The people interviewed were the ones in charge of the external brands purchasing, and included one junior buyer and one buyer and sales associate. One of the retail companies is a large retail chain with circa 120 stores and the other one is a smaller chain that has 8 stores. To ensure anonymity the retailers will from now on be called Retailer A and Retailer B, respectively.

The interviews were semi-structured, in order to ensure comparability among the respondents answers as opposed to an unstructured interview (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The interview guide was developed from the theoretical framework, thus enabling the authors to analyze the data deductively (see Appendix A). The majority of the questions were open-ended to ensure that as much information as possible could be acquired. The initial questions were about the interviewees position in the company, in order to break the ice and make them feel more comfortable, followed by questions about their company in terms of brand image, target customers, the brands they purchase and what influences the purchasing of those brands. The objective was to learn more about the influence of vendors’/Fashion Box’s/Replay’s brand image on the stores’ purchasing behavior and intention. The interview followed a “funnel logic”, which means that the interview starts with more general questions, and ends up in a logical way to more specific questions (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Therefore, the last questions were specific to the relationship with North Box, trade marketing material provided by Fashion Box as well as their perception about Replay’s brand image and about its advertising images featuring sex appeals. In order to understand better the retailers attitudes towards advertising featuring sexual appeals, they were shown the same images that were used in the experiment, one with sexual appeals and one without. These images are described more in detail in section 3.7.2. Despite the planning of a specific set of questions, other questions related to the themes were formed during the interviews based on the interviewees answers. This is expected from an unstructured interview (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The interviews were held in a quiet place where the respondent would not have to worry about being heard, and the sessions were recorded, in order to be able to better concentrate on listening rather than taking notes and it allows for a more detailed analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Mathers, Fox, & Hunn, 1998).

To learn more about the single case, an interview with Fashion Box’s Image, Communication and Marketing Director was done over the phone. The interview guide was developed with the same procedure as the ones with the retailers, but the questions were more focused on adaptation and standardization concepts reviewed in the literature, to gain a deeper understanding of the activities and the degree Fashion Box’s marketing standardization (see Appendix B). The choice of conducting the interview over the telephone was made because of practical reasons, even though this type of interview has disadvantages with respect to face-to-face interviews. For example, the interviewer is not able to see the facial expressions of the interviewee and the
interviewee may be less open to answer questions with a less personal conversation. On the other hand, the answers are more reliable, because the interviewer has less chances of affecting the respondent’s answers (Jacobsen et al., 2002).

3.7.2. Quantitative Primary Data
In this study, quantitative primary data was collected for the experimental study through a web questionnaire conducted in Italy and Sweden. The method and measures used will be discussed in the following section.

**Manipulation Check and Web Questionnaire**
The literature previously reviewed shows that consumers in different countries may respond in different ways to ads featuring sexual appeals (Liu et al., 2009). To understand the effect of sexual appeals used in advertising on end consumers’ purchase intention and perceived brand image of Replay, an experiment was conducted in Italy and Sweden through a web questionnaire. A cross-cultural study allowed the authors to draw conclusions regarding standardization and adaptation theories by comparing the conclusions from the analysis of the respective countries. The experiment approach is appropriate for studying how consumers from different cultures respond to different advertisements (Hoeken et al., 2003).

The web questionnaire was preceded by a pre-test (n=30) made in Sweden, in order to do a manipulation check and evaluate, if there was a significant difference in terms of sexual appeals between the two visual stimuli that the authors intended to use for the experiment, as this was crucial for the study. Moreover, the pre-test was also used to identify other possible provocative traits. This approach has been used in past experimental researches (Putrevu, 2008; Handelman & Arnold, 1999). Therefore, a separate pool of respondents was shown two real advertisement images of Replay, one with sexual appeals, determined by the level of nudity, and one without sexual appeals (see Appendix C). The sexual image represented a heterosexual couple wearing a pair of jeans and no clothes on the upper body and the models were hugging, so they were very close to each other. The image without sexual appeals represented again a heterosexual couple, but more conservative, with the male model wearing a sweater and the female model a dress with only arms exposed; the models were not engaging with each other. The respondents were asked to rate on a Likert scale (1- Not accurate at all; 5- Very accurate), how well 25 traits described the pictures, first the one with sexual appeals and then the one without. The 25 traits included 16 traits that referred to either being provocative or non-provocative (Leavitt, 1970), and 9 traits that referred specifically to being sexual or non-sexual (Putrevu, 2008). The images did not show the brand name in order to avoid bias from brand awareness. The results confirmed the expectations of the authors, in that there was a significant difference between the two images when it came to the traits describing sexual appeals and the trait “indecent” describing general provocativeness.

The web questionnaire was sent via email (see Appendix D) to 4807 university students in Sweden and to 5000 university students in Northern Italy. The authors chose a student sample, since student samples are normally more homogeneous than other samples, and can therefore increase the internal validity in cross-cultural studies like this (Ozsomer, Bodur, & Cavusgil,
To incentivize the responses, a lottery of a pair of jeans was organized in Sweden and a lottery of a T-shirt in Italy. The difference in incentives is due to logistical and practical reasons.

For the cross-cultural study, the independent variable is the level of sex appeal, and the main effects studied are purchase intention (H1) and brand image in terms of warmth and competence (H8, H9). Moreover, the authors found interest in researching the moderation effect of gender in Sweden and Italy (H2, H3, H4, H5) and of involvement level of the consumer (H6, H7).

A between-subjects design was used, meaning that respondents were shown either the sexual or nonsexual image. Thus, by doing the web questionnaire in two countries, this resulted in two control groups (Italy-nonsexual and Sweden-nonsexual) and two manipulation groups (Italy-sexual and Sweden-sexual). The brand name was kept anonymous for all the groups. Among the 675 participants in Italy, 49.78% (n=336) received the control questionnaire and 50.22% (n=339) received the manipulation questionnaire. Among the 449 Swedish participants, 47.22% (n=212) received the control questionnaire and 52.78% (n=237) received the manipulation questionnaire.

The web questionnaire was divided into two parts: first, the image was shown (either sexual or nonsexual) and then it was not. The first part included constructs of the main effects investigated, purchase intention and brand image, as well as sex appeals and control questions. The second part included the construct of involvement. In addition, some questions about in which retail stores the Swedish respondents shop were asked for managerial purposes only. Lastly, all control groups had to fill information about their gender, since it is used as a moderator variable in this study, age and nationality. Moreover, the email address was asked in the case the respondents wanted to join the lottery (see Appendix E). Originally, the questionnaire was created in English, but it was later translated into Italian and Swedish. The naturalness of the translation was ensured by the fact that Italian and Swedish are native languages of one of the authors. The pre-test was translated with the same method but only into Swedish.

**Measures**

*Sex Appeals.* To measure the sex appeals of the image, the respondents were asked to answer a straightforward question “How sexual do you consider this ad?” on a 1-to-5 Likert scale (1 - Not sexual at all; 5 - Very sexual) (Putrevu, 2008).

*Purchase Intention.* In terms of sex appeals, the measure of purchase intention included one single item, where the respondents were asked to indicate on a 1-to-5 Likert scale the likelihood that they would buy the clothes shown in the image (1 - Unlikely; 5 - Likely) (Putrevu, 2008).

*Degree of Involvement.* To measure the degree of involvement, the respondents were first asked to indicate who buys their clothes (themselves/someone else), and then to rate on a 1-to-5 Likert scale (1 - Strongly disagree; 5 - Strongly agree) how much they agreed with five involvement scales (Vézina & Paul, 1997).
**Brand Image (warmth/competent).** To measure how warm/cold and competent/incompetent the brand is perceived with the presented images, the respondents were asked to rate on a 1-to-5 Likert scale how accurate the items were in describing the brand (1 - Not accurate at all; 5 - Very accurate). The items 1, 2, 6 and 7 (section B) were borrowed from (Kervyn et al., 2012) and they were integrated with the items 3, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 10 borrowed from (Bratanova, et al., 2015) in order to increase reliability. The last-mentioned items were modified to fit the product category of the present study.

### 3.7.3. Secondary Data

In this study secondary data was collected mainly through participant observation, by collecting information from brochures, internal sales reports and company presentations. This data was used to write the problem discussion, the empirical problem from the point of view of North Box in section 4.1.1. as well as to describe the brand identity of Replay in section 4.2.

### 3.8. Data Analysis

In the following paragraphs the procedures adopted for analyzing the qualitative and quantitative data are explained.

#### 3.8.1. Analyzing Qualitative Data

The qualitative data collected has been interpreted with a thematic analysis, which consists of categorizing empirical data into predetermined codes, or themes. Such themes are developed by the researcher and can be based on the theory or the literature used for the study, on the terms used by the respondents or on main themes identified from the researcher when reviewing the data collected (Saunders et. al, 2016). For this study, the authors developed the themes from the theoretical framework and from the detection repeated patterns in the data collected. When conducting deductive studies, deriving the codes from the extant theory is common, because of the intrinsic nature of the research approach (Saunders et al., 2016). The choice of a thematic analysis was based on the quantity of qualitative data collected and the different numbers of sources. This type of analysis is in fact preferred when there are large amounts of information to examine and when there is a need to integrate related data from different transcripts and annotations. Moreover, because of the complexity of the study, the different designs and multi-layered perspectives, the authors found the thematic analysis to be the most appropriate, since it allows to describe the data in a logical order and it is more adaptable (Saunders et al., 2016).

#### 3.8.2. Analyzing Quantitative Data

For analyzing the quantitative data collected through the web questionnaire, the tool SPSS 24 was used. The hypotheses developed in the theoretical framework were divided into four groups for the analysis. When testing H1, the authors analyzed the first main effect, which is the influence of sexual appeals on purchase intention. H2, H3, H4, H5 were then tested to examine, if gender has an influence on the effect of sexual appeals on purchase intention. Since these hypotheses are country-specific, H2 and H3 were only tested on the Swedish sample and H4 and H5 are only tested on the Italian sample. H6 and H7 were tested to understand, if consumers’ level of involvement has an influence on the effect of sexual appeals on purchase...
intention. Finally, H8 and H9 were tested to examine the second main effect of this study, namely the effect of sexual appeals on brand image. Brand image is composed of warmth and competence, based on the framework from Kervyn et al. (2012).

In order to answer the hypotheses, basic statistical analyses were used, such as means table and ANOVA (analysis of variance). The means table is useful for giving an overall understanding of the differences in the average responses between the manipulation and the control group. Subsequently, the ANOVA was computed to verify, if the differences between means are statistically significantly different (Field & Hole, 2002). The confidence level used is 0.95. A one-way independent ANOVA was computed for the analysis of the main effects, both of sexual appeals on purchase intention and on brand image. To analyze the influence of the moderators (gender and involvement) on the first main effect, a two-way independent ANOVA was computed. In this case, one independent variable was added, either gender or involvement level, and in all the groups the respondents are different (Field & Hole, 2002).

The ANOVA has three assumptions: normal distribution of residuals of the independent variable, homogeneity of variance and that every group analyzed is independent. When each group analyzed is large (n > 30) the normal distribution of residuals of the independent variable is not particularly important to be satisfied, therefore the testing of this assumption is not presented in the analysis part (Saunders et al., 2016). The homogeneity of variance assumption is verified before computing each ANOVA. However, if the largest group is not more than 1.5 times bigger than the smallest group, then this assumption does not have a relevant effect on the results (Saunders et al., 2016). Lastly, all the groups analyzed are independent of each other.

3.9. Reliability and Validity

Reliability refers to the degree to which the results of a research are repeatable. Very close to the concept of reliability, is the concept of replicability, which means that a study should allow replication (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The authors of this study ensure reliability of the quantitative part of this study in three ways. Firstly, the questionnaire with all the items is displayed in Appendix D making replication possible. Secondly, the items used in the web questionnaire are borrowed from extant studies, thus their reliability has been proven by other researchers. Lastly, to increase reliability, the Cronbach alpha’s has also been measured by the authors of this study to prove more clearly the construct reliability of the measures (see Table 4 and Table 6).

Validity refers to the integrity of the whole study, including the suitability of the measures used, the correctness of the procedure used for analyzing the findings and the generalizability of the results (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Saunders et al., 2016). Bryman and Bell (2007) distinguish four types of validity: measurement validity, internal validity, external validity and ecological validity. Measurement validity refers to if the measure really measures the concept that is meant to be analyzed. In this research the measurement validity is ensured by the fact that the items are borrowed from previous studies, and therefore have already been proven. Internal validity is the extent to, which a causal relationship is really explained by the independent variable or variables. In this study, the control questions regarding the sexual appeal of the models are
asked in order to increase the internal validity of the results. In fact, this way the authors can understand, if it is really the sexual appeal of the image that causes changes in purchase intention and brand personality, or if the relationship is affected by the attractiveness of the models. External validity refers to the extent to which the results of a study can be generalized. For this experiment, a non-probability convenience sampling has been used, which is less generalizable than a probability sampling. Since the populations studied are the Swedish and the Italian markets, the results from the samples chosen are not truly generalizable. This is one of the limitations of this research. Nevertheless, the respondents were university students in the two countries, and fall into the target segment of Fashion Box, and the results are therefore significant for the specific case. Moreover, a student sample is normally more homogeneous than other samples (Ozsomer et al., 1991). Ecological validity is concerned with the setting in which the respondents are put, and whether it reflects their everyday life and if it is natural. In this study, the respondents could answer the questions at home and the manipulation is believed by the authors to not be unnatural, therefore ensuring ecological validity.

3.10. Trustworthiness and Authenticity

Reliability and validity are criteria normally used for assessing quantitative research in terms of quality (Bryman & Bell, 2007). For qualitative research instead, Guba and Lincoln (1985) and Guba and Lincoln (1994), suggest two alternative criteria, namely trustworthiness and authenticity. In order to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research the following four criteria should be established: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility is achieved in this study by sending the interview transcripts to the interviewees so that they can confirm that the authors understood their social world correctly. Transferability refers to the congruence between the observations the researches makes and the theoretical concepts (Bryman & Bell, 2007). In terms of transferability in this research, the single case study represents a limitation since the authors are focusing on analyzing deeply one unique case and the results may not be generalizable. The multiple case study, on the other hand, has a higher degree of transferability since the focus is more on finding similarities and differences among the cases, in order to try to generalize the results. Dependability, which corresponds reliability in quantitative studies, can be ensured through auditing, which means that all the records of the research process are saved and made accessible for others to be reviewed (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The authors of this study have in fact saved all the audio files recorded during the interviews and focus groups, transcripts, participant selection decisions and data analysis processes, hence they can be available to anyone who desires to audit the results. Confirmability is the parallel of objectivity in quantitative research, and refers to the guarantee of acting in good faith, without being too biased by personal values of preferences. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994) confirmability can be judged by auditors, but the authors of this study can claim that they did their best to be as objective as possible.

Authenticity refers generally to the political impact of the research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The authors express confidence in their presentation of the data in a fair way, showing different viewpoints of the problem analyzed. In fact, not only North Box’s perspective is presented, but also of Fashion Box, the retailers and consumers.
4. Qualitative Empirical Data

This chapter presents the empirical findings collected through participant observation and interviews. North Box and Fashion Box are analyzed as a single case for this case study, as North Box is regarded as the representative of Fashion Box in Sweden. Thus, first the empirical problem from the point of view of North Box is introduced with the data collected through participant observation at the office of North Box. The interview with the Image, Communication and Marketing Director of Fashion Box for the case study follows. Then, the data from the two interviews with the retailers is presented for the cross-case analysis.

4.1. Single Case Study: North Box and Fashion Box

4.1.1. North Box and the Empirical Problem

North Box, a sales agency, has the exclusive rights to sell the products branded by Fashion Box (Replay) in Sweden, Finland and the Baltic countries. Replay is a brand for clothes, accessories and shoes for men, women and children, which are produced, promoted and distributed by Fashion Box. Fashion Box was established in Italy in the early 80’s and is working internationally with distributors, agents, and its own subsidiaries. Replay was first introduced in the Swedish market in 1984 via distributors. In 1999, 15 years later, Fashion Box started its collaboration with North Box, which has since then been its exclusive agent for Replay in the markets mentioned above. North Box has two Swedish owners with 19 years of experience in sales in the Swedish fashion industry, thus they can be considered as being experts in the market. Moreover, market knowledge is important to have especially in this context, because both the market and the fashion industry differ between Sweden and Italy, the heritage country of Fashion Box.

In 2017, the agency was able to double its sales revenue with respect to year 2016, increasing from approximately 7.5 MEUR to about 16 MEUR. According to the owners this increase in sales was mainly related to the collaboration with new retailer chains that are well established in the industry. Because of the huge success during the recent years, Fashion Box and North Box have agreed on reaching a new sales target of 20 MEUR by the end of 2019. The objective of North Box is in fact to reach the agreed target revenue, and then focus its resources on maintaining the aforementioned sales revenue rather than growing it. However, the agency has expressed some concerns in the ability to maintain stability in terms of sales after reaching the target. The concerns in achieving this goal rise from differences between Fashion Box and the Swedish market in terms of industry and company structures, as well as local and organizational cultures.

Fashion Retail Industry in Sweden and Italy

The fashion retail industry in Sweden is dominated by chains, for example H&M, MQ, JC, and Gina Tricot. This has an influence on both the buying behavior of the retailers, and the end customer. The retailers that are the main players in the industry and that sell Replay, buy from their suppliers according to a budget decided before the sales campaign. The retailers’ buying
managers study the sales numbers of specific models and styles of clothes and different brands, and according to that they plan the purchase for the next season. Therefore, the retail buyers do not have a high degree of decision-making power, as they are given a certain amount of money for each of the brands they have in store. The purchase decisions are made with higher focus on sales opportunities rather than on the aesthetic features of the clothes.

In Italy, on the other hand, the fashion retail industry includes a bigger number of independent stores and the industry is not dominated by fashion retail chains, if the fast fashion brands such as H&M and the Inditex Group, are excluded. This results in smaller organizations on the retail side, and therefore smaller purchasing departments, which may even be made of only one person who coincides with the decision maker. In this context, the buying decision can be made more based on personal taste than on given budgets and business reasoning. As mentioned above, Fashion Box is established in Italy, and thus tends to work in accordance to the Italian market and fashion retail industry. Consequently, it is using strategies that focus on art and fashion and on “surprising” the retail buyers, not only in Italy but also internationally in a standardized way. For instance, when Fashion Box presents their new “secret” project, mostly every year, they present it months after the beginning of the sales campaign, when most of the Swedish retailers, for example, have already had their first buying meetings and spent the biggest parts of their budgets. Thus, the buyers do not have enough money left from their budgets to spend on the novelty product and are disappointed about the fact that stores in other countries, or even competitor stores in Sweden, will have such products.

**Functionality vs. Fashion**

Purchase decisions by the retailers in Sweden are mainly driven by analytics and sales trends, and therefore the choice of products is based on functionality instead of extravagant aesthetics. Thus, Replay in Sweden is positioned as a denim brand more than a fashion brand. This positioning is a consequence of both the structure of the market and the Swedish culture, where the purchase of clothes is driven more by functionality rather than by fashion. Additionally, in general Swedish consumers prefer more minimalistic styles rather than clothes with a lot of embellishments. Moreover, the most successful product, Hyperflex (stretchy jeans made out of technical innovative denim fabric), of Replay has strengthened Replay’s position in the Swedish market and has almost become a brand on its own due to its popularity and success.

**Organizational Cultures**

Management style and organizational cultures are different between Fashion Box and North Box. These dissimilarities, at times, create confusion when the two companies interact with each other, but also during the interactions with retailers. Fashion Box is a hierarchical company, in which the top-down approach prevails. Therefore, before a decision can be made, it has to be approved by the top-level management and the information has to pass through the hierarchical levels. These dynamics can influence the work of North Box, as it has a closer relationship with retailers, sometimes personal, and needs to explain to them the difference in organizational cultures between Italy and Sweden, since Swedish companies are normally more flat. In addition, Fashion Box has complex bureaucracy, which can lead to the slowdown of
planning and operations, and in turn sometimes affect the interaction between North Box and its local customers, and consequently sales.

**Marketing Activities**

North Box feels that another barrier in maintaining the current performance stable could be the way marketing activities are organized and carried out by Fashion Box. In fact, Fashion Box’s marketing is centralized in the headquarters in Italy, where products are designed, prices are set, and advertising campaigns are created for all its markets. When it comes to product designs and pricing, North Box can request some small changes that it considers necessary, and these are sometimes accepted to be adapted to the local market. While North Box has freedom in the choice of distribution channels, which means they can choose any retailer they believe is appropriate as a customer, and in the choice of trade promotion activities to take part in, the decision making in the promotional area is still centralized in Italy. Moreover, Fashion Box requires the countries they are operating in to carry out specific promotional activities with a specific frequency. For example, North Box is required to join at least two press days per year in Sweden and appear at least one time on a printed magazine.

The promotional material in particular, can sometimes be a problematic theme in North Box’s perspective, when it comes to sharing them with the retailers and communicating to the Swedish consumers. In fact, because Fashion Box operates in a standardized manner, the images taken and chosen are often thought to not be the most appropriate for the Swedish market. This has been the case recently, as the advertising pictures are representing partial nudity and tattoos and having a strong and aggressive look. In addition, the clothes chosen for the images are not sold in Sweden and this is seen as a problem for most Swedish retailers, since the end consumers often ask for the products represented in the images. The concerns derive not only from the fact that North Box, with its market knowledge, believes these pictures are not a good fit for Sweden for attracting consumers, but also that retailers do not accept these pictures to be displayed in their stores, windows or websites, resulting in a missed opportunity for promoting the brand. Moreover, many of Replay’s customers in Sweden, especially the bigger chains, are concerned with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and do not want to promote directly or indirectly values that are not appropriate in the country, for example nudity, skinny body image and violence.

4.1.2. Fashion Box

The Image, Communication and Marketing Director of Fashion Box has been working for the company for over a decade. She explains that originally, Fashion Box started with a denim shirt, which was considered very unique in the 80s. Since then the brand has been characterized as being unique, because of its way of finding inspiration from the existing clothes in the market and also modifying them in an unusual and innovative way. Moreover, the CEO of the company is seen to be both an entrepreneur and a visionary.
“He has the vision of where he wants to take the company in the future”

(Image, Communication and Marketing Director, personal communication, 2018-03-27.
Translated by the author)

He is also the one who develops the marketing strategy, however, it is the task for the managers to support the CEO’s vision with numbers and in that way bring it to reality. Fashion Box targets mainly consumers from the ages of 30 to 45, however it is also interested in the younger generation, as young people are seen to be the future. Moreover, in terms of sales, the success of Replay has been bigger among men:

“The collection for women needs to be improved quite a lot. Also, because there is a lot more competition for women. When a man identifies a fit or a model that he likes, he is more repetitive in the purchase. Women change more clothes and are more aware of the novelties, so the scenario is more competitive”

(Image, Communication and Marketing Director, personal communication, 2018-03-27.
Translated by the author)

In fact, men represent about 60-65% of the customers, while the rest is women.

**Brand Identity**

The brand identity of Replay is not easy to pin-point, as the description of the brand’s traits is subtler than simply stating some pronounced traits, for example aggressive. Therefore, interviewee provided the authors with a company presentation describing the branding and communication strategy of Fashion Box. Replay is the synonym of high quality denim, with the complementary core products being leather and cotton. Jeans to Replay are seen to be sexy, rebellious, a symbol of thinking outside the box and unique. These attributes are reflected on the brand identity of Replay itself. The essence of the brand is being imperfectly cool, while focusing on innovation and evolution. In fact, the fascinating trait about jeans is that they become part of the owner, being shaped over the years by adapting to his/her body. No two pairs of jeans are the same, therefore becoming “imperfect”, but still cool. As mentioned above, the focus on innovation has been part of Fashion Box since its foundation, with the denim shirt being the first informal shirt in the 80’s. Nowadays innovation is pursued with the development of technical and extremely stretchy fabrics. The interviewee further explains that, even though Fashion Box wants to improve its sales on the rest of the collection as well, the denim-related posts on social media are the ones that get the most responses, indicating that Replay is mainly known for the denim.

**Brand Image in Sweden**

In Sweden, Replay is seen as a denim brand due to high sales in denim.
“The nature of this company is in denim and the expertise lies in the production of denim. The story and expertise of the washes, fits, treatments and finishes is something that not many have in the world. But also we should not neglect the revenues that come from the rest of the collection”

(Image, Communication and Marketing Director, personal communication, 2018-03-27. Translated by the author)

Furthermore, Hyperflex is seen to be a brand of its own. This is not seen as a problem, since Replay has been very innovative from the very beginning and Hyperflex is seen to represent the origin of the brand. Denim is also the biggest category in terms of sales, as 60 to 65 % of sales revenue come from denim and the rest from the other clothes.

**Trade Promotion and Communication Activities**

Fashion Box plans its marketing budget in October/November every year. Moreover, nowadays every euro invested in marketing is planned carefully and it is difficult to invest in everything. Fashion Box divides its marketing activities into communications and trade marketing, and the budget is, therefore, divided between the two areas.

Trade marketing is considered to be contributions given by the headquarters for supporting the markets locally. The agents/distributors/sales subsidiaries (hereafter indicated as representatives of Fashion Box) operating in the local markets then allocate the budget between the most important clients in their country of operation based on their local knowledge. The trade promotion activities referred here are, for example sponsoring in-store competitions, or appearance in a retailer’s catalogue. Aside from the monetary contributions, Fashion Box supports its markets with materials to have in-store, for example logo blocks that represent the brands, materials to decorate the windows, point-of-purchase (POP) materials, images and videos.

With the term communications, instead, Fashion Box refers to the above the communication that has a wider reach, meaning all the promotional activities and contents aimed to reach consumers directly. Images and video contents used in communications are usually the same as in trade promotion. Since the digitalization has changed the marketing environment, the company is changing from using traditional print media to digital media. For instance, in the past the company invested in Vogue Italia, but now they invest in Vogue.it, the digital version of the magazine. In addition to the use of print and digital media, a lot of outdoor media is used.

**Standardization**

Fashion Box standardizes both its trade promotion and communication activities to some extent. This is done not only to decrease costs, but most importantly to maintain the desired brand identity.
“We standardize the contents and materials that we distribute. Meaning the image, which is made out of photos, videos, posts on social media, and our website”

(Image, Communication and Marketing Director, personal communication, 2018-03-27.
Translated by the author)

The headquarters also give strict instructions every season in terms of guidelines for logos and technical rules. However, not all countries follow the rules. The problems arise when in all the countries the company operates in, the representatives want to invent their own image for Replay to match their ideas of what works in their countries. The headquarters, however, prohibit this.

“The branches say “in my country this works better” but if we let them all do what they want the brand speaks 80 different languages and presents itself with 80 different images, which is not good”

(Image, Communication and Marketing Director, personal communication, 2018-03-27.
Translated by the author)

Nevertheless, in some special situations some changes are made. For example, during some seasons the advertising campaigns have included imagery with partial nudity, which had to be substituted with alternative images in Islamic countries. Another type of issue are the different media outlets, in certain East European countries, for instance, printed media is still working, while in other European countries the number of copies are lost, in favour to the digital media.

“In this case we listen to the necessity of the countries and we try to understand how the media scenario is evolving in each country”

(Image, Communication and Marketing Director, personal communication, 2018-03-27.
Translated by the author)

Lastly, as already mentioned above, issues arise when it comes to social media, as all countries where Replay is presented feel that they need to have a local account. This might then have an effect on the tone of voice used when communicating on behalf of Replay.

“The type of texts, should be in line with the headquarters, because if we always speak in a certain way and then a country expresses itself with more aggressive or even arrogant texts, these things should be the same as the headquarters”

(Image, Communication and Marketing Director, personal communication, 2018-03-27.
Translated by the author)

Thus, the main issue encountered in their standardization activities is to maintain a uniform social media image and create structure among the countries. In terms of product standardization, Fashion Box has a uniform product portfolio internationally, with some
exceptions. For example, in China they sell products in different sizes and measurements to mirror the body structure of the Chinese population. In addition, in Germany some special models/pieces are sold, because of the market size and possible potential for growth.

4.2. Multiple Case Study: Retailer Interviews

The data from the two interviews conducted is organized in the following way. First, information about the interviewee and his/her position in the company is given together with a short profile of the retail chain. Then the retailer’s brand portfolio will be presented to contextualize Replay in the store. Next, the use of trade promotion activities and materials is discussed connected to purchasing behavior. The retailer’s perception of Replay’s brand image follows. Lastly, the attitudes of the retailer towards sexual advertising are presented. As mentioned above, the retailers will be addressed as Retailer A and Retailer B.

4.2.1. Retailer A

The Interviewee and the Retailer Profile

The interviewee is a Junior Buyer of most of the external brands bought for men that are sold in brick and mortar stores. Retailer A has circa 120 stores in total and a webstore. The target customers of the retailer are 30 to 40-year-old men and women. The image of the store is a bit unique, because the retailer carries both external and its own brands. Moreover, even though it is not communicated to end consumers, CSR and the use of sustainable materials is a big part of Retailer A’s image.

Retailer A’s Brand Portfolio

Retailer A carries a wide portfolio of brands, including “big commercial brands”, such as Lee, Lyle & Scott, and Replay. The brands are divided by different themes: preppy, denim, trend, formal, casual. Not all brands are sold in every store, but instead the stores have been categorized in the following way: A, B, C, and D, from which stores belonging to the category D are the ten biggest, where more trendy clothes are sold. Retailer A also sells some brands only online. When making decisions about which brands to include in their collection, the “trendy” factor and the fit with the image of the retailer and the brand are considered.

“Sometimes we buy more trendy brands knowing that maybe they will not last for so many seasons, but you still want to be updated with the trends. Obviously, we would not buy a brand that we don’t think fits our image. We want to buy a brand for what it is of course, but at the same time you need to adapt it to our image and our customers”

(Junior Buyer, personal communication, 2018-04-04. Translated by the author)

In addition, the CSR aspects are taken into account in the choice of brands and collaboration with them. Lastly, the interviewee states that a good balance between the brands and Retailer A and its customers´ needs to be found.
Trade Promotion
Provision of trade promotion material has an influence on the buying behavior of the retailer. Not all retailers, though, are able to provide the materials/images displayed for example in the stores and on the company’s website in the early sales meetings. However, when they do have the materials/images then these are taken into account when making purchasing decision.

“Then maybe we buy a product - many times it can be very trendy products that might be a bit outside our range - but then maybe we choose to buy it anyways because it is on an image that is nice and we know we can show it in the store and on the website appropriately during the season. So images and material influence our decision”

(Junior Buyer, personal communication, 2018-04-04. Translated by the author)

In terms of other trade promotion activities Retailer A also takes part in clinics and competitions, which are managed by its sales team, that decides which brands to have these kind of activities with. But these are not influencing the purchasing behavior. When it comes to the trade promotion support given by Fashion Box, the materials and images provided are seen to be many times not suitable, as the clothes in the pictures are not the clothes that Retailer A buys.

“Sometimes it feels like Replay has quite trendy products which are put in the image material, that we can’t really use. So this is how I think how it is, that it exists, but it is not really good for us”

(Junior Buyer, personal communication, 2018-04-04. Translated by the author)

Also, the fact that the material is not most of the time provided during the early purchase meetings is perceived as a shortcoming.

Perception of Replay’s Brand Image
Replay is seen as a cool brand. It is perceived at the same time trendy but also very commercial. As Replay is bought by a broad range of customers the image of the brand is seen to differ depending on the customer buying it. Furthermore, the interviewee states that Replay’s clothes can be seen to worn by many middle aged men, for instance. Additionally, in Retailer A’s stores, Replay is categorized as a denim brand.

Attitudes Towards Sexual Appeals in Advertising
When shown Replay’s advertising images: one featuring sexual appeals and one with no sexual appeals. Retailer A described the picture featuring sexual appeals as “undressed” and “brand-strengthening rather than product-reporting”. The retailer elaborates by saying that even though the picture shows denim, the signature of the brand, the focus is on what the models are not wearing.

“I believe that our customers do not expect to see images like these in our stores and digital channels, as it is not as common to use this type of advertising among Swedish fashion
companies, compared with e.g. Italian. Then we have a communicative strategy based on why our customers shop with us and what they expect from us, and it does not include naked models. It is not selling for us”

(Junior Buyer, personal communication, 2018-04-04. Translated by the author)

The picture with no sexual appeals, instead, was described as putting more focus on the clothes compared to the sexual image, even if the difference in this matter was not that pronounced. As for its customers, Retailer A states that the pictures communicates Replay as a brand while focusing on the clothes as well. The interviewee further explains that, even if sex sells, Swedish consumers have been accustomed to the fact that marketing that makes use of sexual appeals is not applied by Swedish fashion companies, and that consumers in some way are against it. Moreover, the retailer assumes that this type of picture works better with Italian consumers, since Replay is based in Italy.

When asked to choose one of the two pictures for trade promotion purposes, Retailer A expressed preference towards the picture with no sexual appeals. The retailer, also, adds that even though the sexual picture is nice, the company is not working with naked models when communicating its products and brand. On the other hand, the interviewee also specifies that they would be able to definitely use the conservative picture for some kind of cooperation with Replay, if the image was representing clothes that they sell in their stores.

4.2.2. Retailer B

The Interviewee and the Retailer Profile
The interviewee is responsible for buying the denim brands sold in all stores and is working in one of the shops. Retailer B has 8 stores in total. The retailer targets women from the ages of 35 to 40 and men from all ages. The image is described to be “very marine”, representing a lot of the following colors, navy, red and white. Furthermore, the image is described to be very commercial and is seen to fit the most people, however it is not a trend setter and is not considered trendy.

Retailer B’s Brand Portfolio
Some of the brands sold by Retailer B are Gant, Replay, Diesel, Levi’s, and Superdry. When it comes to denim brands, the retailer also carries, for example Calvin Klein, Tommy Jeans and Polo Denim. Furthermore, the decision concerning the brands chosen to be sold by the retailer is affected by market demand, since it is a commercial store. However, the brands must be compatible with the image of Retailer B too.

Trade Promotion
Trade promotion material is seen to be important when it comes to making purchasing decisions. Also, the collections and colors other stores have, are taken into consideration.
Images provided by brands to be displayed in the store are found to be important as they help to make the brands stand out.

“*I think it is very important in terms of clarity, to show that we work with all the brands in the store and have a designated area for them. Also, we have really strong brands and we are proud to work with them, so it is important for us as retailer but also for the customer, so they know that Retailer B sells for example Replay*”

(Buyer for denim brands, personal communication, 2018-04-04. Translated by the author)

Moreover, if the brands want to put focus on specific products, Retailer B wants to be a part of that promotional push and purchases those clothes. Therefore, it is emphasized that different trade marketing activities are both listened and evaluated. Nevertheless, there are specifically assigned people that plan the marketing material in store, for example for the windows, in which they have the each brand’s material for two weeks. Competitions and clinics are something that are organized in stores.

“We have a lot of competitions - two per week between February and Midsummer. So, there are a lot and sometimes it doesn’t matter if you have a competition or not. But in general, the brand is affected by them, because you see that during those two competition weeks, the sales for that brand peak”

(Buyer for denim brands, personal communication, 2018-04-04. Translated by the author)

In terms of trade marketing support, material and images provided by Fashion Box, the clinics and competitions are appreciated. Even though the retailer already sells a lot of Fashion Box’s products, during the competitions there is always a peak in sales, which is more than welcome. Also, when it comes to the prizes for the winners, the interviewee mentions that Fashion Box includes everyone by for example rewarding the store that wins with a nice dinner. On the other hand, competitions and clinics are not considered during the purchasing.

**Perception of Replay’s Brand Image**

Replay is perceived as a rough brand. Furthermore, the interviewee mentions the washed denim (both jeans and shirts) and Hyperflex as representing the Replay’s identity.

“*Hyperflex has become almost as a big of a brand on its own as Replay. Many customers don’t even know that they had bought a pair of Replay jeans. They come in saying “I want a pair of Hyperflex” and we ask “Replay?” and they answer “No, Hyperflex”*”

(Buyer for denim brands, personal communication, 2018-04-04. Translated by the author)
When compared to other jeans brands, such as Lee, Levi’s and Wrangler, Replay is seen as a trendy alternative denim brand. Moreover, the interviewee adds that Replay is a very cool brand for jeans on the West Coast of Sweden at the moment and sells really well.

“Today it is important to be part of something, be close to something. And I would happily be part of what Replay is. This adds something to the whole shopping experience of buying Replay”

(Buyer for denim brands, personal communication, 2018-04-04. Translated by the author)

Moreover, the interviewee adds that Replay is a very cool brand for jeans on the West Coast of Sweden at the moment and sells really well.

**Attitudes Towards Sex Appeal in Advertising**

When shown Replay’s advertising images: one featuring sexual appeals and one with no sexual appeals, Retailer B described the first one to be outdated and not great and compares it to a sexist perfume advertising. The interviewee further explains that this type of picture could have worked 5 or 7 years ago in their magazine or possibly on a newsletter. The retailer also believes that their customers would have the same attitude as him, and that using an almost undressed model highlighting a bare back and the rear instead of a cool outfit is extremely outdated. When it comes to image with no sexual appeals, the interviewee describes it as “quite okay”.

*But I do not feel like either of the pictures would be suitable for the Nordic market, if I'm to be honest”*

(Buyer for denim brands, personal communication, 2018-04-04. Translated by the author)

Moreover, Retailer B believes that its customers would not think too much about this picture, since it is quite bland; it is totally fine but not inspiring. When asked to choose one picture as the most appropriate for trade promotion, Retailer B stated that they would not choose the image featuring sex appeals, since it is not exactly contemporary.
5. Quantitative Analysis and Results

This chapter presents the data collected with the web questionnaire and the results of the quantitative analyses done, which will be used in chapter 6 for cross-cultural analysis and in chapter 7 for discussion and conclusions.

5.1. The Experiment: Consumers in Sweden and Italy

The number of valid responses collected for the experiment is 654 in Italy and 424 in Sweden and respondents were from the ages of 18 to 31 with one respondent being 54. Valid responses were those given by Swedish and Italian people in Sweden and Italy respectively, and that were either male or female, for practical purposes.

In the following two sections, the empirical data collected through the experiments conducted in Sweden and Italy and their analyses will be presented separately, including the rejection decisions of the hypotheses developed from the theoretical framework and the focus group data. All the ANOVA tables are presented in Appendix F for the Swedish data and Appendix G for the Italian data. Hypotheses 1, 6, 7, 8 and 9 were tested both in Sweden and in Italy. Hypotheses 2 and 3 were only tested in Sweden while Hypotheses 4 and 5 only in Italy.

5.2. Analysis of Data Collected in Sweden

Table 3 indicates the mean scores of the variables measured in the study conducted in Sweden.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual Appeal in Ad</th>
<th>Sexual Perception</th>
<th>Couple Attractiveness</th>
<th>Purchase Intention</th>
<th>Warmth</th>
<th>Competence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mean 4,16</td>
<td>Mean 3,70</td>
<td>Mean 2,05</td>
<td>Mean 2,44</td>
<td>Mean 2,73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N 186</td>
<td>N 186</td>
<td>N 222</td>
<td>N 217</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD 0,88</td>
<td>SD 0,95</td>
<td>SD 1,20</td>
<td>SD 0,80</td>
<td>SD 0,86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Mean 2,38</td>
<td>Mean 3,66</td>
<td>Mean 2,51</td>
<td>Mean 3,09</td>
<td>Mean 3,08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N 156</td>
<td>N 153</td>
<td>N 202</td>
<td>N 191</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD 1,13</td>
<td>SD 0,94</td>
<td>SD 1,22</td>
<td>SD 0,83</td>
<td>SD 0,83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sample was divided into two groups, one that saw the manipulated image featuring sexual appeals and the other one that saw the control image. The two groups differed significantly from each other in terms of sexual appeals (4.16 vs 2.38 in the manipulation group and the control group respectively, $F (1, 340) = 266.66, p < .01$). Levene's test indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variance is violated, $F (1, 340) = 23.06, p < .05$, but according to Saunders et al. (2016) this assumption is not particularly relevant, if the size of the biggest group is not 1.5 bigger than the smallest group.
The web questionnaire included two control questions, in order to verify that sexual appeals are not related to the attractiveness of the models. One control question measured the attractiveness of the female model and the other one measured the attractiveness of the male model. One cumulative variable called couple attractiveness was computed by adding the scores for the female model and the male model and dividing it by 2, in order to get a measure in the same scale (1 to 5). The attractiveness of the couple was not significantly different between the two images \( F (1, 337) = 0.17, p > .05 \), indicating that the manipulation was successful. Levene's test indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variance holds, \( F (1, 337) = 0.66, p > .05 \).

5.2.1. Measure Reliability: Cronbach’s Alphas
To calculate if the measures for warmth, competence and involvement are robust, Cronbach’s alphas were calculated (see Table 4) The Cronbach’s alpha of warmth and competence is 0.88. To reach a higher Cronbach’s alpha for involvement items E and F3 (see Appendix D) were excluded, resulting in a score of 0.78.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Web Questionnaire Items</th>
<th>Cronbach's Alpha</th>
<th>N of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warmth</td>
<td>B1, B2, B3, B4, B5</td>
<td>0.875</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>B6, B7, B8, B9, B10</td>
<td>0.879</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>F1, F2, F4, G</td>
<td>0.776</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.2. Main Effect 1: Effect of Advertising Featuring Sexual Appeals on Purchase Intention
H1 was assessed by computing a one-way ANOVA with sexual appeal in ad as the independent variable (two levels: Yes, No) and purchase intention as the dependent variable. The mean score of purchase intention is 2.05 for the advertising featuring sexual appeals (Sexual Appeal in Ad = Yes), while it is 2.51 for the advertising without sexual appeals (Sexual Appeal in Ad = No). Levene’s test indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variance holds, \( F (1, 422) = 2.15, p > .05 \). With the ANOVA, the means showed to be significantly different, \( F (1, 422) = 15.28, p < .01 \), indicating that the expectation of H1 is rejected. In fact, the presence of sexual appeals in a form of a heterosexual couple had a negative effect on the purchase intention of the respondents, differently from what was expected after reviewing the existing literature. Figure 4 represents the means of purchase intention in the manipulation and control groups, showing the tendency of purchase intention to increase with the removal of sexual appeals from the advertising image.
5.2.3. Moderation of Gender on Main Effect 1

H2 and H3 were assessed using a two-way independent-measures ANOVA, with purchase intention as the dependent variable and sexual appeal in ad (two levels: Yes, No) and gender (two levels: Female, Male) as independent variables. Levene's test indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variance holds, $F(3, 328) = 1.61, p > .05$.

Females’ purchase intention average scores are 1.88 and 2.45 in the manipulation and control group respectively, while males’ purchase intention means are 2.22 and 2.57 respectively. After computing the ANOVA, purchase intention showed to be significantly different for sexual appeal in ad ($F(1, 328) = 11.13, p < .01$). Nevertheless, neither the difference in purchase intention between gender ($F(1, 328) = 2.77, p > .05$) nor the interaction effect of gender and sexual appeal in ad ($F(1, 328) = 0.70, p > .05$) were statistically significantly different.

Given this data, H2 is rejected, while H3 is not. This indicates that as predicted, Swedish women’s purchase intention is affected negatively with promotion through pictures featuring sex appeals. The same tendency is seen for Swedish men, contradicting the expectations created by reviewing the existing literature. Therefore, it is interesting to notice that sexual appeals had a negative effect on all Swedish respondents regardless of gender, as it is visualized in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Means Plot of Purchase Intention – Sweden.
5.2.4. Moderation of Involvement on Main Effect 1

In order to assess H6 and H7, a two-way independent-measures ANOVA was conducted. As in the previous analyses, one independent variable is sexual appeal in ad, while the other is involvement level. Since it was originally a continuous variable, the latter independent variable was computed from dividing the responses into two categories, low and high, based on a median split (median = 3.25). The dependent variable is again purchase intention. Levene's test indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variance holds, $F(3, 420) = 2.08, p > .05$.

Low-involvement consumers’ purchase intention average scores are 1.87 and 2.40 in the manipulation and control group respectively, while high-involvement consumers’ purchase intention means are 2.22 and 2.69 respectively. After computing the ANOVA, Purchase Intention showed to be significantly different for sexual appeal in ad ($F(1, 420) = 17.46, p < .01$). Moreover, the difference in purchase intention between low-involvement (2.13) and high-involvement (2.46) consumers is statistically significant ($F(1, 420) = 7.45, p < .01$) while the interaction effect of involvement level and sexual appeal in ad is not significant ($F(1, 420) = 0.05, p > .05$).
Given this data, H6 is rejected, while H7 is not rejected. From this rejection decision it can be drawn that high-involvement consumers have a higher purchase intention when the advertising image does not feature sexual appeals, and low-involvement consumers also prefer the same image. Therefore, sexual appeals in advertising have a negative impact on the purchase intention of both low-involvement and high-involvement consumers, as can be seen in Figure 6. On the other hand, it is interesting to notice that high-involvement consumers on average have a higher purchase intention than low-involvement consumers, no matter the presence of sexual appeals in the advertising.

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**Figure 7.** Estimated Marginal Means of Purchase Intention – Involvement Moderator in Sweden.

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### 5.2.5. Main Effect 2: Effect of Advertising Featuring Sexual Appeals on Warmth and Competence

H8 and H9 were assessed with the same procedure as with H1, namely an ANOVA with sexual appeal in ad as the independent variable and warmth and competence as dependent variables. Levene’s test indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variance holds both for warmth and competence, $F(1, 406) = 0.25, p > .05$ and $F(1, 378) = 1.49, p > .05$ respectively. In the
manipulation group the average score of warmth is 2.44, while it is 3.09 in the control group. This difference is significantly different ($F(1, 406) = 64.50, p < .01$). In terms of competence, the average is 2.73 in the manipulation group and 3.09 in the control group. This difference is also statistically significant $F(1, 378) = 16.72, p < .01$).

Consequently, it can be concluded that H8 is rejected, and H9 is not rejected. Figure 7 shows how the average warmth and competence change when moving from an advertising with sexual appeals to one without. Sexual appeals have a negative effect on both brand personality traits, from which it can be derived that in order to become a popular brand it would be more ideal to use advertising that does not feature sexual appeals.

![Graph showing the change in warmth and competence](image)

*Figure 8. Means Plot of Warmth and competence – Sweden.*
5.3. Analysis of Data Collected in Italy

The mean scores of the variables measured in the study conducted in Italy are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

*Means Table for Italy*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual Appeal in Ad</th>
<th>Sexual Perception</th>
<th>Couple Attractiveness</th>
<th>Purchase Intention</th>
<th>Warmth</th>
<th>Competence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>2.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly to Sweden, the Italian sample was also divided into two groups, one manipulation group and one control group. Both groups were shown the same images shown to the participants in Sweden. The two groups differ significantly from each other in terms of sexual appeals (3.26 vs. 1.98 in the manipulation group and the control group respectively, $F(1, 557) = 192.90, p < .01$). Levene's test indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variance holds, $F(1, 557) = 2.19, p > .05$.

To verify that the manipulation check was successful, the control questions were tested. The cumulative variable couple attractiveness was computed with the same procedure as for the experiment in Sweden. The attractiveness of the couple resulted to be not significantly different between the two images ($F(1, 556) = 0.28, p > .05$), affirming the manipulation. Levene's test indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variance holds, $F(1, 556) = 1.26, p > .05$.

5.3.1. Measure Reliability: Cronbach’s Alphas

Robustness of the measures for warmth, competence and involvement was calculated with Cronbach’s alphas, with the same procedure as with the Swedish data (see Table 6). The Cronbach’s alpha of warmth is 0.76 and the one of competence is 0.84. In this experiment as well, the items E and F3 (see Appendix D) had to be excluded to reach a more robust score of 0.83.

Table 6

*Cronbach’s Alphas for Italy*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reliability Statistics</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Web Questionnaire Items</th>
<th>Cronbach's Alpha</th>
<th>N of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warmth</td>
<td>B1, B2, B3, B4, B5</td>
<td>0.763</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>B6, B7, B8, B9, B10</td>
<td>0.843</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>F1, F2, F4, G</td>
<td>0.828</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3.2. Main Effect 1: Effect of Advertising Featuring Sexual Appeals on Purchase Intention

Similarly to the procedure used with the Swedish data, the assessment of H1 was made by computing a one-way ANOVA with sexual appeal in ad as the independent variable and purchase intention as the dependent variable. The mean score of purchase intention is 2.34 for manipulation group (that saw the advertising featuring sex appeals), while it is 3.11 for the control group. Levene's test indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variance is violated, \( F(1, 652) = 9.11, p < .05 \), but having more than 30 cases the ANOVA could be computed anyways (Saunders et al., 2016). The means are significantly different, \( F(1, 652) = 71.00, p < .01 \), indicating that H1 is rejected. This means that in Italy, sexual appeals in advertising in the form of a heterosexual couple have a negative effect on purchase intention. The relationship between purchase intention and the presence of sexual appeals in advertising it presented in Figure 8.

![Figure 9. Means Plot of Purchase Intention – Italy.](image)

5.3.3. Moderation of Gender on Main Effect 1

To assess H4 and H5, a two-way independent-measures ANOVA was used, with the same variables as in Sweden: purchase intention as the dependent variable and sexual appeal in ad and gender as independent variables. Levene's test indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variance does not hold, \( F(3, 550) = 3.88, p < .05 \), but this did not prevent an ANOVA.

Females’ purchase intention average scores are 2.42 and 3.15 in the manipulation and control group respectively, while males’ purchase intention means are 2.20 and 3.16 respectively. After computing the ANOVA, purchase intention showed to be significantly different for sexual appeal in ad \( F(1, 550) = 58.87, p < .01 \). Nevertheless, neither the difference in purchase
intention between gender \((F(1, 550) = 0.92, p > .05)\) nor the interaction effect of gender and sexual appeal in ad \((F(1, 550) = 1.15, p > .05)\) are statistically significantly different.

Given this data, H4 is rejected, while H5 is not rejected. It was predicted that the purchase intention of Italian women would be negatively affected by the presence of sexual appeals in advertising, and this prediction is confirmed. On the other hand, the same influence is seen when it comes to Italian men’s purchase intention, confuting the expectations of the authors. No matter the gender of the respondents, the presence of purchase intention seemed to have a negative effect in general in Italy (See Figure 9 Estimated Marginal Means of Purchase Intention – Gender Moderator in Italy).

![Estimated Marginal Means of Purchase Intention](image)

Figure 10. Estimated Marginal Means of Purchase Intention – Gender Moderator in Italy.

5.3.4. Moderation of Involvement on Main Effect 1

H6 and H7 were assessed with a two-way independent-measures ANOVA. As for the Swedish data, one independent variable is sexual appeal in ad, while the other one is involvement level. Involvement level was transformed into a categorical variable (low, high) with a median split (median = 3.25). The dependent variable is again purchase intention. Levene's test indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variance is violated, \(F(3, 650) = 5.48, p > .05\), but this is not significant, as mentioned before.

Low-involvement consumers’ purchase intention average scores are 2.24 and 2.95 in the manipulation and control group respectively, while high-involvement consumers’ purchase intention means are 2.44 and 3.29 respectively. With the ANOVA, purchase intention showed
to be significantly different for sexual appeal in ad \((F (1, 650) = 72.99, p < .01)\). Moreover, difference in purchase intention mean between low-involvement (2.59) and high involvement (2.87) consumers is statistically significant \((F (1, 650) = 9.06, p < .01)\). The interaction effect of involvement level and sexual appeal in ad is not significant \((F (1, 650) = 0.62, p > .05)\).

Given this data, H6 is rejected, while H7 is not rejected. This indicates that for low-involvement consumers, differently from what was assumed, sexual appeals in advertising decreases purchase intention. Meanwhile, high-involvement consumers are also negatively affected by sexual appeals in terms of purchase behavior. Figure 10 shows this tendency for both types of consumers in Italy. An additional observation that is interesting to make is that in Italy, on average high-involvement consumers have a higher purchase intention than low-involvement consumers, not only when they see non-sexual advertising, but also when they see the advertising with sex appeals.

![Figure 10](image_url)

**Figure 11.** Estimated Marginal Means of Purchase Intention – Involvement Moderator in Italy.

### 5.3.5. Main Effect 2: Effect of Advertising Featuring Sexual Appeals on Warmth and Competence

H8 and H9 were assessed with the same procedure as in Sweden, namely an ANOVA with sexual appeal in ad as the independent variable and warmth and competence as dependent variables. Levene's test indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variance holds both for warmth \((F (1, 634) = 1.24, p > .05)\), but not for competence, \((F (1, 612) = 11.65, p < .01)\).

In the manipulation group the average score of warmth is 2.63, while it is 3.03 in the control group. This difference is significantly different \((F (1, 634) = 52.66, p < .01)\). In terms of competence, the average is 2.88 in the manipulation group and 3.18 in the control group. This difference is also statistically significant \((F (1, 612) = 23.33, p < .01)\).

Consequently, it can be concluded that H8 is rejected and H9 is not rejected. Since sexual appeals affect negatively both the level of perceived warmth and the level of perceived
competence of a brand (see Figure 11), non-sexual advertising is more appropriate to be perceived as a popular brand among Italian consumers.

Figure 12. Means Plot of Warmth and Competence – Italy.
6. Qualitative Analysis

This chapter presents the analysis of the empirical findings considering the different concepts presented in the theoretical framework. More specifically, the analysis is divided into three parts according to the different research designs of this research, namely the single case study, the multiple case study and the cross-cultural study.

6.1. Case Study

RQ1. To what extent do international fashion companies adapt and/or standardize their trade promotion and promotional strategies, and why?

6.1.1. Standardization of Trade Promotion and Promotional Strategies

Globalization, continuous integration of world’s major economies, and the increase in world trade make standardization and adaptation of marketing strategies important for both academicians and practitioners (Viswanathan & Dickson, 2007). In particular, according to Levitt (1983) markets are changing to more homogeneous due to globalization that is driven by advancements in technology. Hence, marketers need to take advantage of the homogenized markets by adapting to a standardized marketing strategy (Levitt, 1983). It could be argued that Fashion Box has taken advantage of some of the benefits digitalization has brought, by for example by standardizing its social media profiles and contents. This is done by giving strict guidelines to all the markets the company operates in. Furthermore, Fashion Box has standardized the creation of visual content, for example images and videos used for both trade promotion and promotional purposes across markets. To further clarify and as mentioned above, the same images and videos are used in trade promotion (i.e. in-store promotion and display material) as well as in advertising (e.g. on billboards and magazines). By using the same images and videos in all markets, it could be argued that Fashion Box assumes that markets are homogeneous and thereby consumer preferences are assumed to be similar as well. Moreover, maintaining a consistent brand identity and image as well as to reducing marketing costs (Papavassiliou and Stathakopoulos, 1997) are the main reasons for standardization for Fashion Box.

Despite digitalization allows companies to create a global image through social media (Papavassiliou and Stathakopoulos, 1997), there are still challenges related to local cultures, as the issues Fashion Box has in regulating the social media contents internationally demonstrate. Many of the representatives of Fashion Box argue that as they are experts in the local culture and norms they should be allowed to have, for example more freedom in terms of the content shared on social media, as they consider themselves as experts in their field. Nevertheless, Fashion Box’s concern is that each country would take too much freedom in presenting the brand according to personal and cultural preferences, thereby changing the brand identity that Fashion Box wants consumers to perceive globally. Therefore, strict guidelines and instructions are enforced by Fashion Box.
Moreover, culture and its effects on marketing strategies and brand identity can be looked through Hofstede’s cultural dimensions. For example, uncertainty avoidance, that is rated fairly high in Italy, indicates that Italians need rules, laws and structure to increase predictability (Hofstede, 1989). It could be therefore argued that one reason for Fashion Box to aim for standardizing its marketing activities is that when rules and clear structures are in place, it is easier to implement, maintain and control standardized marketing strategies.

Moreover, a fairly high score in power distance (Hofstede, 1989) could be seen to have an effect on the marketing strategy of Fashion Box, and thus on the standardization decisions. As mentioned above, the CEO of Fashion Box is not only the visionary and entrepreneur of the company, but he is also in charge of the marketing strategy and, even though he makes the decisions regarding the strategy, he still relies on the management team to support his vision with, for example, financial numbers. Making all the decisions concerning marketing strategies far from the people who actually implement them might make it hard for both the decision maker and the people implementing the strategies to execute them effectively, due to the distance between them and the different type of knowledge they possess.

The Italian culture being highly masculine (i.e. people are assertive and care less of other people’s well-being) (De Mooij and Hofstede, 2002), on the other hand, can be seen to have an effect on Replay’s identity (e.g. it wants to be seen as sexy and cool, which are bold traits) and explain why the identity differs from how the brand image is perceived in Sweden, where the culture is more feminine. Fashion Box is standardizing its promotional contents with the main aim being to have a uniform brand image across countries. Nevertheless, assertiveness is not perceived the same way in Sweden and in Italy, as one is a feminine country and the other is more masculine. Moreover, according to Roth (1995), brand image strategies should be developed before making marketing decisions, thus it can be deduced that is important to also see how brand image and brand identity can be affected by culture. Therefore, standardization of contents can have the opposite effect of what it was trying to achieve, exactly because it does not take into account cultural differences. In fact, Replay in Sweden is positioned as a denim brand more than a fashion brand. This positioning is a consequence of both the structure of the market and the Swedish fashion culture, where the purchase of clothes is driven more by functionality rather than by fashion. Additionally, Swedish consumers, in general, prefer more minimalistic styles rather than clothes with a lot of embellishments, and prefer not to stand out, which is typical in a feminine culture. These differences lead the Swedish retailers to select more fitting alternatives in terms of clothes to be portrayed in the promotional material over the “unfitting” promotional material. This in turn can be seen to change the brand image of Replay in Sweden, as consumers are mainly exposed to the material chosen by the retailers.

### 6.1.2. Adaptation of Trade Promotion and Promotional Strategies

Regarding adaptation, many researchers argue that standardization is not a necessity to compete in global markets (Boddewyn et al., 1986). Moreover, using a universal strategy implies that the activities pursued by a company are not based on a customer behavior analysis or the market characteristics (Douglas & Wind, 1987). There are some activities Fashion Box adapts because it acknowledges that the local representatives have better knowledge about their respective
markets compared to the headquarter’s. Thus, it seems that to some extent Fashion Box understands that there are differences in consumer needs and preferences (Vrontis and Vronti, 2004), thereby it makes sense to give more responsibility to the locals in terms of choosing the trade promotion activities they want to take part in (e.g. retailer’s magazines, clinics and competitions), as they know the customers in their markets better. Even though the local representatives choose these activities, it is Fashion Box that sponsors them, for example by covering the costs for the winners of the in-store competitions.

When cultures are similar, standardization of advertising is easier to implement and on the contrary when cultures differ adaptation is necessary (Papavassiliou & Stathakopoulos, 1997). As an example, Fashion Box had to change some of its advertising images portraying a partially nude model in Islamic countries, because the usage of such an image would have been a violation of cultural norms (Mastor et al., 2000). In addition, Fashion Box has made some adaptations in terms of measurements of its products sold within the Chinese market to mirror the body structure of the Chinese population. Moreover, the company produced some special pieces for Germany, since it is a big market and the consumer preferences differ from other markets. Consumers have been found to have different needs and preferences by earlier research (Fournier, 1998), thus indicating that companies should adapt their marketing activities instead of using an universal strategy (Douglas & Wind, 1987). Fashion Box recognizes the need for adaptation in accordance to the market characteristics, especially in large markets like Germany and China, where there is potential for sales growth.

Also, as digitalization has changed the marketing environment Fashion Box is using more digital media instead of traditional media (Rust & Oliver, 1994; Keller, 2009). The company is changing from using traditional print media to digital media. In the past the company invested in Vogue Italia, but now it invests in Vogue.it, the digital version of the magazine, for instance. However, in some European countries print media is still quite popular, therefore the company needs to adapt to different market environments in order to reach the consumers.

Furthermore, retailers are also shaped by the culture and environment they operate in. In Sweden the fashion retail industry is dominated by chains, the retailers are bigger and have stronger bargaining power over North Box. In this situation the agency is compelled to demand marketing adaptation to match the retailers’ preference to maintain a good relationship. This is in accordance to Kotler (1986), who highlights that customers’ varying amount of resources and buying behavior in different countries pressure companies to adapt when operating internationally. Furthermore, as fashion goods are mostly sold in retail outlets the relationship between the manufacturer and retailer is important (Park, 2004). In this case, as North Box is considered to be a representative of Fashion Box and has closer more personal relationship with the retailers, the relationship between the retailer and the agency should be taken take care of. To further emphasize the need for a good relationship with retailers, it should be mentioned that the target of reaching 20 MEUR in sales by 2019 and after that maintaining that revenue makes it even more crucial to keep the retailers satisfied.
In terms of the fashion culture in both Italy and Sweden, it is argued that the culture differs greatly, Italy being more fashionable in terms of extravagant aesthetics and Sweden valuing functionality and minimalism. Hence, the differences in cultures have an effect on the advertising images used and preferred in both countries; in Italy pictures with sexual appeals are seen to be appropriate (Lass and Hart, 2004) as fashion is accepted to be sexy, while in Sweden where functionality is emphasized, having the product shown clearly in the images is more important (Roth, 1995). Also, the clothes in the images should be clothes that are sold in the Swedish market, otherwise the images can be seen to mislead the consumers, as they are not able to buy the products they see in the pictures. Therefore contents of promotional material should consider cultural differences.

6.2. Multiple Case Study

RQ2. What influence does trade promotion, and more specifically images featuring sexual appeals have on retailers’ purchasing behavior?

6.2.1. Trade Promotion and the Importance of Brand Image

When it comes to trade promotions, Poddar and Donthu (2011) stress that trade promotions are widely used by companies, however they have not been extensively researched by academics. Trade promotions are defined as “any promotions that are provided to the downstream channel members by vendors to incentivize them to either purchase their products or to do some specific brand-building activity on behalf of the vendor” (Poddar, et al., 2013, p. 45). The two retailers interviewed are both provided with trade promotion support in terms of monetary participation in different activities and provision of trade promotion material by Fashion Box in order to, for example, increase their sales through clinics, competitions organized between the store employees, as well as in-store promotion and display material (e.g. display fixtures and visual display materials) (Rogers & Gamans, 1983). In terms activities, clinics and competitions sponsored by Fashions Box in particular, both retailers seemed to be quite satisfied with them, but these do not have an effect on their purchasing behavior towards Replay.

Nevertheless, brand image is important to consider in relation to trade promotion. Retailers have great influence on the promotional material displayed in their stores, as they define the image of their own stores and the customers they want to target (Frings, 1987). It is argued that the most important factor for increasing the success of trade promotion is to make sure that the brand image does not contrast the store image of the retailer. The store images of both retailers are in a way similar. Neither of them is trying to stand out from other players in the market or be a trendsetter through their image, but instead their images are very commercial as are the brands they sell. As mentioned above, it is important for both retailers that there is a good fit between their image and the images of the brands they carry. Particularly, when it comes to the brand image of Replay both retailers describe it to be cool and trendy. Retailer A also stresses Replay to be a very commercial brand, while Retailer B further elaborates that Replay’s identity can be described as being rough and a trendy alternative denim brand. Moreover, Retailer B also explained how Replay’s brand image can be built around Hyperflex. However, it is pointed out that customers do not associate Hyperflex with Replay but that Hyperflex has in a way
become a brand of its own. As Dobni and Zinkhan (1990) highlights, product attributes have an effect on the development of brand image, even though in the case of Replay the product attributes seem to have divided the brand image, as seen above.

Furthermore, brand image is shaped in the consumer’s mind, thus it is important to understand the social signals and symbolism related to brands (Levy, 1959). Retailer B recognizes the importance being part of something, in particular being part of Replay, as it would add value to the whole shopping experience. This notion is supported by Levy (1959) stating that “people buy things not only for what they do, but also for what they mean” (p.118). All in all, it could be argued that Replay’s brand image perceived in Sweden is a good fit for both retailers.

6.2.2. Trade Promotion Content and Sexual Appeals

Concerning trade promotion material, Retailer A stresses that, if the material is provided to them in the early sales meetings with a representative of the company, it is inclined to buy more pieces from that vendor. Retailer A might even buy pieces from the brand’s collection that are seen to be very trendy and different from the clothes it usually buys in terms of style.

The provision of promotional support and materials are in line with Park (2004), who highlights that promotional support is used to make the trade deal more attractive and thus increase the consumer demand through store merchandising. When it comes to the trade promotion material provided to the retailers in general by all the brands they carry, and by Fashion Box in particular, it can be concluded that the material has an effect on their purchasing behavior. Retailer B, specifically, points out that having promotional materials in the store does not only enforce clarity, in terms making it easier for the customers to see where the brands are located in the store, but they also help the customer to have a more clear image of what type of brands Retailer B carries.

When it comes to the promotional material provided by Fashion Box, particularly, Retailer A is not fully satisfied with the images and materials provided to them. There are several reasons for this. First of all, the pictures/images are not seen to always suit the communication strategy of the retailer. Baker et al. (1994) suggest that retailers need to align their decisions about atmospheric (i.e. ambient, design and social) elements with their marketing and store image objectives. In addition, the clothes worn by the models are not necessarily sold in the Swedish market, and it is not possible to sell the clothes worn by the models to the customers. Thirdly, as mentioned above Retailer A is not a trend setter, and thus it is not inclined to purchase the most trendiest pieces, hence by having very trendy products portrayed in the images does not make the retailer want to have the images in stores or digital platforms. In fact, this could be also related to the fact that if the products are too trendy and therefore not sold in Sweden, the images provided to the retailers should then be adapted at least in terms of the clothes worn by the models (Douglas & Wind, 1987). Also, sometimes the images provided by Fashion Box are considered to be too sexy and even though both retailers state that sex sells they do not believe that images featuring sexual appeals placed in stores and digital channels would be something their customers want or accept. Retailer A explains the reason why images featuring sexual appeals are not a good fit in the Swedish market by referring to the prevailing Swedish fashion...
company culture, that does not use such advertising, and thus customers are also thought to be against them. This could also be related to the Swedish culture in general, which is described to be feminine, and which entails taking care of each other is important (Hofstede, 1989), to not show off what oneself has (Tixier, 1996). Therefore, using images featuring sex appeals, for example nudity, is not in line with the Swedish cultural values. Retailer B further continues by stating that using a naked model that emphasizes more a bare back and the rear instead of a cool outfit is extremely outdated. Pictures featuring sexual appeals are also seen more as brand-strengthening instead of product-focused. Because both retailers express the importance having pictures that show the clothes that they have in store, it can be concluded that the promotional material featuring sexual appeals are not appropriate for the Swedish market.

Lastly, if the retailers decide to not to accept the trade promotion images, that might have a negative effect on their sales, since without promotional images the brand loses visibility. In a scenario where the retailer would accept the pictures against its image it could in that way lose paying customers who might find the pictures offensive, for instance. In the case of the fashion company Benetton, its retailers sued the company because they believed Benetton’s provocative advertising style was driving the customers away (Ganesan, 2002). It is not to say that having images featuring sexual appeals would drive customers away, but they might have a negative effect on their purchasing behavior, as sexual appeals are considered to be a subset of provocative appeals (Vézina & Paul, 1997). All in all, as mentioned above, if the retailers are satisfied with the trade promotion activities they are more receptive to the trade deal (Poddar et al., 2013). While images matching the store image have a positive effect on purchasing behavior, if the images are continuously a mismatch with the store image of the retailer the effect on purchasing behavior might turn into being negative. Overall, both of the retailers could be described to be fairly satisfied with the trade promotion activities, but in the long run if problems with the promotional contents keep on existing the retailers might become dissatisfied.

6.3. Cross-Cultural Study

**RQ4. What are the differences in the effects of advertising featuring sexual appeals between Sweden and Italy?**

The conceptual framework developed by the authors after reviewing existing literature (see Figure 2) represents the expected effects of sexual appeals used in advertising on purchase intention as well as on warmth and competence. Moreover, a moderation effect was predicted on the effects on purchase intention and brand image. After conducting a quantitative analysis of the data, the conceptual framework was modified by the authors in accordance to the findings of this study.

In both countries it was found that advertising featuring sexual appeals has a negative effect on both purchase intention and brand image. Moreover, in both countries gender and involvement were proved to not be significant moderators. Nevertheless, in both countries, for both female and male groups the effect of sexual images on purchase intention is negative. Also on both
involvement groups, high and low, the effect is negative. Yet, a significant difference was found between the high and low-involvement groups. Hence, high-involvement consumers were found to have higher purchase intention than low-involvement consumers despite the presence of sexual appeals in the advertisement. This is valid for both countries.

Even though the effects in the two countries are the same, Figure 12 represents the findings in two frameworks. Culture is an important factor that affects how consumers perceive ads, therefore it is still assumed to affect the entire framework. Nevertheless, the dimensions of culture which may affect the framework have not been measured separately, therefore culture is considered to be the environment in which each framework is placed in. The reason for keeping the Swedish and Italian frameworks separated is that different cultural dimensions may have affected the relationships between the variables in different ways, but still resulting with the same effects. The cultural considerations will be developed in the following sections.
6.3.1. The Influence of Advertising Featuring Sexual Appeals on Purchase Intention

Consumers in different countries have different consumption and personal preferences (Usunier and Lee, 2009; Roth, 1995). In the view of the authors of this study, personal preference can also be seen as an important driver of consumption, as consumers make purchases based on their preferences. Perception of sexual appeals in advertising as well may differ in different countries, due to the effect that culture has on how images are understood (Liu et al., 2009). Moreover, a study done by Severn et al. (1990) shows that sexual appeals increase purchase intention. Overall, the findings of this study from both Italy and Sweden revealed that sexual appeals actually do not have a positive effect on purchase intention of Replay. Furthermore, the results might differ due to the influence of culture on the perception of sexual appeals used in advertising. In fact, it seems restrictive to generalize the effect of specific advertising characteristics on purchase intention to all markets, when many authors highlight the importance of considering culture and its influence on the many differing understandings of reality when doing business (Liu et al., 2009; Hofstede, 1984).

Furthermore, Courtney and Whipple (1983) found that if the product in an ad is not sexually related, the use of sexual appeals must be questioned. Replay sells mainly denim, but also other clothes such as T-shirts and jackets, and the relation of this product category with sexuality may not be immediately obvious. The main purpose of clothes in both Italy and Sweden is to cover the body, as it is presumably in many other developed countries too, and depending on the personal preferences, mix and match them to create a preferred style. Then the absence of clothes in advertising seems in this case the opposite of the function of the product. Therefore the use of sexual appeals may not be perceived as suitable and consequently sexual appeals might be seen to decrease the level of purchase intention.
The differences in attitudes towards advertising featuring sexual appeals between genders is a subject that has been studied extensively (Putrevu, 2008; Belch et al., 1982; LaTour & Henthorne, 1993; Smith et al., 1995). Other authors combine the gender variable with culture (Bosveld, 1996; Hultin and Lundh, 2004), to see the differences in the perceptions of sexual appeals. Despite Sweden and Italy have different cultures, as the scores in Hofstede’s cultural dimensions show (see Table 2), the experiments done in the two countries resulted in similar findings. In both countries sexual appeals in the ad had a negative effect on purchase intention of Replay, contradicting the results of Severn et. al (1990). Moreover, in terms of genders, the results were not different neither in Sweden nor in Italy. Regarding Italy, Bosveld (1996) highlights that Italy is more conservative and the least sexually permissive country in Europe, but the study still found that Italian men react more positively to sexual appeals than Italian women. The results of the present study disagree with the differences in gender, as both women and men showed the same tendency in the purchase intention of Replay’s clothes. Even though the study of Bosveld (1996) was more concerned with attitudes, negative attitudes towards a brand can be seen as having a direct effect on purchase intention. Meanwhile, it was found by Hultin and Lundh (2004) that the purchase intention of Swedish men is not affected by advertising featuring sexual appeals, but that women’s purchase intention is affected negatively, if the advertising is too sexual. The findings of this research agree with the findings in terms of women, but not when it comes to men, as men were also found to be affected negatively by images featuring sexual appeals. Moreover, it is interesting to highlight that in neither of the countries there is a significant difference between women and men in the purchase intention of Replay’s clothes, if considering the sexual and the non-sexual image separately. Also from this perspective, the position of Bosveld (1996) about Italian men and women’s attitudes to sexual appeals in advertising is contradicted, since in the case of Replay there was no difference between the genders.

Putrevu (2008) found that sexual appeals in advertising have different effects on the purchase intention of high and low involvement consumers, namely low-involved consumers have higher purchase intention than high-involved consumers. He also found that the opposite would happen when using nonsexual advertising. Instead, in the case of Replay, both Italian and Swedish low-involved consumers were not affected positively by the sexual advertising in terms of purchase intention. The same was valid for Italian and Swedish high-involved consumers, confirming some of Putrevu’s (2008) findings. Furthermore, according to Putrevu (2008), low-involved consumers do not think too much before making the purchase decision, and that’s how he explains that they are more positive towards sexual appeals. Since both Swedish men and women would change their attitudes towards a brand if the ad is too sexual (Hultin & Lundh, 2004), an interpretation can also be that low-involved consumers in Sweden, who base their purchase decision on first impression, will have a lower purchase intention because of their aversion towards sexual imagery. In Italy the same reasoning can be applied, as it is a very conservative country with Catholic traditions (Bosveld, 1996).

6.3.2. The Influence of Advertising Featuring Sexual Appeals on Brand Image

Purchase intention is a good measure for actual behavior (Webb and Sheeran, 2006) and is of interest for managerial implications, but brand image is also important in order to measure the
success of a promotional strategy in reaching one of its objectives (Rowley, 1998). It was assumed by the authors of this study that sexual appeals in advertising would have had a positive effect on competence, but not on warmth. However, the findings indicate that sexual appeals have a negative effect on both traits of the brand image of Replay. Moreover, the effect on brand image were the same in Italy and Sweden. Since brand image is formed in the minds of the consumers, it is important to understand the social signals and symbolism related to brands. As Levy (1959) suggests, consumers purchase products for what they mean, not only for their function. Moreover, as mentioned already above consumers are affected by culture (Hofstede, 1994). Therefore, it is important to understand how culture influences brand image and promotional strategies.

Both Italy and Sweden are individualistic countries, and individualism has a significant impact on the performance of brand image strategies. More specifically, variety and novelty should be emphasized in individualistic countries (Roth, 1995). Yet, the use of sexual appeals is a common advertising technique and has long been used by companies. Therefore, by using sexual appeals to promote products, the competence trait of Replay may be compromised, as consumers may perceive the strategy as an inability to be original. Additionally, uniqueness is a specific attribute of jeans and Replay’s brand identity, so the usage of sexual appeals in its advertising strategy may jeopardize this attribute, instead of highlighting it and using it to strengthen the brand.

Italy is a high power distance country, and therefore a brand image strategy based on social and sensory needs of products would be more appropriate (Roth, 1995). With sexual images, Replay is leveraging on the senses of consumers, but it is not emphasizing the social and sensory need for jeans. For example, it is not communicating how the quality of the denim may benefit consumers in terms of comfort or how the jeans may make them feel part of a specific type of social group, for instance people that think outside the box, which is one of the qualities Replay symbolizes. However, in Sweden power distance is low, and brand image strategies should focus on the functionality of products instead of the social roles or group affiliations of the brand (Roth, 1995). Therefore, Swedish consumers are affected positively by highlighting competence traits of brands. The use of sexual appeals and high levels of nudity in the advertising may be contradictory to the goal of being perceived as a competent brand, as the ability of Fashion Box in producing high-quality denim is not obvious from the images. Indeed, in the sexual image the models are barely showing the product, and rather putting the focus on the bodies of the models.

Despite the differences between the two countries in terms of masculinity, and therefore in the degree of care for others (Hofstede, 1989), the effect of sexual appeals on warmth was negative in both. Italy is a country that is rated high on masculinity (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2002). Also, Italians are more acceptant towards sexual images compared to other countries in Europe (Lass & Hart, 2004). Therefore, considering the case when Replay is using nudity, which makes the advertising sexual and bold, in its advertising strategy, it is interesting to note that the brand’s warmth is still affected negatively in Italy. Italian consumers’ reaction to the sexual ad in terms of warmth could be instead related to the strong Catholic traditions in the country, which are
conservative and would not relate sexual appeals to the traits that warmth represents, namely generosity, kindness, honesty, sincerity, helpfulness, and trustworthiness (Aaker, 1997); on the contrary, these traits would rather be applied to Catholicism itself. Meanwhile, Sweden is a feminine country, where individuals are more sympathetic and caring of others (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2002). Considering that Swedish consumers have in general negative attitudes towards advertising featuring sexual appeals (Hultin & Lundh, 2004), the negative impact on the warmth dimension of the brand image is not surprising. Therefore, both countries seem to be opposed to sex appeals in advertising, but because of different cultural characteristics.

In order to fall in the popular brand category, Aaker et al. (2012) suggests to increase the perception of competence for a warm brand by offering high quality products, and correspondingly, to increase the perception of warmth for a competent brand by showing that it cares for others. In this case, Replay’s perceived warmth and competence dimensions are lower when the advertising featuring sexual appeals is shown to consumers. The brand would lean more towards the troubled brand quadrant of the BIAF (Kervyn et al., 2012). In order to move towards the popular brand quadrant, Replay would have to increase both warmth and competence. Consumers that were shown the ad without sexual appeals in both Italy and Sweden had a higher perception of warmth and competence. Therefore, it could be assumed that competence increased by replacing the nudity with clothing, while warmth increased by removing the sexual appeals in terms of pose of the couple.
7. General Discussion and Conclusions

In this chapter the authors first integrate the results of the different studies conducted in this research in a general discussion. Then, the main conclusions are presented, followed by managerial implications. Lastly, the limitations of the study are discussed and further research is suggested.

7.1. Discussion

Fashion Box is using both trade promotion and promotional (communication) strategies that find a balance between standardization and adaptation, as most companies do, instead of choosing one or the other (Douglas & Wind, 1987; Hennessey, 2001; Svensson, 2002; Vrontis & Papasolomou, 2005; Vrontis & Vronti, 2004). On one hand, the company is acknowledging that the local representatives have better knowledge about their own markets, because they have the same cultural background with their customers. This is seen as the main rationale for Fashion Box to adapt its trade marketing activities through its local representatives. The freedom given to North Box in choosing the trade marketing activities to take part in, is giving the agency an opportunity to customize its strategy to support sales activities the best way possible. This is in line with one of the aims of trade marketing, which is to encourage retailers to buy the vendors’ products (Poddar et al., 2013). In fact, Swedish retailers have different preferences due to the local culture and fashion industry (Park, 2004). The cultural influence is also the same as the one affecting Replay’s consumers in Sweden. Therefore, it is argued that making use of North Box’s market knowledge in order to support the sales to the Swedish retailers would be beneficial for Fashion Box. In turn, a tailored trade promotion strategy, will agreeably be adopted by the retailers and help them sell more to the end consumers (Poddar et al., 2013; Park, 2004). Thus, Fashion Box, North Box and the retailers would all benefit from adaptation.

Nonetheless, Fashion Box implements standardization strategies when it comes to promotion and, more specifically, promotional content. The promotional content in terms of images and videos, is uniformly used for promotional activities as well as for trade promotion activities. The reason behind this standardization is the need for control and lower costs, while maintaining a uniform brand image globally (Rowley, 1998). These reasons are inward-looking, in the sense that Fashion Box is standardizing based on the company’s internal needs. An additional reasoning from the same inward perspective, could explain the company’s need for standardization. In fact, it has been suggested that Italy is a country characterized by high uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 1984) and that culture shapes management cultures (Solberg, 2000; Laurent, 1983). Having its origin and operating in Italy, Fashion Box can be seen to share the same qualities as the Italian culture in terms of high uncertainty avoidance: copious regulations, complex bureaucracy and low tolerance for ambiguity (Hofstede, 1989). Considering that sexual appeals have been used extensively in advertising in the past, it may be regarded as a low-risk strategy that does not result in excessive uncertainty. The use of sexual appeals in Replay’s advertising was criticized by Swedish retailers exactly in these terms, for being outdated, and therefore unoriginal.
Digitalization has enabled consumers to have more power in choosing which ads they want to be exposed to (Keller, 2009), as they can quickly avoid them nowadays. Therefore, using sexual appeals could be seen as an effective strategy in getting the attention of consumers, increasing visibility and creating strong brand associations (Kotler, 2000). Moreover, Fashion Box may perceive the strategy of using nudity as appropriate, since sexual appeals have been proved to increase purchase intention (Severn et al., 1990). Nevertheless, the findings of this study have shown that Swedish consumers and retailers are not the only ones who share negative attitudes towards sexual appeals used in trade promotion and advertising, but Italian consumers feel the same way as well. The difference between consumer reactions in Sweden and the successful reactions that Fashion Box was expecting when implementing the strategy could be explained with cultural motivations. On the other hand, a surprising finding is that Italian consumers do not prefer advertising featuring sexual appeals over the one without either. Since Fashion Box is closer to the Italian market, the mismatch was unexpected. Yet, one consideration to be made is that, as mentioned above Fashion Box’s target market for Replay is women and men from the ages of 30 to 45, and is interested in younger generations as well. Younger consumers can be assumed to be more tolerant, and therefore more accepting towards sexual appeals, so the negative attitudes from the retailers may be due to the fact that their customers, as well as Replay’s, are part of older generations. Nonetheless, the experiment conducted with students as participants, found their reactions to sexual appeals in terms of purchase intention and brand image to be negative. Therefore, it could be assumed that there have been some changes in the perception of younger consumers towards sexual appeals used in advertising. Moreover, another reason explaining why Fashion Box is using sexual appeals in their advertising could be that, even though their target segment includes both men and women, around 60-65% of its end customers is represented by men. Also, sexual appeals used in advertising have been shown to increase especially the purchase intention of men (Bosveld, 1996). If not a reason for implementing a promotional strategy featuring sexual appeals, it could be the reason for the bigger success among male consumers. On the other hand, the experiments done in both Italy and Sweden showed a negative purchase intention when related to sexual advertising, questioning the contemporary attitudes towards sexual appeals in promotion.

In light of the preceding discussion, it seems that one standardized promotional strategy in terms of contents may be appropriate across Italy and Sweden, with the condition that they do not include sexual appeals. Additionally, Swedish retailers expressed their fondness in receiving the trade promotion content to use in store already in the early meetings, so that they can be aware of what products Fashion Box wants to emphasize its advertising on. In this case, the retailers would be willing to make some exceptions and purchase some clothes that they would otherwise not have in their stores, as they do not fit the Swedish fashion taste. In fact, Fashion Box’s intention is to sell more trendy clothes from the collection, not only denim, even though Swedish consumers focus more on functionality and minimalistic styles. More importantly, retailers demand promotional images that show the products that they are actually selling in store, so that when consumers see them they have the opportunity to purchase exactly from that retailer. This request and expectation of retailers further supports the inappropriateness of images featuring sexual appeals. In fact, as the images portray nudity (so
the absence of clothes) the chances of showing the products bought by the retailer are lower. Lastly, as already mentioned above the Swedish retailers explicitly expressed their disapproval towards advertising featuring sexual appeals, as they believe it is an outdated strategy that would not be appreciated by their customers. Their claim about their customers’ antagonism towards sexual advertising is additionally supported by the results of the experiment conducted in Sweden.

As an alternative to standardizing the promotional material, Fashion Box could adapt it to the Swedish market. As highlighted through this dissertation, different cultures can be the reason for different effects advertising has on consumers (Liu et al., 2009). Sexual appeals might have had an effect not only on purchase intention, warmth and competence, but also on the different brand positioning of Replay in Sweden compared to the desired one by Fashion Box. Replay’s identity is symbolized by uniqueness and thinking outside the box, which could be suitably presented with sexual appeals if one considers that in Sweden this is a non-mainstream trend. In fact, the Swedish retailers explained that fashion companies in Sweden normally do not base promotional strategies on nudity. Therefore, retailers would not accept these pictures featuring sexual appeals since they do not match their store image, and then North Box would not be able to share them with their customers. This “selective removal” of images featuring sexual appeals made by retailers, may have led consumers to think of Replay uniquely as a commercial brand, which is mainly focused on high-quality denim, rather than on fashion and uniqueness. Additionally, the success of Hyperflex in Sweden, which highlights the functional qualities of Replay, could be related to the preference for product features (i.e. functionality, comfort, etc.) and simple styles in Sweden, to the extent that it has almost become a brand on its own. Therefore, the rest of Replay’s identity, being imperfectly cool, sexy, unique, has not been appropriately communicated. In view of the above, the standardization strategy as intended to have a uniform brand image, seemed to have the opposite result in the Swedish market.

Since advertising can be interpreted differently in different cultures, companies should assess whether they should implement standardization or adaptation strategies (Sawyer & Howard, 1991; Belch & Belch, 2004) or even a combination of the two. Moreover, cultures can be seen as non-negotiable (Lee et al., 2015) and the violation of cultural norms might even cause disapproval (Mastor et al., 2000). Therefore, rather than trying to impose advertising in other countries based on the own preference of the company, a careful assessment of the degrees of standardization and adaptation would be a more beneficial approach for attracting and retaining customers.

Finally, jeans are considered a high-involvement product since they are seen to become a very personal garment for the consumers, as it shapes into their bodies and is expected to be worn for years. Thereby, as high-involved consumers have been found to process advertising more in detail compared to low-involved consumers (Rossiter and Percy, 1987), adaptation of advertising is further suggested (Papavassiliou & Stathakopoulos, 1997).

In terms of sexual appeals, Replay’s advertising had a negative effect on not only warmth, but also on competence, leading the brand towards being categorized as a troubled brand (Kervyn
et al., 2012). These results emerged from the experiments done on consumers. Nevertheless, the findings are supported also by the Swedish retailers, who indeed are expected to have different preferences in terms of the promotional supports provided by the manufacturers (Park, 2004). This is because the retailers also plan their own promotion strategies according to their customers’ preferences and their product portfolio (Park, 2004). According to Kervyn et al. (2012), a brand that is high in warmth and competence elicits admiration and falls into the popular brand category, which is the most successful in terms of purchase intention (Aaker et al., 2012). In fact, in both Italy and Sweden, the experiments showed that the image without sexual appeals led to higher warmth and competence, as well as purchase intention. As Replay’s brand identity is grounded on the expertise in producing jeans, the decrease in perceived competence caused by sexual appeals can be damaging, as it involves the perception of inability of the brand in carrying out its intentions (one of them being the production of high-quality denim). The effect of sexual appeals on competence could in the long run also lead to retailers’ disinterest in the brand, as the expertise is not only the core feature of Replay’s brand identity, but also related to the preference of Swedish retailers and consumers who value the functionality of products (Roth, 1995).

Further, to be positioned in the popular brands quadrant, the warmth trait should not be neglected. As mentioned above, the usage of advertising without sexual appeals could help Replay become a more popular brand, as both warmth and competence would increase. The replacement of nudity with clothes would increase the perception of competence in the minds of consumers and retailers, as Replay would have the opportunity to highlight product features not only of denim, but also on the rest of the collection, which Fashion Box does not want to neglect. Warmth could be increased in the minds of retailers by providing promotional material that emphasizes sustainable processes and materials rather than sexual appeals, message that could in turn be transmitted from the retailer to the customers.

### 7.2. Conclusions

One of the main findings of this research is that sex does not sell after all. Even though sexual appeals have been extensively used in the past in marketing strategies because of their proved success on purchase intention, the contemporary attitudes seem to have changed. Moreover, previous studies have found that specifically men’s purchase intention is affected positively by images featuring sexual appeals are contradicted by the results of the experiments conducted in both Italy and Sweden. Additionally, sexual appeals used in advertising are found to damage brand image. Also, the attitudes of consumers towards sexual appeals in advertising were expected to be very different between Sweden and Italy, but the results were surprisingly the same. Yet, the effect of sexual advertising on purchase intention and brand images could be explained by different cultural factors influencing the consumers.

Culture revealed to be especially important to consider not only when it came to consumers, but also business relationships. In fact, by understanding the preferences of retailers, companies can increase sales to retailers and motivate them to promote the brand to consumers in their respective stores.
In can be concluded that even though one of the main goals of standardization is to create a uniform brand image internationally, it could happen that it is actually the reason for the emergence of different brand images in different countries, due to cultural reasons and to how consumers and retailers perceive what is appropriate/inappropriate, appealing/unappealing, original/unoriginal, and so on. Therefore, the results suggest contents and activities to be standardized across countries where similar cultural values prevail, and to adapt other features of trade promotion and promotion. This would help companies create or maintain strong relationships with retailers and at the same time ensure that their brand image does not contradict the store image of retailers, in order to avoid lack of promotional efforts of the brand from the retailer to the consumers.

7.3. Managerial Implications
This research provides valuable information for international marketers, but especially for companies operating in the fashion industry. In order to be successful internationally, marketers should find a balance between standardization and adaptation when developing their marketing strategies, by making sure they understand how contents (e.g. images, video, statements, colors) are perceived across countries. This can be done with the help of local representatives, as they have deeper knowledge about the market they are operating in. Moreover, the success of the use of different types of marketing channels vary between countries due to differences in the media environments, thus this should be also considered.

In order to have a successful brand, companies should try to communicate that they are both well-intentioned and able to act on their intentions. In particular, due to digitalization, the increasing trend of transparency and people being more aware, companies should aim for putting more emphasis on communicating, for example, their commitment to sustainable processes and materials as well as the transparency of their value chain. This in turn, would be perceived as sincere and honest by consumers. Moreover, by showing expertise, offering high quality and innovative products and/or services companies are able to increase the perception of competence in the minds of consumers. Innovation does not necessarily need to be a completely new product, but it can also be generated by reinventing existing offerings.

When it comes to fashion companies, or any companies for that matter, it is counter-productive to use advertising images/trade promotion images showing clothes that are not sold in that particular market, for multiple reasons. Firstly, the retailers might not accept those images to be displayed in their stores. Secondly, the images might create annoyance among customers who might feel misled when they are not able to purchase the clothes shown in the pictures. Additionally, companies should be careful when using sexual appeals in promotional content, as they nowadays may be perceived as outdated, violating cultural norms and/or not original. All three cases would be damaging to the brand image of the company.

7.4. Limitations
One of the limitations of this mixed-method study refers to the fact that only one case is analyzed for exploring standardization and adaptation strategies, and therefore only the perspective of one company is presented. Thus results may be less generalizable. Nevertheless,
the aim of a single case is to get deep insights about an organization, and the data collected with the help of business contacts have helped in gaining in-depth knowledge. Moreover, the industry analyzed in this research was the fashion industry, and therefore the results may have been different in other industries.

Concerning the methods used for carrying out this research, one limitation can be found in the fact that only two retailers were interviewed in Sweden, and make results less generalizable. However, one of the retailers is one of the biggest chains in Sweden, with 120 doors, and can be seen as a good representative of the industry and of the perception of consumers. Additionally, one of the interviews was done on the phone, and thus could be seen as a limitation because of lack of personal communication. However, this was due to logistical reasons, which is very common when it comes to international interviews.

The experiment was conducted in two countries and then qualitatively cross-analyzed, overcoming the common logistic and resource obstacles when doing research abroad. Nevertheless, besides measuring, if there were effects between variables in the experiment, it would have been a strength to also measure the effect sizes of the causal relationships.

Regarding the concept of brand image in terms of warmth and competence, a limitation of this study could be seen to lie in the hypothesis generation of H8 and H9, as the argumentation could be considered not sufficiently strong and theoretically grounded. Yet, there is a lack of studies about the BIAF (Kervyn et al., 2012), therefore the authors found the alternative solution of exploring the topic with the help of the data collected through focus groups to be able to produce stronger assumptions.

**7.5. Further Research**

For future research the authors recommend that the role of an agent or a distributor in the agent/distributor-manufacturer relationship should be further investigated, especially in standardization and adaptation of marketing strategies studies. In addition, more cross-cultural studies are suggested to be done with experimental approaches to discover how consumers with different cultural backgrounds react to advertising images featuring sexual appeals. It would be, for example, interesting to compare the opinions of consumers from a European country to a country in, for example South America or Africa regarding advertising images featuring sexual appeals. In addition, as mentioned above, the BIAF developed by Kervyn et al. (2012) has not been extensively studied, thus the authors suggest that further research should be done regarding the framework. In particular, it would be interesting to study a brand’s perceived ability and intention in relation to advertising using sexual appeals in other industries and countries. Moreover, as recommended by Krishma (2016) the spotlight analysis should be used more to examine the interactive effect between an independent variable and a continuous moderator. This type of analysis could be interesting to use when examining the moderation effect of involvement on the influence of sexual appeals on purchase intention, as different levels of involvement could be better analyzed. Lastly, even though the topic of sexual appeals in advertising has been studied extensively in the past, it would be interesting to conduct more
modern studies on contemporary societies, especially in relation to the fashion industry, since the results of this study have shown differing trends.
References


McCarthy, E. J. (1964). *Basic Marketing*. Irwin, IL: Richard D.


Appendix A: The Interview Guide (Retailers)

1) What do you do? What is your role?

2) How would you describe [Retailer]’s store image?

3) Who’s your target customer?

4) What kind of brands do you sell?

5) How do you choose the brands to have in the store? Do you consider the store image when choosing the brands?

6) When you make purchase decisions, are the choices influenced by the availability of trade marketing activities and support?

7) For how long have you been working with North Box?

8) How would you describe your relationship with North Box?

9) What’s something that you think is better or worse compared to other vendors?

10) Do you think the country of origin of the brands has an influence on your relationship with the vendors?

11) Do you think Replay (Italy) has an influence on your relationship with North Box? Can you give me some examples?

12) Are you satisfied with the support provided by Replay in terms of trade marketing?

13) How would you describe Replay’s brand image?

14) Would you put these images in your store or on your website? Why?

15) How would you describe image 1?

16) How would you describe image 2?

17) How do you think your customers perceive image 1?

18) How do you think your customers perceive image 2?

19) If you had to choose one image for your store/stores, would you choose image 1 or image 2?
Appendix B: The Interview Guide (Marketing Director)

1) What is your position in the company
2) For how long have you been working for Fashion Box?
3) Can you describe the trade promotion and promotion strategies of Fashion Box?
4) How do you calculate and divide your marketing budget?
5) Are there any trade promotion activities that are standardized/adapted in different markets? What about promotional activities? If yes, why do you standardize/adapt?
6) Have you encountered any difficulties, when it comes to standardization/adaptation of trade promotion and promotion strategies?
7) If you had to describe Replay’s personality, how would you describe it?
8) What is the target group of Replay?
9) What influence does Hyperflex have on Replay as a brand?
10) In Sweden, Replay is seen as a denim brand, is this the intention of the headquarters or is the brand image seen differently only in Sweden?
Appendix C: The Images Used for the Experiment and Interviews with the Retailers

1. Image with Sexual Appeals

2. Image without Sexual Appeals
Appendix D: The Web Questionnaire

The survey has been divided into two parts. In the first part of the survey you are shown a real advertisement of a brand and you are then asked to answer questions related to the ad shown to you. In the second part we are asking about your clothing purchasing behavior.

PART 1

A) I would buy the clothes of this brand (on a scale of 1 to 5):
   
   Unlikely
   
   Likely

B) Please indicate how accurate the following statements are in describing the brand (on a scale of 1 to 5):

1. The brand has good intentions toward ordinary people.
   Not accurate at all
   Completely accurate
2. The brand consistently acts with the public’s best interest in mind.
   Not accurate at all
   Completely accurate
3. This company’s staff has the consumers’ interest at heart.
   Not accurate at all
   Completely accurate
4. This company’s staff cares about the quality of their garments.
   Not accurate at all
   Completely accurate
5. This company’s staff has the intention to provide their customers with good clothes.
   Not accurate at all
   Completely accurate
6. The brand has the ability to implement its intentions.
   Not accurate at all
   Completely accurate
7. The brand is skilled and effective at achieving its goals.
   Not accurate at all
   Completely accurate
8. This company’s staff has good knowledge about jeans design.
   Not accurate at all
   Completely accurate
9. This company has a high level of jeans manufacturing expertise.
   Not accurate at all
   Completely accurate
10. This company has a high competence when it comes to maintaining quality in their products.
    Not accurate at all
    Completely accurate

C) Try to describe the brand as if it was a person. Please indicate how accurate the following statements are in describing the brand (on a scale of 1 to 5).

1. The brand does not care about what others think.
   Not accurate at all
   Completely accurate
2. The brand is original.
   Not accurate at all
   Completely accurate
3. The brand is self-confident.
   Not accurate at all
   Completely accurate
4. The brand is perceived as effortless.
D) Next, you will be asked a couple of questions about how you perceive this ad and its content.

1. How sexual do you consider this ad? (On a scale of 1 to 5)
   Not sexual at all               Very sexual

2. A part from the clothes, how attractive do you find the male model? (On a scale of 1 to 5)
   Not attractive at all           Very attractive
3. A part from the clothes, how attractive do you find the female model? (On a scale of 1 to 5)
   Not attractive at all           Very attractive

PART 2

In this section you will be asked a few questions about you buying behavior.

E) Who buys most of your clothes?
   You / Someone else

F) To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (On a scale of 1 to 5)

1. Clothing represents a large portion of my budget.
   Strongly disagree               Strongly agree

2. Clothing represents a way to express my values and personality.
   Strongly disagree               Strongly agree

3. I mostly buy clothes to satisfy practical needs such as seasonal demands.
   Strongly disagree               Strongly agree

4. I regard clothing as a source of pleasure or a way to indulge yourself.
   Strongly disagree               Strongly agree

G) Overall, how important would you rate clothes to be in your life? (On a scale of 1 to 5)
   Not important at all           Very important
H) How often do you shop for clothes in the following stores?

1. MQ
Never / Once per month or less / 2-3 times per month / More than 3 times per month
2. JC
Never / Once per month or less / 2-3 times per month / More than 3 times per month
3. Design Only
Never / Once per month or less / 2-3 times per month / More than 3 times per month
4. Åhléns
Never / Once per month or less / 2-3 times per month / More than 3 times per month
5. Jeansbolaget
Never / Once per month or less / 2-3 times per month / More than 3 times per month
6. Carlings
Never / Once per month or less / 2-3 times per month / More than 3 times per month

I) If you look for jeans what is the likelihood of you shopping looking for them in these stores. (On a scale of 1 to 5)

1. MQ
Very unlikely / Very likely
2. JC
Very unlikely / Very likely
3. Design Only
Very unlikely / Very likely
4. Åhléns
Very unlikely / Very likely
5. Jeansbolaget
Very unlikely / Very likely
6. Carlings
Very unlikely / Very likely

J) Lastly, we ask you if to fill in the following information.

1. What’s your gender?
Female / Male / Other/don’t want to say

2. How old are you? Indicate your age in digits.
(digits)

3. What’s your nationality?
Swedish / Italian
Other:
K) In case you are interested in taking part of winning a pair of jeans á 1500kr, type in your email address too. The email address will only be used for announcing the winner of the jeans.

Email: _______

L) Thank you for your answers!
Appendix E: The Email Messages

First Email Message:

Dear Participant,

This is a short survey which is part of a research project at Halmstad University. The research is about the usage of advertising imagery in Sweden (in Sweden and Italy) and its influence on the brand image of fashion companies/a fashion company and the purchase intention of the consumer.

The survey will take around 10 minutes to be completed, so we hope you have time to help us.

You are contacted because you work or study at Halmstad University. Your participation is anonymous and the data gathered in this survey will only be used for research purposes and will not be sold to any third party. As a thank you for your participation you get a chance to win a pair of jeans worth of á 1500kr.

If you want to take part on this survey click the link below.

LINK

If you have any questions about the research feel free to contact us at xxx@icloud.com or xxx@gmail.com or on Linkedin.

Thank you for your participation!

Best Regards,

Lotta Laakso & Anna Friberg
Reminder Email:

Subj: Survey reminder

Dear Participant,

We sent you a survey last week concerning a research done at Halmstad University. Your opinion would make a great impact on the success of the research. So we kindly ask you to fill out the survey.

We would also like to remind you about the possibility to win a pair of jeans (your choice) for the value of a´ 1500kr.

If you want to take part on this survey click the link below

LINK

If you know you will not have the chance to help us, then you can disregard this email. We will not send you anymore remainders.

Thank you for your participation!

Best Regards,

Lotta Laakso & Anna Friberg
Appendix F: ANOVA Analyses on the Collected Data in Sweden

Main Effect 1: Effect of Advertising Featuring Sexual Appeals on Purchase Intention

### Descriptives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual Appeal in Ad</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval for Mean</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>1.200</td>
<td>0.081</td>
<td>1.89 - 3.42</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>2.51</td>
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**ANOVA**

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<th>Sig.</th>
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**. The mean difference is significant at the 0.01 level

Moderation of Gender on Main Effect 1

### Descriptive Statistics

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<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
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<td>1.239</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>1.171</td>
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<td></td>
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### Two-Way ANOVA

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**. The mean difference is significant at the 0.01 level

97
Moderation of Involvement on Main Effect 1

**Descriptive Statistics**

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<td>1.093</td>
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<td>High</td>
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**Two-Way ANOVA**

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**Main Effect 2: Effect of Advertising Featuring Sexual Appeals on Warmth and Competence**

**Descriptives**

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<tr>
<th>Sexual Appeal in Ad</th>
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<th>Mean</th>
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<th>Std. Error</th>
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**ANOVA**

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**. The mean difference is significant at the 0.01 level.**
### Descriptives

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<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
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### ANOVA

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**. The mean difference is significant at the 0.01 level
Appendix G: ANOVA Analyses on the Collected Data in Italy

Main Effect 1: Effect of Advertising Featuring Sexual Appeals on Purchase Intention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention</th>
<th>Descriptives</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>329</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>325</td>
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ANOVA

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<td>---</td>
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**. The mean difference is significant at the 0.01 level

Moderation of Gender on Main Effect 1

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<tr>
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<tr>
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Two-Way ANOVA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention</th>
<th>Two-Way ANOVA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Type III Sum of Squares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Model</td>
<td>91,144*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>3397,845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual/Appeal in Ad</td>
<td>81,180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>1,274</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
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**. The mean difference is significant at the 0.01 level
Moderation of Involvement on Main Effect 1

Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual Appeal in Ad</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>1.152</td>
<td>162</td>
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<tr>
<td>High</td>
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<td>1.283</td>
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<td>329</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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Two-Way ANOVA

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<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Model</td>
<td>110,064*</td>
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<td>36,688</td>
<td>27,163</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
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<td>48,725,557</td>
<td>360,747</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
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<td>SexAppeal</td>
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<td>98,579</td>
<td>72,985</td>
<td>0.000**</td>
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<td>Involv Cat</td>
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<td>12,242</td>
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<td>988,008</td>
<td>653</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**. The mean difference is significant at the 0.01 level.

Main Effect 2: Effect of Advertising Featuring Sexual Appeals on Warmth and Competence

Descriptives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual Appeal in Ad</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval for Mean</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>0.714</td>
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<td>2.55</td>
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ANOVA

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
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<tr>
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<td>634</td>
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<td>0.495</td>
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<td>339,681</td>
<td>635</td>
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</tbody>
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**. The mean difference is significant at the 0.01 level.
### Descriptives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual Appeal in Ad</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval for Mean</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>0.826</td>
<td>0.047</td>
<td>2.79-2.98</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
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<td>0.705</td>
<td>0.041</td>
<td>3.10-3.26</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>0.783</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>2.97-3.09</td>
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</table>

### ANOVA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Sex Appeal in Ad</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
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<th>Sig.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
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* * The mean difference is significant at the 0.01 level