Are intermediary luxury fashion brands excluding overweight and obese women in the UK, by not offering their sizes among its assortments?

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Preface

This thesis was written during the spring of 2015 where our journey first started in Halmstad and ended five months later in Pizzo, a small picturesque village in the Italian district of Calabria. In between the start and finish line however, we have worked together on a long distance between Gothenburg, Sweden -also referred to as ‘little London’ and Sweden’s second largest city located on the beautiful west coast; and the real deal, the vibrant capital of the United Kingdom, London.

There are a few people we would like to thank for their help along the way, without them this process would have been a lot bumpier. First of all we would like to express our gratefulness towards our supervisor Ulf Aagerup, who not only inspired us to choose this field of study, but also showed great support along the way. Without Ulf, this thesis would not be what it is today. Our friends and families have also been invaluable along this process and their embracement means the world to us, thank you all for being there. Last but not least, we would like to thank each other. We have carried each other through a period, which has been the toughest one so far for personal reasons, but have still managed to compose a thesis that we are proud to present.

Pizzo, Calabria, Italy, May 2015.

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Abstract

Title: Are intermediary luxury fashion brands excluding overweight and obese women in the UK, by not offering their sizes among its assortments?

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Purpose: The purpose of this study is to review the sizes available in store by three leading intermediary luxury fashion brands offered in the UK and compare it with the actual body shapes of the female UK population. This will show whether intermediary luxury fashion brands exclude overweight and obese women, by not offering their sizes among its assortments. We want to find out whether it is possible to reveal a correlation between existing branding theories and intermediary luxury fashion assortments in the UK.

Theoretical framework: Our frame of reference consists of established branding theories and previous research concerning brand identity, brand image, self-image congruence, user imagery, segmentation and luxury branding.

Method: This is a cross-sectional research of the descriptive kind. We have used a deductive research approach and a quantitative research method.

Empirical findings: In this chapter we are presenting the results of our study through a table demonstrating the distribution of individuals and garments over weight classes. Also, any significant differences between supply and demand within any of the categories will be revealed through a Z-test.

Conclusions: Obese women are by all means excluded by intermediary luxury fashion brands. The overweight women have significantly less jeans to choose from than what should be supported by their relative share of the female UK population. However, it turned out that they are not entirely excluded as they still have an amount of tops to choose from that closely matches their demand. Also we succeeded with identifying a causal correlation between branding theories and the result of our study. Therefore we have managed to provide further knowledge on how intermediary luxury fashion brands can become successful.
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1 Introduction

This chapter includes the background and background discussion concerning our field of study and will explain why our research will be relevant and important. This is followed by the research question, the purpose of our study, key concepts, definitions, delimitations and the disposition of the thesis.

1.1 Background

A research conducted in the beginning of the 21st century, where the body sizes of 1,540,000 people in the United Kingdom were measured, showed that 38% of all women were overweight or obese (Judd, 2004). Today, health concerns and obesity are increasing and research show that by 2030, the obese adults in the UK will rise and become 11 million more than of today (Brown, Gortmaker, Marsh, McPherson & Wang, 2011). As people started getting bigger, the societal debate as to what healthy really means also started to awaken (Cooper, 2007). Flint and Snook (2014) question the UK government and claim the endeavours towards a society where all individuals are treated equally and accepted for their differences, to be effortless when it comes to discrimination of obese people in the UK. They particularly criticize media’s way of portraying obesity and argue that they have a major responsibility when it comes to influencing peoples attitudes towards overweight and obese individuals (Flint & Snook, 2014). Another study reveals all the negative stereotypes, often associated with overweight and obese people, such as: undisciplined, dishonesty, social unattractiveness and unlikeness to be productive at work (Greenberg, Hofschire, Lachlan, Brownell & Kelly, 2010). Large sized people are also claimed to be associated with low status, low moral and Nilsson (2014) explains how rare it is for them to get a qualified education, in comparison with healthy and thin people.

When a life-style magazine tried to take a step back from the so-called 'size-zero phenomenon' a few years ago, notable fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld stated that these initiatives were absurd and probably carried through by fat women, tired of being reminded of their weight problems by the fashion industry (Connolly, 2009). According to Suzanne D’Amato (2005), women express feelings of being discriminated by the fashion industry and claim that retailers do not offer fashionable clothes in large sizes. Even though the average UK woman is a size 14, a lot of high street fashion stores only offer clothes up to a size 16 (Ritzon, 2003).

Another example of the fashion industry’s questionable way of approaching women of all sizes is that of Hollywood actress Melissa McCarthy (Jones, 2014). When McCarthy asked a number of high-level fashion designers to dress her for the Oscar’s, every single one of them turned her down (Jones, 2014). Laura Berger (2014, para. 2) claims that the situation of McCarthy most definitely had to do with the fact that these designers simply did not want to be associated with her, or more specifically: her body. But if reality poses that people keep getting bigger and bigger, why do women still feel that the fashion industry is neglecting their demands of fashionable clothes in large sizes?

1.2 Background discussion

D’Amato (2005) suggests that fashion brands do not want to be associated with fat people, due to the fact that being overweight simply isn’t fashionable. However, in spite of the fact that overweight women do feel mistreated by the fashion industry, previous research has shown that mass-market brands do not and would not be able to afford
excluding these women through not offering their sizes among its assortments (Aagerup, 2010). But if financial aspects hold the mass-market brands back from excluding unwanted customers, could the case be different looking at more upscale fashion brands instead?

It is known that many luxury fashion brands that offer their products in their own concept stores actually lose money due to the maintenance of these stores (Chevalier, Gutsatz & Schwedt, 2012, pg. 38-39). So why do these stores exist, is the purpose of running a business not for it to be profitable? Actually, the purpose of an extravagant concept store in a prime location is not to make money, but rather to represent and promote the luxury brand, as well as communicate the brand identity (Chevalier et al., 2012, pg. 86).

Luxury brands also use different approaches to marketing than do mass-market brands (Armstrong, Kotler, Saunders & Wong, 2005, pg. 391-393). Through segmentation companies divide large groups of people into smaller homogenous segments to be able to satisfy their specific needs in a more effective way. A significant and common approach used by mass-market brands is that of a standardized marketing mix, while high fashion brands tend to adapt their offering to more closely match specific needs in a single segment (Armstrong et al., 2005, pg. 391-393). However, marketing approaches used by luxury brands do not only concern matching certain needs, but also how to avoid satisfying others (Aaker, 1996, pg. 173). Luxury brands have the ability to distinguish and unite consumers at the same time when they offer a way of escaping the mass by consuming better (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012, pg. 25). The happy few united through exclusive brands and the benefits they will provide them, are destined to experience a sense of emotional satisfaction and self-fulfilment (Aaker, 1996, pg. 172; Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012, pg. 25; Holger & Holmberg, 2002, pg. 111). But what about the excluded ones?

To not offer clothes in large sizes is of course a question of moral, but Ritzon (2003) claims that this strategy is a way for fashion brands to not counteract its target segments. This will allow the brands to maintain a loyal customer base and not risk the event of having favourable customers seeing the clothes they are wearing, also being worn by unattractive users (Ritzon, 2003). According to the self-expression model designed by Aaker (1996, pg. 173-174), brands are an important vehicle for people to express themselves and find their self-identity. High fashion brands are more sensitive to harming their user imagery and depend to a wider extent upon not being associated with the wrong people (Aaker, 1996, pg. 173).

Kapferer (2008, pg. 273) claims that a product that is not representative of a brand should not, under any circumstances, carry the brand name. The brand logo plays a role in social relations both based upon the information it sends out to the consumer prior to a purchase and the perception it creates of the consumer after the purchase, when the same person will be associated with the brand (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012, pg. 105). When Aagerup (2010) analysed the findings of his research, he suggested that mass-market fashion brands might have found a way to fend the risk of being associated with unwanted consumers, without rejecting them. What he claimed was that mass-market brands avoid the impacts of unfavourable consumers through not displaying the logotype or corporate brand name on the actual garments. Thereby, he stated that the
typical user’s effect on the public’s perception of the brand could be eluded (Aagerup, 2010). However, when purchasing a luxury item, consumers want to enhance their self-image and reinforce their potential to be associated with a certain desired group of reference (Chevalier et al., 2012, pg. 8). Could this have an impact on the assortments offered by more upscale fashion brands, in contrast to what was stated in the research conducted by Aagerup (2010)?

**1.3 Research question**
With previous research disproving of women being excluded and discriminated by the fashion industry, even though the women themselves do express these kinds of feelings (Aagerup, 2010), we would like to recreate prior research using a reliable method though testing different variables. With this in mind, our research question will be as follows:

*Are intermediary luxury fashion brands excluding overweight and obese women in the UK, by not offering their sizes among its assortments?*

**1.4 Purpose**
The purpose of this study is to review the sizes available in store by three leading intermediary luxury fashion brands offered in the UK and compare it with the actual body shapes of the female UK population. This will present a result of whether intermediary luxury fashion brands exclude overweight and obese women, by not offering their sizes among its assortments. We want to find out whether it is possible to reveal a correlation between existing branding theories and intermediary luxury fashion assortments in the UK.

**1.5 Key Concepts**
The key concepts of this study are: Fashion, Intermediary Luxury, Brand Identity, Brand Image, User Imagery and Self-Image Congruence.

**1.6 Definitions**
*Following, any concepts consistently used throughout the thesis, explaining as well as bringing comprehension to the subject of study, will be defined and declared.*

**1.6.1 Brand**
Armstrong et al. (2005, pg. 549) explain a brand as a name, term, sign, symbol, design or a combination of these, whose purposes are to identify and distinguish the products or services available through one seller, from those of the competitors. Kapferer (2008, pg. 11-15) defines a brand as “a name with power to influence buyers” and whose influences are composed of a number of mental associations and relationships between consumers and distributors.

**1.6.2 Intermediary luxury**
Intermediary luxury is explained as products diffused with traditional views on luxury regarding level of creativity, approaches to marketing and cohesiveness in the work of building and maintaining the brand identity. However, the products within this category are, as a matter of fact, only traditional consumer goods in upgraded packages. They are identified as products located in the upper middle range of the price scale and offered to consumers in considerable large quantities produced in factories, however with a very cautiously developed and well monitored brand identity (Chevalier et al., 2012, pg. 5).
1.6.3 Department store
Department stores are large scale retailing institutions that offer assortments of products, that are both broad and deep in its kind (Baines, Fill & Page, 2008, pg. 577).

1.6.4 Concept stores
Concept stores are defined as key opportunities for manufacturers to promote their brands and are usually situated in prime locations. Through concept stores, manufacturers have the possibility to plan the display of products the way they like and a chain of stores may consist of hundreds or thousands (Finne & Sivonen, 2008).

1.6.5 Fashion
Armstrong et al. (2005, pg. 572) define fashion as "a currently accepted or popular style in a given field". Fashion is claimed to grow slowly, stay popular for a while and then slowly recess (Armstrong et al., 2005, pg. 572).

1.7 Delimitations
This research investigates the assortments available by three different intermediary luxury fashion brands in the UK, through one concept store of each brand and three different department stores, all located in London. Due to the limited time we had to dispose, we chose to only include the range of assortments available to female users, in order to be able to accurately carry out the work of collecting primary data. The research also only includes the assortments available in store alone and does not take any stock-keeping units under consideration. The types of garments that have been measured and calculated include all jeans as well as t-shirts and sweaters, which we refer to as tops.

1.8 Disposition

Model 1, Disposition.

**Introduction:** This chapter contains the background and background discussion of our thesis, followed by the research question along with the purpose of the study, key concepts, definitions and delimitations.

**Theoretical framework:** In this section we will present previous research within our field of study along with relevant branding theories.

**Method:** In this chapter we will present our choice of method along with the research approach and verify the level of validity and reliability of the study.

**Empirical findings:** In this chapter we will present the results of our empirical findings.

**Analysis:** We will in this section analyse the relationship between our empirical findings, previous research and existing branding theories.

**Conclusions:** We will answer our research question and reveal whether we could identify a correlation between our empirical findings and existing branding theories. Further, we will develop suggestions on future research.
2 Theoretical framework

In this part of the thesis we will present relevant and existing theories linked to our field of study. The theoretical framework consists of well-established marketing and branding theories, as well as up to date research.

2.1 Brand identity

A brand is made up of everything that turns a product into something further, not just a product (Kapferer, 2008, pg. 155). The brand identity is a set of associations, intended to be developed or maintained and which symbolises what the brand stands for, as well as it gives a promise to the consumers of what they can expect from the products it represents (Aaker, 1996, pg. 68).

When talking about brand identity two distinctions should be made, of which one is the brand ethics and refers to the intelligible part of the brand, such as its values and ideal proposal (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012, pg. 10). The other dimension is referred to as the brand aesthetics, which is everything that affects the physical expressions and substantial manifestations of the brand, in other words: all of the mental interactions between the brand itself and its consumers (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012, pg. 10). A product carries its own aesthetic characteristics, but perhaps more importantly, it also carries a brand, which in every aspect must be consistent and cohesive with what it communicates and add value to the offerings it represents (Chevalier et al., 2012, pg. 4). The aesthetic dimensions affects how the brand is perceived by the consumers and goes way beyond physical attributes (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012, pg. 10).

To develop a strong brand identity within the consciousness of the consumer has over time become a more and more important task in order for businesses to become successful (Holger & Holmberg, 2002, pg. 15). Aaker (1996, pg. 2) also states that there are a number of substantial factors that affects the likelihood of brands and the companies they represent to survive in today’s marketplace, of which the process of developing a strong and distinct brand identity is the most important one. A distinct brand identity however, is believed to be more important in terms of visible products and products associated with high involvement prior to a purchase (Aaker, 1996, pg. 159).

Kapferer (2008, pg. 171) states that today’s successful businesses use two different tools in terms of managing their brands: the brand identity and the brand positioning. The positioning is referred to as the difference perceived by the consumers of a specific brand in relation to its competitors (Kapferer, 2008, pg. 171). It is often expressed that developing a brand identity should be viewed as giving the brand a set of human characteristics which makes up the brands own individual personality (Aaker, 1996, pg. 142; Kapferer, 2008, pg. 183). The business of branding is a way of creating and maintaining predetermined notions of a certain brand and try to mediate these ideas within specific segments in an existing market (Koplovic & M’Rad, 2005, pg. 13-14). However, when it comes down to the positioning, the identity excludes certain options whilst welcoming others. The consumers targeted when positioning a brand must therefore justify it and add credibility to the brand identity (Kapferer, 1992, pg. 37).
2.2 Brand image

If the purpose of brand identity is to define a brand’s meaning, objective and self-image, brand image is explained as the result and notion of these made up by the consumers (Kapferer, 2008, pg. 174). Whilst brand identity refers to how the strategist wants the brand to be perceived, the brand image defines how the consumer perceives the brand (Aaker, 1996, pg. 71). Brand image is the main reason for why it is of extreme importance to be as accurate and circumstantial as possible when developing a brand identity (Kapferer, 2008, pg. 174).

Successful brands have the ability to develop strong personalities in the consciousness of the consumers (Holger & Holmberg, 2002, pg. 19). Jennifer Aaker (1997) stated through a research that there are five different personality traits that consumers associates brands with: Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication and Ruggedness. Sophistication and ruggedness are explained as aspirational associations, dimensions desired by humans but at the same time traits they do not necessarily have (Aaker, 1997). Tim Halloran (2014, pg. 53) believes that the strong brands are those who attain these specifically aspirational personalities, and that consumers perceive these brands as being particularly ‘designed for them’.

Every physical need identified among consumers, comes hand in hand with a range of emotional needs also required to be satisfied and Halloran (2014, pg. 41) accentuates the importance of understanding this emotional connection. Without an emotional connection, consumers will easily be able to replace brands with other alternatives that closely match up with their needs, if that happens to be more convenient at the time (Halloran, 2014, pg. 52).

The choices we make as consumers are in many cases linked to the desires of being part of a specific tribe (Holger & Holmberg, 2002, pg. 19). However, the premise of social belonging has now changed (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012, pg. 122). Consumers want to be a part of a larger group and will be recognized within this group for the choices they make as individuals. But if consumers wanted to be identical to their group of reference two decades ago, they now value being similar to a smaller selection of individuals instead (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012, pg. 122).

It is claimed that the blast of brands now fighting for a position in the consciousness of the consumers, would never exist without the social circumstances affecting them (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012, pg. 102). Some brands act as vehicles for consumers to be able to express their own self-identities; identities that can either be their actual identities or ideal and aspirational selves (Aaker, 1996, pg. 153). Chevalier and Mazzalovo (2012, pg. 102) suggests that the brands we surround ourselves with, for example the car we drive and the clothes we ware, often reveals more about our personalities then do our curriculum vitae. Consumers perceives value among brands who enables them to make statements about themselves and are willing to pay more for such products, compared to those who do not supply the same social benefits (Halloran, 2014, pg. 61-62).

2.3 Self-image congruence

Sirgy (1983, pg. 165) has previously discussed different approaches to self-concept and self-image. It is argued that human beings can be referred to by their actual or ideal...
selves, where the ideal self is explained as the image of whom one would like be. The social self-concept and ideal social self-image is directly linked to how people believe others perceive them in social situations, versus how one would like to be perceived by others (Sirgy, 1983, pg. 165). The usage of branded products is a way for consumers to express who they are and a lot of people find themselves uncomfortable in situations of where the use of a brand does not match up with their actual or ideal self (Aaker, 1996, pg. 154). Brands are not only tools that consumers use to navigate themselves through an overcrowded market; they also bring a sense of value and can help consumers strengthen their own individuality (Holger & Holmberg, 2002, pg. 156-157).

The way we behave when we shop for clothes highly depends upon how well the brand image matches up with our own personal image or indeed; the way we want to be perceived by others (Parker, 2009). Parker (2009) explains that positive feelings towards a brand depends upon these similarities and call it the self-image congruence phenomenon. Clothes and cosmetics are particularly used by consumers to express their personalities, as they are being used in a social context and require a relatively high involvement (Aaker, 1996, pg. 156).

As part of Kapferer’s (2008, pg. 186) Brand Identity Prism, he includes customer reflection as a symbol of the importance for brands to pay attention to how the consumers want to be perceived as a result of using a brand. Further, he states that a brand exists when a risk is perceived and only provides benefits in such situations (Kapferer, 2008, pg. 20). Humans are social beings and we value the opinions of others and judge ourselves upon the choices we make, which explains why brands are such a big part of our social identity (Kapferer, 2008, pg. 20). Halloran (2014, pg. 59) indicates that a majority of marketers underestimates the social power a brand can offer its consumers. He explains how brands functions as badges sending out information about its consumers to their surroundings, expressing their attitudes, beliefs and opinions. In other words: who they are as individuals (Halloran, 2014, pg. 59).

Tim Halloran (2014, pg. 3) also emphasizes the importance of the relationship between the consumer and the brand and explains how consumers engage in these relationships -some as short-term flings, whilst some end up lasting for a lifetime. Brands have the abilities to offer consumers ways of embodying their self-images and provide them with self-expressive benefits (Aaker, 1996, pg. 100-101). These types of benefits enrich the relationship between the brand and the consumer (Aaker, 1996, pg. 100-101). Fournier (1998) also agrees upon this in his study on consumer-brand relationships, which reveals their relevance and importance. He claims that meaningful relationships are built upon how well certain brands matches up with the self-images of the consumers, rather than the type of product or level of involvement in the product category. The study shows that once a significant relationship is established, the meaning of the brand becomes inseparable from the value of the product per se (Fournier, 1998).

Jennifer Aaker (1999) conducted a research where she found that consumer preferences towards brands increase when they perceive that their own personality traits are congruent with the personalities of the brands. This is explained accurately by Joseph Sirgy (1982). Consumers will purchase products whose brand image positively affects their self-image -either by maintaining the self-image, or by enhancing it to reach an ideal image. Consumers will to the same extent avoid being involved with products
associated with negative brand images. This explains why consumers will be motivated to purchase products, whose brands are congruent with their own self-image beliefs (Sirgy, 1982).

The prime reason that motivates fashion-conscious women to make a purchase is a combination of the emotional appeal of wearing the latest fashion, along with being admired for it by their surroundings, which requires a brand that is immediately recognizable (Brun & Castelli, 2013). The logo featuring a product carries critical actions in a social context for two complementary reasons: it functions as an important source of information to the consumer prior to a purchase; and will create perceptions of that particular consumer among others, when associated with the logo (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012, pg. 105). The uniqueness of the product itself plays a minor part in situations like these; the main reason for why women choose to wear designer items is the fact that they are in the same company as other fashion-conscious women (Brun & Castelli, 2013). Social belonging is important for all human beings; it is a way of defining how we look upon ourselves. Brands are a part of an interaction between internal and external elements affecting the process of building our own personal identities and self-concepts (Holger & Holmberg, 2002, pg. 19).

2.4 User imagery

What determines a brands personality is affected by a lot of things, but one crucial driver is the user imagery. The user imagery can be built upon two different aspects; the people you perceive as the typical users of the brand, or the idealized user being portrayed by the brand itself in its advertising (Aaker, 1996, pg. 147). When Kapferer (2008, pg. 184) explains the meaning of brand personality in the identity prism, he states that the most convenient way of creating a brand personality is through brand representatives or spokes persons, no matter if they are real or symbolic. As an example of this, a research published in European Journal of Marketing found that the use of celebrity endorsements when developing a brand identity, significantly affected the way the brand was perceived by the consumers (Cornwell, Pappu & Spry, 2011). But just as celebrity endorsements can be used to promote user imagery, the actual users can also drive the concept ‘normal’ people being seen on the streets using the brand. However, actual users might not always provide desirable images of the brand and are difficult to control. Therefore, as a way of de-emphasizing these unfavourable users, brands often promote idealized users through various marketing efforts (Aaker, 1996, pg. 173).

Another study, with the partial purpose of examining the influences of user imagery on consumers’ attitudes towards luxury fashion brands, revealed a positive correlation between the two. The authors emphasized the importance of consistence between the image communicated by the brand and the image desired by the potential market (Li, Liu, Mizerski & Soh, 2012). User imagery is a concept, which can be used by brands to create a value proposition and build a relationship with its consumers by positioning itself towards a specific group of reference. In a situation of where a consumer sees an opportunity to belong to, or become accepted by a particular social or reference group, a brand can provide added emotional value (Aaker, 1996, pg. 172).

Halloran (2014, pg. 55) suggests that the way consumers choose brands should be adopted both ways; brands should focus upon those consumers whom they want to be in a relationship with. The most important consumers, the influencers, are the ones with
power enough to influence and persuade others, to inspire and motivate other consumers to follow their lead (Halloran, 2014, pg. 55; Kapferer, 2008, pg. 215). Aaker (1996, pg. 82) believes that companies should position their brands by the type of users they want to be associated with, he emphasizes that a strong user-type position can create value for the consumers and affect the brand personality. However, brands do not in every aspect have the capability to choose their customers and it is impossible to control their actions to every extent, which might affect the associations of the brand in the end (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012, pg. 237; Halloran, 2014, pg. 74). In other words, the actual brand users are also brand manifestations and all have a certain uncontrollable impact upon how the brand is perceived (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012, pg. 237). The look of the brands actual consumers can indeed be influenced, but it is impossible to entirely control (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012, pg. 218).

2.5 Segmentation
Segmentation creates clusters, which can be defined and measured (Kapferer, 2008, pg. 158). A segment is an abstract concept within marketing, which designates consumers who are similar to some extent, or has similar expectations of a certain phenomenon (Kapferer, 2008, pg. 158; Magnusson & Oxholm Zigler, 2008, pg. 92; Söderlund, 1998, pg. 11).

The purpose of segmentation comes down to the fact that no company neither can, nor want to reach out to all of the imaginable consumers out there (Söderlund, 1998, pg. 12). The development of consumer profiles through segmentation makes it possible for companies to identify the consumers best suitable for their specific brand (Kapferer, 2008, pg. 158).

2.6 Luxury branding
A value proposition is of high importance in order for brands to become successful (Aaker, 1996, pg. 95). A value proposition is the summary of all of the benefits a brand provides for its customers and an effective value proposition has a positive impact on the relationship between the brand and its consumers (Aaker, 1996, pg. 95). A luxury item consists of various value propositions, which makes its consumers emotionally attached to it (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). According to Park, Jaworski and MacInnis (1986), there are three main brand concepts: functional, symbolic and experiential brands, where the symbolic brands should emphasize the relationship between self-identification and group membership. Brands in this category have to inform both targeted and non-targeted consumers to create strong preferences among both. By doing this, they can minimize transaction barriers facing the target audience and therefore maximize transaction barriers for the non-targeted. A symbolic image can be created based upon brand characteristics; where the form or size of the product might for example only be usable by the target audience (Park et al., 1986). Chevalier and Mazzalovo (2012, pg. 121) explain that a prime reason for investing in luxury items, are the emotional and aesthetic satisfactions they contribute with, such content are highly valued by consumers. When an investment in, or the use of, a certain brand leaves the consumer with a positive feeling, the brand provides an emotional benefit and adds value to the consumers’ experience of owning and using the brand (Aaker, 1996, pg. 97).

The purpose of consuming luxury goods is the consumers desire to emphasize his or her difference towards others (Kapferer, 2008, pg. 96). Luxury purchasers are fashion trendsetters aspiring to express creativity and achieve their social ambitions; they want
to look good and cherish their bodies. They think of the body as the reason to their success, in every aspect of life (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012, pg. 135). Luxury brands must therefore be difficult to access in social means and they cannot let themselves become a subject of responsiveness (Bastien & Kapferer, 2009, pg. 97). One of the biggest fears among luxury brands should be to be perceived as similar to a competitor - they should not worry too much about competition at all, but rather emphasize their uniqueness (Bastien & Kapferer, 2009, pg. 97).

The marketing of luxury brands differs from the traditional approaches to marketing in the way luxury is all about building a dream, where the brand itself is the main character (Bastien & Kapferer, 2009, pg. 68; Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012, pg. 25). Due to the fact that luxury brands are constantly imitated by the mass-market, one of their challenges is to make the differences between them more distinct and always find new ways of differentiating themselves (Bastien & Kapferer, 2009, pg. 97).
3 Method
To be able to answer the research question of whether overweight and obese women in the UK are excluded by intermediary luxury fashion brands, a deeper knowledge of the assortments available in store and information about the relative sizes of the UK female population is required. In this section of the thesis we will clarify and explain the choice of method that we used to collect data relevant for the objective of our study.

3.1 Collection and interpretation of primary data and secondary data
Our research constitutes of a survey including measurements of garments available in store through three different intermediary luxury fashion brands. We have counted and measured all jeans and tops available among the assortments offered in one concept store of each brand, along with three different department stores where the brands are represented, all located in London. In order for our thesis to reach a high level of external validity and enable possibilities to generalize the result, the survey includes measurements of 1454 garments. Every top included was measured to find out the size of the waist it would fit and all jeans were measured around both the waist and the hip. However, the tops were not meant to entirely fit the body and because of that, we had to subtract 15 cm from the measurement of each top in order for the result to correspond with the relative sizes of the female UK population. As the measurements of each garment may vary, this method strengthens the validity of our research since we prevent any differences from affecting the result of our study (Aagerup, 2010). These measurements reveal the supply of intermediary luxury fashion clothing size-wise and constitutes as the first step in the process of gathering our primary data.

Further, when we had successfully identified the supply of garments, our next assignment was to identify the general demand for clothes size-wise. In order to do this, we had to know how many among the female UK population are thin, overweight or obese, which we refer to as whether they belong to BMI group 1, 2 or 3 (Table 1).

Table 1: BMI classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>BMI Range</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BMI 1</td>
<td>&lt;25</td>
<td>Underweight and Normal weight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMI 2</td>
<td>25-29,9</td>
<td>Overweight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMI 3</td>
<td>Equal to 30 or more</td>
<td>Obese</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NHS (2015)

To then allocate the female UK population into these different BMI groups, we used data available through a report published by the National Obesity Observatory (2011). Once this was done, we needed to understand how big the females in each BMI group were; we had to describe what they look like physically. This was necessary in order to enable the possibility to compare the supply of garments with the actual demand (Aagerup, 2010). This was a critical step within our research and it was Ulf Aagerup who made it possible for us to proceed as he let us view the secondary data he used in order to
perform his study, which was published in 2010. This information constitutes of measurements that represent the general Swedish female population (Aagerup, 2010). But how could this information be used to tell us something about the female UK population?

With the UK using the same ranges of Body Max Indexes as in Sweden and with information telling us the size of each BMI group in the UK, we could still apply this to our research. We could now compare the supply of intermediary luxury fashion available in store, with the demand. As Aagerup (2010) constitutes, there are a range of garments that can be allocated into each BMI group, which then represent ratios of the total. These ratios are used to see the sizes of the women that would be able to wear the garments, which allow for us to identify if any of the BMI groups have more or less to choose from, than what would be motivated by the relative size of the group (Aagerup, 2010). When we had compared supply with demand, as a last step in the process, we used these samples to test the strength of the correlations in each category through a Z-test. This test revealed any significant differences between supply and demand at a 99% confidence interval.

3.2 Choice of brands
In order for our research question to be as simple and precise as possible and provide us with a relevant result, the choice of brands under investigation played a major part of our delimitations (Jacobsen, 2002, pg. 82-83). As a first step in identifying suitable brands we needed to find a definition, which would encircle all appropriate candidates and further more delimitate the options available. The definition best suitable for our research’s purpose of investigating whether slightly more up-scale fashion brands are excluding overweight and obese women, by not offering their sizes among its assortments, turned out to be intermediary luxury fashion. The way some brands offer products produced in large quantities, but which at the same time are similar to luxury brands in terms of approaches to marketing, makes it possible to refer to them as intermediary luxury fashion brands (Chevalier et al., 2012, pg. 3).

Acne Studios, Kenzo and Marc by Marc Jacobs were all relevant candidates for us to be able to thoroughly carry out this research. They offer jeans and tops among their assortments through both concept stores and department stores and as Aagerup (2010) suggested more research to be done within his field of study, but rather focusing on more up-scale fashion brands, we decided for our research to focus on intermediary luxury fashion brands.

3.3 The deductive approach
Our thesis is based upon Ulf Aagerup’s (2010) previous research, where he found that despite of what branding theories claim, mass-market fashion brands do not discriminate overweight or obese people. With Aagerup’s (2010) findings in mind, we wanted to recreate his research through using the same type of method but studying slightly more up-scale brands instead, in order to see whether that would provide a different result.

To establish a research based upon previous knowledge about a certain phenomenon is referred to as using a deductive research approach (Andersen, 1994, pg. 33). As Aagerup’s (2010) article made us interested in his field of study, we started to go through additional literature before collecting our primary data, which now constitutes
as our theoretical framework. The deductive research approach is used when the researchers, based upon literature and what is already known in terms of established theories, enters a field of study with predetermined thoughts of what the outcome will be (Halvorsen, 1992, pg. 45-46). An inductive research approach on the other hand, is explained as when little is known about a certain phenomenon and the researcher enters the field of study without being able to make up his or her own perceptions of what the outcome might be (Halvorsen, 1992, pg. 43-46; Jacobsen, 2002, pg. 35). So with regards to the fact that our research derives from Aagerup’s (2010) previous findings, our thesis is based upon a deductive research approach (Andersen, 1994, pg. 33; Halvorsen, 1992, pg. 45-46; Jacobsen, 2002, pg. 34-35).

3.4 The development of a research question
When developing a research question, Jacobsen (2002, pg. 82-83) describes the importance of it to be exciting, simple and fertile. In terms of fertile, again referring to Aagerup’s (2010) previous research, this mean that our thesis had to provide value to what is already known about this particular phenomenon (Halvorsen, 1992, pg. 29-30; Jacobsen, 2002, pg. 83). A subject of study does not have to be entirely new and innovative, but it has to contribute to previous research through bringing new knowledge to the table (Halvorsen, 1992, pg. 29-30; Jacobsen, 2002, pg. 83). Through recreating Aagerup’s (2010) research, though investigating whether intermediary luxury fashion brands excludes overweight and obese women, we are testing a new aspect of a phenomenon through a reliable choice of method.

As mentioned, the research question also has to be exciting. This means that it should not be possible to predict what the outcome will be (Jacobsen, 2002, pg. 82). When Aagerup (2010) conducted his research he formulated hypotheses, which all indicated that large sized people would be discriminated by the fashion industry. However, the result turned out to be the opposite. Overweight and obese people actually had more garments to choose from among mass-market fashion assortments, than did the underweight and normal weight people (Aagerup, 2010). With this in mind, as Aagerup (2010) was surprised by his findings although branding theories implied that brands would exclude certain unwanted customers, we ascertain the outcome of this study to be unknown in advance and exciting in its nature.

The third request of a well-developed and accurate research question is that of simplicity (Jacobsen, 2002, pg. 82-83). It is expressed that research questions commonly includes a much too broad research perspective. If the researchers try to cover too much in their field of study, they often loose their grip and end up with irrelevant conclusions (Ejvegård, 1996, pg. 25-26; Jacobsen, 2002, pg. 82-83). A way of tackling these types of threats though, is through delimitations (Jacobsen, 2002, pg. 66). As soon as we have chosen to investigate a certain phenomenon, delimitations are made through deciding not to investigate others.

Delimitations can be made through an explicit or implicit approach, where the implicit approach is based on prejudices and made more unconsciously. The explicit approach is used when the researcher critically narrows down the subject of study and only includes certain accurately chosen and relevant variables (Jacobsen, 2002, pg. 66). We chose the explicit approach. We knew that the time we had to dispose required certain delimitations for the research to become feasible.
Further, an extensive discussion of our findings was important and this also called for accurate delimitations to be able to finish on time. Therefore, we decided to only investigate the assortments available through intermediary luxury fashion brands to female users in the UK. In 2009, London was stated the number one global city in terms of presence of retailers with a total of 60 %, making it the most international retail city in the world (CBRE, 2009). This was one of the main reasons for why we chose to investigate the UK market. The other reason was the fact that obesity is such a major problem in the UK (Brown et al., 2011; Judd, 2004; NHS, 2015). Further, as most of the secondary data we collected for our background discussion was related to female users (Connolly, 2009; D'Amato, 2005; Jones, 2014; Ritzon, 2003), we also decided to only concentrate on the female consumer segment. Also, our investigation is based only upon garments including all jeans and tops, such as t-shirts and sweaters, as these represent a majority of the assortments (Aagerup, 2010). These delimitations combined, made it possible for us to formulate a simple question, adding up to the rest of Jacobsen’s (2002, pg. 82-83) claims of what a good and accurate research question should look like.

3.5 The development of a research method

A research question can be formulated to generate different types of outcomes. It can either be explanatory or descriptive, which means that it can either describe a certain phenomenon to answer questions such as “how many”, “where” and “how often” or answer the question of “why” the phenomenon exists (Andersen, 1994, pg. 44; Jacobsen, 2002, pg. 72-74). The purpose of our research is to find out whether the size of a woman, in terms of which BMI group she belongs to, affects the woman's tendency to find her size among intermediary luxury fashion assortments. However, due to the limited time available for us to complete this research, it would be pointless to try and discuss the change over time (Jacobsen, 2002, pg. 108-109). Therefore, we have chosen to perform a cross-sectional research, where we are investigating a possible causal correlation between the relative body sizes of the female UK population and the assortments available in store by three intermediary luxury fashion brands (Bryman, 2008, pg. 64; Jacobsen, 2002, pg. 107; Wallén, 1996, pg. 46). To only collect primary data one time, instead of investigating variations over time, allowed us to understand structures rather than processes (Halvorsen, 1992, pg. 65). We wanted to find out whether our variables were correlated, rather than if the possible correlations between them had changed over time.

A causal research allows you to understand the cause and effect of a phenomenon (Esiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson & Wångerud, 2012, pg. 42-43). A consequence of using our method though, is that it is usually not possible to define a cross-sectional research as causal, which is also claimed to be necessary in order for the research to be defined as descriptive, since it is impossible to reveal changes over time (Jacobsen, 2002, pg. 72-74 & 117-118). However, Halvorsen (1994, pg. 65) claims that a cross-sectional research can be appropriate after all. A research approach based upon previous research and theories enables explanations of whether causal correlations exist. This actually allows us to avoid a common disadvantage that often occurs when using a causal research approach, as it is often claimed that causal researches only identifies correlations, but fails to explain why they exist (Bryman, 2008, pg. 168; Jacobsen, 2002, pg. 129). Therefore, if intermediary luxury fashion assortments are affected by the relative sizes of the female UK population, in the means of the bigger the woman –the less garments
she has to choose from, this would be supported by branding theories and the phenomenon can be defined as causal after all (Bryman, 2008, pg. 168; Jacobsen, 2002, 129-130).

With this in mind, the conclusion can be made that our cross-sectional research is of the descriptive kind. But it is also necessary to consider whether the research is distinct or diffuse (Andersen, 1994, pg. 46; Jacobsen, 2002, pg. 70). When little is known about a certain phenomenon, the research can be referred to as diffuse. However, as our thesis is developed and based upon existing theories and previous research, it was possible to formulate a distinct research question (Jacobsen, 2002, pg. 80). This is expressed based upon our delimitations, since we aim to investigate whether overweight and obese women in the UK are excluded by intermediary luxury fashion brands by not being offered their sizes among the assortments.

3.6 The quantitative research approach

The ultimate purpose of research designs is to find a method that will provide correct answers to assumptions and research questions (Taylor, 2000, pg. 80). A research can be conducted mainly in two different ways, generating two different types of results, both with different presumptions of what types of conclusions that can be made (Bryman, 2008, pg. 39-40; Jacobsen, 2002, pg. 38-39). The qualitative research method is a complex method used to collect primary data, usually through observations or in depth interviews and generally requires great participation by the researcher (Taylor, 2000, pg. 79). According to Bryman (2008, pg. 40), the qualitative research is commonly used when choosing the inductive research approach and focuses more on how each individual understands and interpret its own social reality. However, the qualitative research is very demanding and makes it difficult to achieve an external validity, which means that it is difficult to draw general conclusions about the field of study (Bryman, 2008, pg. 352; Jacobsen, 2002, pg. 143-144). But as this is a deductive research and we would like to reveal whether intermediary luxury fashion brands exclude overweight and obese women in the UK, by not offering their sizes among its assortments, we do aim to be able to generalize our result. Therefore, we have chosen the quantitative research approach.

We have collected data from a high amount of entities and transformed it into numbers, which we could then interpret in order for us to be able to draw conclusions providing an answer to our research question. This is a typical quantitative research approach (Andersen, 1994, pg. 71; Taylor, 2000, pg. 69). It is recommended to be used when you want to find the tendency of occurrence of a certain phenomenon, as well as explain why it occurs (Esiasson et al., 2012, pg. 198). Further more, the quantitative research method is also related to the deductive research approach, as it aims to reveal the link between existing theories and the result of the research (Bryman, 2008, pg. 40). As mentioned earlier, this choice of method will not only provide an answer to our research question, but also reveal a possible causal correlation between the variables due to the claims of existing branding theories (Bryman, 2008, pg. 168).

However, we are also aware of the risks of using a quantitative research approach, since it is a type of one-way communication and the investigation is based only upon the conditions created by the researcher (Andersen, 1994, pg. 70). To avoid this
disadvantage though, we tried to gather as much theories and previous research as possible prior to collecting our primary data.

### 3.7 Reliability

One important condition for the result of a research to be able to tell us something about reality is the need for it to be reliable. It has to be possible for other researchers to perform the same study themselves and end up with the same result (Andersen, 1994, pg. 92). Our choice of method is not only reliable in the way other researchers would be able to use perform it themselves and end up with a matching result, but also in the sense of it being well heard within previous research (Aagerup, 2010).

Further, we have gathered our primary data through concept stores within the intermediary luxury fashion industry, which often functions as showrooms and are a part of the development of the brand identity (Chevalier et al., 2012, pg. 38-39 & 86). We felt that it was important to take this under consideration when deciding upon how to operate the collection of our primary data. Therefore, part from visiting one concept store of each brand, we also visited three different department stores in London where all brands are represented. The department stores use buying representatives to develop their assortments, lowering the power of the brands themselves to fully control what is available to the consumers (Chevalier et al., 2012, pg. 39 & 43). Through combining one concept store of each brand with the assortments available through three different department stores, the reliability of our research is further strengthened (Andersen, 1994, pg. 92).

### 3.8 Validity

The extent to which a research is valid, in terms of measuring what is actually intended to be measured, collecting relevant data as well as the extent to which the result can be generalized, is of high importance (Andersen, 1994, pg. 92; Esiasson et al., 2012, pg. 57; Jacobsen, 2002, pg. 21). Validity is further explained by Bryman (2008, pg. 50) as a judgement of whether the final conclusions have generated any coherency, or not. Regardless of the outcome of our study, the result will generate coherency in terms of either providing further knowledge of how intermediary luxury fashion brands behave to develop their brand identities, or reject the claims regarding these brands’ behaviours.

Further more, there are two different aspects of which validity can be referred to: internal and external (Jacobsen, 2002, pg. 21). Internal validity is related to the extent to which you can rely on the causal conclusions drawn through the result of the study. This means that the more variables involved in testing the causal correlation between them, the more you can rely on the result revealing the true causes of the effect (Bryman, 2008, pg. 50). However, since we are only testing whether the body sizes of the female UK population affects the tendency to find the right sizes among intermediary luxury fashion assortments, the extent to which an internal validity can be claimed is limited. There might be other reasons for the reality of the assortments, which we have not taken into account through our research (Bryman, 2008, pg. 50; Jacobsen, 2002, pg. 107). But through using well-established branding theories as our theoretical framework, we did manage to slightly increase the internal validity.

External validity however, concerns the potential of the result and conclusions to be generalized to go beyond this particular study (Bryman, 2008, pg. 51). Since quantitative
researches include a large number of measured units, it enables a representative sample, which leads us to the ability of being able to generalize the findings (Jacobsen, 2002, pg. 146-147). Our research includes 1454 garments, available through both concept stores and three different department stores in London. This makes our sample representative of the whole population of intermediary luxury fashion assortments available in the UK and thereby -our research has a high level of external validity (Jacobsen, 2002, pg. 146-147).
4 Empirical findings

This is the part of our thesis where we will declare the result of our research. The data collected from three department stores and one concept store of each brand will be presented through a table demonstrating the distribution of individuals and garments over weight classes. Also, any significant differences between supply and demand within any of the categories will be revealed through a Z-test.

4.1 The results

As Aagerup (2010) stated in his research, optimal economic efficiency occurs when supply meets demand and therefore it is of importance for this research to investigate whether the supply of clothes, offered by intermediary luxury fashion brands, mirrors each weight class’ relative share of the population. In other words, the brands should offer the same proportion of clothes to a specific BMI group, as the group would demand in terms of proportion of the population. If so, supply will meet demand and the brands will reach optimal economic efficiency (Aagerup, 2010).

However, the overall findings of our research reveal that there is a significant difference between supply and demand in most of the categories (Table 3). The only case where there is close to optimal economic efficiency is the amount of tops offered to BMI group 2 in the concept stores as well as in the concept stores and department stores combined, as the result almost matches their relative share of the population (Table 2 & 3). Following, we will go through our empirical findings in depth and have divided the results based upon what we observed in the department stores, concept stores and department stores and concept stores combined.

4.1.1 Department stores

Looking at the tops offered to the different weight classes among the department stores, we could see that 74% would fit underweight and normal weight women, while 24% versus 2% would fit overweight or obese women (Table 2). Further, looking at the result of the data concerning the jeans, 97% of them would fit BMI group 1, leaving 2% for BMI group 2 and 1% to fit BMI group 3. In terms of total garments offered by the department stores, underweight and normal weight women have 86% of the assortments to choose from and the overweight and obese women have 13% versus 1% (Table 2). Regarding significant differences between supply and demand, since underweight and normal weight women represent 43.3% of the female UK population, overweight women 32.8% and obese women make up 23.9% of the total, there are significant differences among all categories (Table 3).

4.1.2 Concept stores

Among the assortments offered through the brands’ own concept stores, 65% of the tops would fit underweight and normal weight women and 35% of them can be worn by overweight women (Table 2). Looking at the assortment of jeans, 99% of them are offered to underweight and normal weight women, while the overweight women have 1% to choose from. This means that a total of 82% of the concept stores’ assortments would fit BMI group 1 and 18% are offered to BMI group 2. Obese women on the other hand would not be able to wear any of the garments available through the intermediary luxury fashion brands’ own concept stores (Table 2). Table 3 demonstrates, when using a 99% confidence interval, that there are significant differences between supply and demand among all categories, part from the amount of tops offered to overweight women in the concept stores. Supply almost meets demand in this category, since
overweight women make up 32.8% of the population and are offered 35% of the assortments (National Obesity Observatory, 2011).

### 4.1.3 Department stores and concept stores combined

The total amount of tops offered by the intermediary luxury fashion brands to underweight and normal weight women reaches 69%, while overweight women are offered 30% of the total. Women in BMI group 3 are almost entirely excluded from buying tops, as they represent 23.9% of the UK female population (National Obesity Observatory, 2011), but the supply of tops that would fit them only reaches 1% (Table 2). Further, 98% of the total amount of jeans offered would fit underweight and normal weight women, whilst only 1.5% of the jeans mirrors the sizes of overweight women and 0.5% the obese. There is a distinct difference between the supply of jeans and tops among the different weight classes and this needs to be taken into account.

Underweight and normal weight women represent 43.3% of the population in the UK and the data shows that these women are offered 84% of the total assortment (National Obesity Observatory, 2011). Therefore, they have significantly more to choose from than what should be motivated by their relative share of the population (Table 3). However, the obese women represent 23.9% of the population and only 1% of the total garments are offered to them (National Obesity Observatory, 2011). The same phenomenon occurs when looking at BMI group 2, as that group represent 32.8% of the population (National Obesity Observatory, 2011), but only 15% of the total assortment is offered to them.

When looking at the significant differences within the department stores and concept stores combined, it turned out that there is one category where no significant difference between supply and demand could be identified. The tops offered to BMI group 2 among the total assortment almost mirrors demand, as overweight women represent 32.8% of the total female UK population and are offered 30% of the total amount of tops (National Obesity Observatory, 2011).

Further, the result shows that there are no major differences between the assortments offered by the department stores and the concept stores among intermediary luxury fashion brands (Table 2).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BMI</th>
<th>Department store</th>
<th>Concept stores</th>
<th>Department stores and concept stores combined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of women per class</td>
<td>Distribution of women's tops (n=221) (%)</td>
<td>Distribution of women's jeans (n=881) (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>43,3</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>32,8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>23,9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on data from National Obesity Observatory (Health Surveys for England, 2009), the Sahlgrenska Academy (Larsson, 2005), and in-store data collected during 2015.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BMI 1</th>
<th>Z-value</th>
<th>Critical Z-value*</th>
<th>Significant</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department store/tops</td>
<td>15.837</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department store/jeans</td>
<td>2.539</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department store/total garments</td>
<td>17.434</td>
<td>2.58</td>
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<tr>
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<td>7.793</td>
<td>2.58</td>
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<td>Concept store/jeans</td>
<td>27.221</td>
<td>2.58</td>
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<td>2.58</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>26.238</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department store and concept store/total garments</td>
<td>16.308</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0.000</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BMI 2</th>
<th>Z-value</th>
<th>Critical Z-value*</th>
<th>Significant</th>
<th>P-value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>3.424</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department store/jeans</td>
<td>15.527</td>
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<td>Department store/total garments</td>
<td>8.468</td>
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<td>2.58</td>
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</table>

<table>
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<th>Critical Z-value*</th>
<th>Significant</th>
<th>P-value</th>
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<td>2.58</td>
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<td>0.000</td>
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<td>0.000</td>
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<td>Department store/total garments</td>
<td>12.915</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept store/tops</td>
<td>13.841</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0.000</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2.58</td>
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</table>

* 99% confidence interval
5 Analysis

Following, we will analyse some of the concepts included in our theoretical framework and apply them on our empirical findings. We will discuss the concepts in relation to our results, in order for it to enable identification of possible causal correlations.

5.1 Brand identity

Aaker (1996, pg. 68) explains the brand identity as a set of associations, intended to be developed or maintained and which symbolises what the brand stands for, as well as it gives a promise to the consumers of what they can expect from the products it represents. Our empirical findings showed that there are significant differences between supply and demand in almost every category among all three different BMI groups. It turned out that underweight and normal weight women have significantly more to choose from when shopping for intermediary luxury fashion, than what should be supported by the relative size of their group. The obese women on the other hand, turned out to be almost completely excluded from the assortments available through the three brands under investigation.

Having favourable consumers seeing the same clothes as they are wearing, also being worn by unattractive users can result in consequences where the perceptions of the brand are being harmed (Ritzon, 2003). Aaker (1996, pg. 159) claims the brand identity to be particularly important in terms of visible products and products associated with high involvement prior to a purchase. As our research focuses on intermediary luxury fashion, which is similar to luxury fashion in terms of approaches to marketing (Chevalier et al., 2012, pg. 5), it can be argued that the brands we have chosen to investigate are high involvement brands. Therefore, it should also be within these brands’ interest to develop and maintain strong and distinct brand identities, which we believe intermediary luxury brands do when they exclude large women from shopping among their assortments. Ritzon (2003) claims that even though it can be argued that not offering clothes in large sizes is morally wrong, it is still a way for the brands to not risk the event of antagonizing its target segments.

Further, we were not able to identify any differences among the assortments available through the department stores and the concept stores. The purposes of concept stores are often to represent and promote the brand, as well as communicate the brand identity (Chevalier et al., 2012, pg. 86). Department stores on the other hand use their own buying representatives to develop their assortments, which could lower the power of the brands themselves to fully control what is available to the customers in these stores (Chevalier et al., 2012, pg. 39 & 43). When we decided to separate the assortments available through department stores and concept stores, we did this to avoid any misjudgement during our analysis. Looking at our empirical findings though, we did not identify any relevant differences between the two. However, we do not think this actually means that the intermediary luxury fashion brands are able to influence the assortments available through the department stores. When measuring the assortments, it turned out that the garments simply would not fit a larger body, no matter the size on the tag, which is not something that the buying representatives of the department stores would be able to control. Hence the fact that no difference between the assortments available through department stores and concept stores among intermediary luxury fashion brands was identified.
When Chevalier and Mazzalovo (2012, pg. 10) describe brand identity, they explain how one of the dimensions of it refers to the physical expressions and substantial manifestations of the brand itself, also called brand aesthetics. Further, a product always carries its own aesthetic characteristics, but one should never forget that it also carries a brand, which in every aspect must be consistent and cohesive with what it communicates and add value to the offerings it represents (Chevalier et al., 2012, pg. 4). These aesthetic dimensions are claimed to affect how the brand is perceived by the consumers and Chevalier and Mazzalovo (2012, pg. 10) emphasize how this goes way beyond physical attributes. In terms of intermediary luxury fashion, it seems like regardless the design of the garments, what actually matters in the end is the meaning of owning and wearing these clothes from a consumers perspective, as well as how other people perceive them when associated with the brand. As the purpose of intermediary luxury fashion is to produce clothes in considerably large quantities and then infuse them with traditional views on luxury (Chevalier et al., 2012, pg. 5), we would like to think that the brand identity plays an extremely important part. Theory implies that these brands need to find a way of making people want to pay more for something they could be able to find among the high-street brands to a less expensive price (Halloran, 2014, pg. 61-62). If brand identity is the key, could the large sized women, portrayed as unattractive users (Flint & Snook, 2014), be an obstacle standing in the way for the brands to reach true success?

Kapferer (1992, pg. 37) states the importance of the targeted costumers to justify the brand and add credibility to the brand identity. As Flint and Snook (2014) claim the media to portray large women in the UK as unattractive, it makes sense that intermediary luxury fashion brands would rather avoid being associated with them. As these brands rely on their brand identities to such a wide extent and the users of the products are part of the development and maintenance of them, it would be questionable not to care about who and what they are associated with. The significant differences between supply and demand in this study among the three different BMI groups could therefore be of extreme importance for the success of the businesses.

5.2 Brand image

As we discussed the meaning of brand identity, Kapferer (2008, pg. 174) explains that the purpose of this is to define a brands meaning, objective and self-image, while the brand image is the result and notion of these made up by the consumers. What he means is that the brand image is the prime reason for why it is of such extreme importance to be as accurate and circumstantial as possible when developing a brand identity (Kapferer, 2008, pg. 174). The result of our research reveals significant differences between supply and demand in most categories, with underweight and normal weight women having more to choose from among intermediary luxury fashion assortments, than what should be supported by the relative size of that BMI group in relation to the female UK population. In terms of brand image and in relation to what Kapferer (2008, pg. 174) claims, it seems like the lack of large women wearing garments carrying the intermediary luxury fashion brand names, are sought to have a positive impact upon how the brands are being perceived by the consumers.

Further, Holger and Holmberg (2002, pg. 19) claim successful brands to be those who are able to develop strong personalities in the consciousness of the consumers. Jennifer Aaker (1997) listed a number of personality traits typically associated with brands, of
which some of them were explained as aspirational associations desired by humans, but at the same time traits they do not necessarily have. The traits with these characteristics were claimed to be sophistication and ruggedness (Aaker, 1997). However, it has been stated that obese people are associated with characteristics such as low status, low level of education and low moral (Nilsson, 2014), which we would like to claim is close to the opposite of what is perceived as sophisticated. Greenberg et al. (2010) also pointed out obese people to be portrayed as socially unattractive. As this study concerns intermediary luxury fashion, brands infused with traditional views on luxury, but in fact upgraded versions of mass-produced products within the category of fashion (Chevalier et al., 2012, pg. 5), we think the aspire to be perceived as sophisticated may very well be another important objective in the development of their brand identities and images. Halloran (2014, pg. 53) argued that the strong brands are those who attain the aspirational personalities of sophistication and/or ruggedness and that the consumers perceive those brands as particularly ´designed for them´.

If intermediary luxury fashion brands want to be perceived as sophisticated as a way of strengthening their brand image, excluding the obese users could be a tool they use to achieve their goals. If being overweight or obese is unattractive, this would be the opposite as to what intermediary luxury fashion brands want to be perceived as and a solution of how to counteract with that, could be to simply not offer clothes to these groups of consumers.

Halloran (2014, pg. 41) explains that part from physical needs among consumers, there are just as many emotional needs also required being satisfied and it is of high importance to understand this emotional connection. Holger and Holmberg (2002, pg. 19) also accentuates that the choices we make as consumers are often linked to our needs of social belonging. As the result of our empirical findings shows that underweight and normal weight women have significantly more to choose from among intermediary luxury fashion, than what should be supported by the relative size of their group, it can be argued that these women are particularly attractive as a consumer segment among these brands. If large sized consumers are claimed to be unattractive (Flint & Snook, 2014), excluding obese women by not offering their sizes among its assortments seems to be a way of strengthening the brand image. Jones (2014) explained how actress Melissa McCarthy was turned down when she had asked a number of well-known fashion designers to dress her for the Oscars’. Laura Berger (2014, para. 2) was convinced that this had to do with the size of McCarthy’s body and claimed that the designers simply did not want to be associated with her because of it. When the result of our empirical findings reveals that obese women have 1 % to choose from among all available garments within the intermediary luxury fashion assortments, while they make up 23.9 % of the total female population in the UK (National Obesity Observatory, 2011), we would like to claim that it is unlikely for it to be a coincidence.

5.3 Self-image congruence
To exclude obese women and rather offer 84 % of the assortments to the consumer segment of underweight and normal weight women, even though they only make up 43.3 % of the total female UK population (National Obesity Observatory, 2011), will certainly obstruct reaching optimal economic efficiency. Parker (2009) explains self-image congruence as how well the brand image matches up with our own personal image or the image we aspire. People use branded products to express who they are as
individuals and become uncomfortable when the use of a brand does not correspond with their actual or ideal self (Aaker, 1996, pg. 154). This could mean that intermediary luxury fashion brands, if worn by unattractive users, create confusion among women who aspire to not in any way be associated with those people and it would also further explain why these brands exclude large women by not offering their sizes among its assortments.

When Kapferer (2008, pg. 186) explained his Brand Identity Prism, he stated the importance of paying attention to why consumers are using a certain brand, in terms of how they want to be perceived when associated with it. As mentioned, people buy branded products because they can enable them to reach their aspirational selves and if a brand does not provide that benefit, it leads to confusion and discomfort (Aaker, 1996, pg. 154). Flint and Snook (2014) believe that the way media portray obesity affect how others look upon overweight and obese people. If large women are portrayed as unattractive, that could also by all means be the reason for why other women are so afraid to be associated with them - hence the reason for why our empirical findings show that the supply of intermediary luxury fashion does not meet demand.

However, our empirical findings also reveal that there is no significant difference between the total amount of tops that would fit overweight women and the relative size of that group. In terms of jeans on the other hand, only 1.5 % of the garments were made to fit the women in BMI group 2, even though they make up 32.8 % of the total female UK population (National Obesity Observatory, 2011). Also, the result shows that underweight and normal weight women have more jeans (98%) to choose from than tops (69%). Brands function as badges sending out information about their consumers to their surroundings and can provide them with an extent of social power; they reveal who the consumers are as individuals (Halloran, 2014, pg. 59). The jeans included in this research all carried the brand name and/or logo on the pocket or the patch, while most of the tops did not reveal the brand name anywhere visible. We would like to presume that one of the reasons for why intermediary luxury fashion brands dare to offer tops to overweight women, even though they might be perceived as unattractive among thin users, is because those garments are far more anonymous due to the fact that it is more difficult to associate them with a certain brand. Just as Aagerup (2010) proposed that mass-market brands avoid being associated with large people by not letting the garments carry the brand name or logo, intermediary luxury fashion brands might do the same - enabling them to still offer overweight women tops in their sizes, without risking the likelihood of the brand image to be incongruent with the consumers' self-images. Further, as fashion is constantly changing (Armstrong et al., 2005, pg. 572), it is difficult to predict whether the result would have been different under other circumstances and if this allows oversized people to actually wear the tops, even if that was not what the brands wished for in the beginning.

5.4 User imagery
Brands are striving to build up a unique personality, which is affected by a lot of things (Aaker, 1996, pg. 147). Therefore it is of high importance for brands to be aware of the most crucial driver, the user imagery. Aaker (1996, pg. 147) describes how this concept can be built upon two different aspects: the typical user of the brand or the ideal user being portrayed in their advertising. However, we decided to only focus on the typical users in our research; in other words people seen on the streets wearing the branded
garments (Aaker, 1996, pg. 173). But Aaker (1996, pg. 173) also states that these users might not always provide the brands with the sought for image. As stated, this research shows that overweight and obese women in the UK are being excluded by intermediary luxury fashion brands and therefore, the brands are also able to influence their typical users to be perceived as underweight and normal weight women. As Nilsson (2010) mentions in his article, overweight and obese people are more seldom highly educated and are often associated with low status, which further indicates why intermediary luxury fashion brands would like to avoid having their clothes being worn by large sized women.

As brands are affected by the way the consumers perceive them, a lot of them are using celebrity endorsements to influence the brand image (Cornwell et al., 2011). Again, when Hollywood actress Melissa McCarthy asked a number of high fashion brands to dress her for the Oscar’s, every single one of them turned her down (Jones, 2014). The reason for that, according to Laura Berger (2014, para. 2), was simply that the brands did not want to be associated with the size of McCarthy’s body. If not being associated with large sized bodies, is a stronger driver in the development of a brand identity than the potential of having your design being worn by an appreciated and well known actress at the Oscar’s, that would explain why the intermediary luxury fashion brands close to completely exclude obese women from being able to wear their garments.

As mentioned earlier, the actual users of the brands are important brand manifestations and drivers of user imagery (Aaker, 1996, pg. 173). However, they do not always provide the brands with the images they desire (Aaker, 1996, pg. 173). Chevalier and Mazzalovo (2012, pg. 237) claim the impact of the actual users of the brands to be impossible to control. But is it? Since it is difficult for brands to prevent unattractive customers from walking into their stores, we believe that by not offering large women the sizes they need, the intermediary luxury fashion brands may have found a way of controlling the impacts that the real users have on their user imagery. If the majority of women wearing these brands are thin, the perception of the brands’ actual users will be thereafter (Aaker, 1996, pg. 173).

Excluding specific unwanted customers is another opportunity for the brands to further strengthen the relationships with the included ones instead and provide added emotional value to these users (Aaker, 1996, pg. 172). In the case of our research, that means that the included group of underweight and normal weight women will perceive it as if they belong to a particular reference group of other thin users (Aaker, 1996, pg. 172). As Brun and Castelli (2013) state: the reason for why fashion-conscious women buy designer clothing, is a mix between the emotional benefits of wearing the latest trends and being in the same company as other fashion-conscious women.

5.5 Segmentation
Segmentation is a tool, which brands use to divide the market into clusters of people, similar to each other to some extent (Kapferer, 2008, pg. 158; Magnusson & Oxholm Zigler, 2008, pg. 92; Söderlund, 1998, pg. 11). Consumer segments can be defined and measured (Kapferer, 2008, pg. 158). Looking at the empirical findings of our research, intermediary luxury fashion brands seem to use the sizes of women’s bodies to create market segments, which they later on can decide on how to approach. Nilsson (2010) points out that overweight and obese people rarely have a qualified level of education, in
comparison to thin people. If so, that could also mean that overweight and obese people are less prone to have a large income. Since intermediary luxury fashion brands are slightly more expensive than mass-market fashion (Chevalier et al., 2012, pg. 5), this means that not all women are able to afford these garments. If thin women are more likely to be able to buy these brands, the brands themselves might not see the reason for why they should include large women as one of their targeted segments.

Through the development of consumer segments, the intermediary luxury fashion brands are able to identify the consumers best suitable for their brands (Kapferer, 2008, pg. 158). The result of our empirical findings indicates that these are underweight and normal weight women. No company neither can, nor want to reach out to all of the imaginable customers out there (Söderlund, 1998, pg. 12).

5.6 Luxury branding

Luxury brands are trying to reach a segment of people that desire to emphasize their difference towards others (Kapferer, 2008, pg. 96). The luxury purchasers consider themselves as fashion trendsetters, they aspire to look good and cherishes their bodies, they think of it as the reason to their success (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012, pg. 135).

Aaker (1996, pg. 95) describes the importance of a value proposition and explains how this is made up by the summary of all benefits the brand provides for its consumers, an effective one will result in a positive outcome regarding the relationship between the consumers and the brand. Since thin women seem to be more likely to be able to afford luxury items and the luxury purchasers value looking and feeling good about their bodies (Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012, pg. 135; Nilsson, 2010), being able to wear luxury fashion might be a value proposition used by luxury brands to strengthen the relationship with their consumers. This also means that thin women would emotionally feel more attached to these products (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009). As Intermediary luxury fashion brands use the same approaches to marketing as traditional luxury brands do, the development of a value proposition should concern them as well. The empirical findings in this research indicate that this is the case.

It is claimed that luxury brands should not be too easily accessible in social means and the marketing of them differs from the traditional ways of building brands (Bastien & Kapferer, 2009, pg. 68 & 97; Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2012, pg. 25). Bastien and Kapferer (2009, pg. 97) point out how likely it is for luxury brands to be imitated by the mass-market and therefore, they must always find new ways of differentiating themselves. If mass-market brands are unable to exclude large people to run successful businesses, as Aagerup (2010) stated, and the objectives of intermediary luxury fashion brands are to be perceived as different towards them, the exclusion of large women might be a reason for why they succeed. As the consumers of luxury goods also seek to emphasize their differences towards others (Kapferer, 2008, pg. 96), it seems like these mutual objectives will help creating a value proposition and a strong long-term relationship between them.
6 Conclusions

This section includes the conclusions drawn based upon the analysis of our research as well as proposals for further research.

With this study, we aimed at investigating whether intermediary luxury fashion brands exclude overweight and obese women in the UK, by not offering their sizes among its assortments. We wanted to see whether we could identify a causal correlation between existing branding theories and the assortments offered.

The study conducted by Aagerup (2010) showed that overweight and obese people were not discriminated by the mass-market fashion industry, due to the fact that the financial aspects hold them back from excluding unattractive users. According to our research however, intermediary luxury fashion brands do exclude overweight and obese women. Only 15% of the overweight women are able to find clothes in their sizes among these brands assortments, even though they make up 32.8% of the total female UK population (National Obesity Observatory, 2011). Further, obese women have 1% to choose from among all available garments within the intermediary luxury fashion assortments, in relation to the fact that they make up 23.9% of the female UK population (National Obesity Observatory, 2011). Therefore, we would like to claim that it is unlikely for this to be a coincidence. Even if it is financially a better option for supply to meet demand, intermediary luxury fashion brands rather value the impacts of a favourable user imagery, an attractive brand image and a strong brand identity, than reaching optimal economic efficiency.

What we also discovered during analysing the empirical findings was that there is a difference between the supply of jeans and tops among intermediary luxury fashion brands. A product should under no circumstances carry the brand name if it is not representative of the brand (Kapferer, 2008, pg. 273). Since all counted and measured jeans are carrying the brand name and/or logo on either the pocket or the patch, it is even more important for the brand to make sure that these are not offered to an unattractive audience. Kapferer (1992, pg. 37) also expresses the importance of positioning a brand in such a way that the consumers targeted justify it and add credibility to the brand identity. In other words, a pair of branded jeans on the right bottom can do wonders for the perception of the brand, while the same pair of jeans on an unattractive user can result in the opposite and the brands should do everything in their power to avoid those unfavourable associations.

Further, fashion is also constantly changing from one season to another according to Armstrong et al. (2005, pg. 572), therefore, if oversize is in fashion this also means that it enables large people to wear more of the branded garments. When allocating garments into different size groups, we decided to discount 15 centimetres from all tops included in the research. This was done since most tops are not made to entirely fit the body. That also leads to the fact that a woman carrying a larger size would be able to wear some of the tops, even though they were not made to fit her in the beginning. So if fashion is constantly changing and the brands need to keep up with that, this could be a reason for why the tops did not carry the brand names or logos. Also, if the fact that overweight women are able to wear intermediary luxury fashion is a coincidence due to the changes in fashion, this would be beyond the control of the buying representatives of the
department stores and might explain why no major difference between the assortments available through the department stores and the concept stores was identified.

So, are intermediary luxury fashion brands excluding overweight and obese women in the UK, by not offering their sizes among its assortments? Looking at the relative sizes of each BMI group in relation to the assortments available, obese women are by all means definitely excluded. The overweight women have significantly less jeans to choose from than what should be supported by the relative size of their BMI group. However, it turned out that they are not entirely excluded by intermediary luxury fashion brands, as they still have an amount of tops to choose from that closely represents their demand.

In terms of identifying a causal correlation between existing branding theories and the results of our research, we believe that we have succeeded. We have managed to provide further knowledge revealing how intermediary luxury fashion brands behave in order to develop favourable user imagery, a strong brand identity and an attractive brand image, which is of high importance for intermediary fashion luxury brands to become successful.

6.1 Proposal for further research
During our research process, we have been able to identify a few angles that would be of interest to further investigate. As our result showed that overweight women are not entirely excluded by intermediary luxury fashion brands, we believe that a research investigating high fashion assortments would provide an even deeper knowledge within this area. We would also like to propose further research investigating the cause of intermediary luxury fashion brands offering tops, but not jeans, to overweight women. Another point of interest would be to investigate intermediary luxury fashion assortments over time, to reveal whether changes within fashion have an impact on the likelihood of large women being able to find their sizes among the assortments. Finally, as the concept of user imagery has a strong impact on the brand identity, investigating intermediary luxury fashion brands marketing efforts, in terms of how they portray their ideal users in relation to the results of our thesis, could provide added value to what is already known within this subject of study.
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