

Master Thesis

# "Made in" where... Do we care?

A qualitative study of the influence of Country of Manufacturing  
among young Danish consumers



AALBORG UNIVERSITET  
STUDENTERRAPPORT

Culture, Communication & Globalization  
2016/2017

Dian Natalia Jensen  
Aalborg University



Submission date:  
31st January 2017

Number of characters:  
111.498

Made in China

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## ABSTRACT

By employing a qualitative method of hermeneutic phenomenology as its research design, this thesis attempts to uncover the role of country of manufacturing in the young Danish consumers' buying decision-making process, focusing especially on the information evaluation stage. Through in-depth interviews with 9 participants, this study has discovered, that in the scenario of buying clothes, young Danish consumers do not use country of manufacturing as a quality indicator in their information evaluation. However, country of manufacturing seems to become prominent to these informants for indicating the workers' welfare, when there are no other indicators present. Findings show, that as long as these consumers are not well informed in regards to the workers' welfare (e.g.: in the form of transparency from companies), the negative effect of country of manufacturing will continue to be present in their information evaluation process.

*Keywords:* phenomenology; transparency; workers welfare; country-of-manufacturing; Danish;

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Horsens, January 2017

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# CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Background

There is this famous quotation made by William Shakespeare in his tragedy Romeo & Juliet from 1597, "*What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet...*" The passage above, simply implies that name of things does not really affect what they are. But if I translate this in the everyday's fashion context, is this the case?

One day, I was strolling in the middle of the street of Aarhus city. There, in the corner, stands a custom tailoring suits store, called Mond of Copenhagen. The store advertises on its big glass windows "*produceret i EU*" (produced in the EU). From that moment on, a curiosity has arisen about why this company has to put emphasis on this matter. As a result of this curiosity, I then visited their website [www.mond.dk](http://www.mond.dk). From this further inquiry, I came to realize that when it comes to advertising products and services, they carefully choose the wording. For example, when it comes to their fabrics, they specify exactly where they come from; "*Over 5000 fabrics from recognized English and Italian manufacturers*" (Mond.dk, 2016). However, surprisingly, when it comes to *where* their products are being manufactured, they deliberately choose to not fully reveal it. Instead, they choose to rather anonymize it by mentioning, "produced in EU" for its designation. Based on this phenomenon, some further questions have arisen in my mind, "Why does the company do that"? "Why do they apply a strategy, where they clearly underline the country of origin, but at the same time hide it?"

Looking at the available literature in the field of marketing, this phenomenon is known as the country of origin effect or simply known as the COO strategy (Aichner, 2013). Some scholars like Beverland and Lindgreen (2002) argue, that country of origin affects consumers' buying decision process. And often, country of origin is linked as a signal of quality (Hausruckinger, 1993 as cited in Aichner, 2013, p. 82), in which the consumers will probably judge the product quality based on a stereotype of a country (Hamzoui & Merunka, 2006 as cited in Aichner, 2013). For instance, China is known for producing cheap goods, but with low quality. Germany is known for its exclusive automobile industry. France is known for

their posh fashion industries (*haute couture*) or Italy, which is famously known for its high-quality leather goods. Connecting this with the strategy employed by Mond of Copenhagen, technically and formally, both England and Italy are part of the European Union. But from this particular observation, it became evident to me that there must be a distinction of countries in the mind of Danish consumers.

Still, from this empirical observation, one has to assume that the reason for Mond of Copenhagen deliberately not mentioning *where* exactly their products are being manufactured, might be because of the fact that those countries have a rather weak or negative COO and thereby not gaining any competitive advantage by mentioning it (Aichner, 2013, p. 81). Now, it suddenly makes more sense to me, why this company chooses to apply the COO strategy as a mean of market communication.

In contrast to Shakespeare's quotation above that name of things do not affect what they really are, in the business context, however, it seems that it is not only brand name that matters, but also the name of the country of origin. As opposed to Italy and England, which belong to the well-advanced countries/high income countries (data.worldbank.org, 2016), I assume that their products are being manufactured in the Eastern Europe, where production is cheaper (Radosevic & Sadowski, 2004, p. 106), hence low-income countries. This assumption is also based on the fact, that for the last 15 to 20 years, many Danish companies are moving their production to lower-income countries (Information.dk, 2014).

From this empirical evidence, I am intrigued to examine how this phenomenon is perceived from those at the other end of the spectrum, namely the consumers. Therefore, in this thesis, I am not trying to pursue this issue further from the practitioners' or marketers' viewpoint. As a student, who studies consumption at a higher university, I have always been taught that understanding and satisfying consumers are imperative, especially today's consumers are very unpredictable and become a more interactive player in the game (Evans, 2001). However, before one can understand and satisfy the needs of the consumers, one has to understand the consumers' behavior.

Inspired by this interesting event that derived from my personal experience as well as taking Beverland and Lindgreen's (2002) theory above as a point of departure, I aim to explore the role of country of origin in the consumers' buying decision making process. As a researcher, who currently resides in Denmark, I am exercising the principle of proximity that I hold, because it gives me "*actualness*" of the given phenomenon. That being said, this

research is carried out within the Danish context. But since both country of origin and decision-making process are very broad topic, it is, therefore, important to choose where to focus. Thus, I will dedicate the following sections to explain readers the scope of this study before coming further to the purpose and research question of the study.

## 1.2. The scope of this study

Following the explanation above, this section presents readers with the scope of this study.

### 1.2.1. Different dimensions of country of origin (COO)

Vianelli & Marzano (2012) break down COO into five different dimensions (as cited in Aichner, 2013), which can be seen in Table. 1 below. In this study, my aim is to examine country of origin but specifically focusing on the country of manufacturing (COM) within the Danish context.

**Table I: COO dimensions for products, based on Vianelli and Marzano (2012)**

|                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| Country-of-design (COD)      | Companies may choose to locate their R&D in countries different from the country of production.  |
| Country-of-assembly (COA)    | Companies from countries with low reputation can move the assembly of their products to other countries with higher reputation.                                    |
| Country-of-parts (COP)       | In some cases, companies give particular importance to the source of the products' raw materials.  |
| Country-of-manufacture (COM) | Some companies may find it convenient to produce their products in countries different from their original COO.  |
| Country-of-brand (COB)       | COB is the country in which the brand originated. There are a number of reasons why this may not coincide with the country where the company has its headquarters. |

Table 1. Country of origin dimensions according to Vianelli and Marzano, 2012 as cited in Aichner, 2013)

### 1.2.2. The consumers' buying decision-making process

Buying decision-making process is complex and broad (Brassington & Pettitt, 2006). In general, the buying decision process can be divided into three stages: the pre, the actual

buying, and the post buying process (Brassington & Pettitt, 2006, p. 101). This can be seen on Figure 1 such below.



Figure 1. Consumer buying decision-making process

Source: Brassington & Pettitt, 2006, p. 101

This thesis' scope, however, is focusing on the pre-purchase stage, where my focus is on the third stage (information evaluation). I will further elaborate my reasons on why I put my focus particularly on this stage in Chapter 2.

### 1.2.3. Young consumers as the unit of analysis of this study

There are several reasons why I choose to advance with young consumers. First, young consumers are chosen because this group of consumers is a major force in the marketplace (Belleau et al., 2007). They are known as the Millennials or Generation Y, who are born between the years of 1980 to 2000 (Politiken.dk, 2016). Additionally, this group of consumers is characterized as one of the most coveted segments for marketers because of its spending power, ability to be trendsetters, receptivity to new products and its huge potential for becoming lifetime consumers (Bush et al., 2004 as cited in Belleau et al., 2007, p. 245).

Therefore, this group of consumers is highly interesting and relevant to be investigated, in order to examine the tendency of the future consumers in the upcoming years.

### **1.3. Delimitation**

The following section will outline the delimitation of this study.

#### **1.3.1. Clothes as a case/scenario in this study**

The fashion industry, especially ready to wear everyday's fashion is used as a scenario/case to seek a better understanding of the effect of COM in the buying decision-making process. Furthermore, the fashion industry in this thesis will be referring to clothes (and only clothes). Other forms of fashion items such as watches, shoes, bags, purses, jewelry, etc., will, therefore, be excluded. What is more, everyday's fashion in this thesis shall not be confused with foreign products or traditional regional products, as for example batik or sarong from Indonesia or sari from India or any other ethnic clothing. Additionally, one may ask, why clothes? Clothes are chosen as a case in this research due to several reasons. First, like food, clothes is a basic need (Maslow, 1943, as cited in Sarot 1996, p. 106). Therefore, it is expected that it will help the interviewees to easily relate to the case. Second, due to the globalization and movement of the production to lower income countries within the textile industry, many fashion items such as clothes made in different countries are easy to be found in Denmark, for instance in H&M, Bestseller, Only and alike. Thus, I find it interesting to use clothes as a case rather than any other products.

### **1.4. Thesis purpose**

From the elaboration of the scope and delimitation of this thesis above, I am now able to formulate the purpose of this study. This thesis seeks to reveal the role of country of manufacturing (COM) in the young Danish consumers' buying decision-making process, especially on their information evaluation process and also to reveal what other factors that might play a role in influencing that process. This thesis, however, does not attempt to provide certain strategies as such, but rather it attempts to give readers a deeper and better insight of young Danish consumers' behavior.

## 1.5. Research question

To serve the purpose of this thesis as outlined above, the research question that needs to be investigated in this thesis is as follows:

**How does country of manufacturing influence young Danish consumers' information evaluation process when it comes to buying clothes and why?**

## 1.6. Terminology

To avoid ambiguity, this sub-section provides some terminologies used in this study.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Consumers</b>                            | In this study, consumers will particularly refer to the end consumer, an individual who buys and uses a product or service and not companies or organizations buyer. |
| <b>Interviewees/Informants/participants</b> | Refer to the unit of analysis for this study, which will be used interchangeably.  |
| <b>Clothes</b>                              | In this study, clothes will refer to clothing on one's body such as dress and trousers   |
| <b>Developing/low-income countries</b>      | Refer to countries that had GNI per capita of US\$1,025 or less (WorldBank.org, 2016).   |
| <b>Well advanced/high income countries</b>  | Refer to countries that had GNI per capita above US\$12,476 (WorldBank.org, 2016).   |
| <b>Thesis/study/research/paper/project</b>  | Will be used interchangeably referring to this scientific work.  |

## **1.7. Project overview**

This paper consists of overall six chapters:

Chapter 1 provides the readers with the background of the phenomenon, the scope, the aim as well as the research question of this thesis.

Chapter 2 presents readers with the literature review that is used as guidance for this research

Chapter 3 provides readers with an insight on the overall approach employed in this study such as justification of the chosen paradigm, data collection methods, and so on.

Chapter 4 will provide readers with the theoretical frameworks that are derived from the findings and data interpretation.

Chapter 5 consists of several parts. First, it provides readers with the findings from the field. Secondly, in what follows, a discussion of the data gathered will also be given. Lastly, this chapter will also provide readers with the discussion of trustworthiness as well as my personal reflection regarding the research process.

Chapter 6 will provide readers with a summary, the answers to the research question as well as the research contribution, limitation and suggestion for future research.

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The aim of this chapter is to present readers with what have already been known in the field of country of origin, buying decision-making process as well as in the field of postmodern consumers. Prior to data collection, these theories were used as a guidance as well as to base the interview questions upon (I will elaborate this more in Chapter 3). Prior to data collection, I did not put too much emphasis on theories, nor did I make an extended and intensive review of the literature. The reason why I did not conduct an extensive literature review was because it would restrict the process of an inductive study, where concepts and theories are usually derived from the data that are collected (Bryman, 2012, p. 404). Therefore, reviewing literature shall be avoided at the early stage of the research process (Shi, 2006, p. 2). However, this chapter has undergone an iteration process. Meaning, that it has been sharpened both after data collection and during the analysis, since I simultaneously gained more comprehensive knowledge through data. Moreover, reviewing the literature after data collection helps me to contextualize my research in the body of knowledge.

### 2.1. Country of origin (COO) and its effect

The study of country of origin (also widely known as "*Made In*") and its effects, is one of the most popular areas of research in international marketing (Bradley, 2002). Many scholars have studied COO and its effects for decades, as it affects the consumers buying decision process (Beverland & Lindgreen, 2002; Abraham & Patro, 2014). Abraham & Patro (2014) add, that a country's image is embedded in the mind of the consumers. But how can COO be defined? Looking at Maheswaran's (1994) definition, COO can be viewed as "*stereotypical belief about specific country product*" (as cited in Abraham & Patro, 2014, p. 312). These beliefs toward the place of the product's origin can be both positive and negative as Gurhan-Canli & Maheswaran (2000) argue.

According to Abraham & Patro (2014), ethnicity plays a part in shaping attitudes toward foreign products (p. 312). For instance, Ahmed & D'Astous (2008) find out, that stereotype is more exhibited by consumers from developing countries. However, a "Home country bias" (where consumers have the tendency to favor more products from their own country) can also happen, especially in the more developed countries (Abraham & Patro,

2014). Agrawal & Kamakura (1999) as quoted by Abraham & Patro (2014) argue, that COO has its considerable effect on the purchase decision of products with less "perceived risk" (p. 314). For example, they specify that in the field of fashion, it has better acceptance when it is connected to Italy or France (Abraham & Patro, 2014, p. 311). However, Ahmed et al., (2002) argue exactly the opposite. They postulate that COO effects are generally less pronounced when the manufacturing process is simple (as cited in Fetscherin & Toncar, 2010, p. 6).

On the other hand, consumers are still exhibiting a preference for some brands (Abraham & Patro, 2014, p. 315). This can be viewed that brand is still an important factor, which is always connected to the country of brand image. Take for instance the brand of fashion apparel labels, which is widely known to have their products produced in the developing countries. Nevertheless, the brand is still recognized and valued by consumers (Abraham & Patro, 2014, p. 315), even though many studies claim that consumers typically view products made in developing countries less favorably (Cordell, 1992; Wang & Lamb, 1980 as cited in Chu et al., 2008). Additionally, Balabanis & Diamantopoulos (2008) argue, that consumers are willing to pay more for the same branded products if they are made in more favorable countries (as cited in Abraham & Patro, 2014, p. 315).

## **2.2. Stages in the consumers' buying decision-making process**

This section presents readers with the field of consumer buying decision-making process, which is influenced by a number of factors. Accordingly, this section also provides an elaboration of how COO may affect the consumers' buying decision-making process. Since this study is limited within the pre-purchase stage (focusing especially on the stage of information evaluation), it is, therefore, irrelevant to touch upon the post-purchase stage.

The field of consumer buying decision-making process might be one of the most widely studied fields in the consumer behavior (Brassington & Pettitt, 2006). Since many marketing scholars admit that studying consumers is the center of many marketers' universe, it is imperative to study them (Brassington & Pettitt, 2006, p. 100). The first stage in the buying process is known as the problem recognition stage (Brassington & Pettitt, 2006, p. 102). It is begun when consumers are able to identify and recognize that there is a problem/need that has to be solved. And, it requires both willingness and the ability to fulfill this emerging need (Brassington & Pettitt, 2006, p. 102). Moving forward to the second stage

in the buying decision process, when a consumer has the need and is able to do something about it, he/she will start to search some information that might be useful for them. This stage includes such as what kind of purchase will solve their problem (Brassington & Pettitt, 2006, p. 103). In addition to that, Bloch et al., (1986) distinguish two type of search (as cited in Brassington & Pettitt, 2006, p. 103). First, the ongoing search which includes the browsing and storing for future references. And second, is the purposeful research with a particular objective in mind (as cited in Brassington & Pettitt, 2006, p. 103). Besides seeking information through sources such as Internet or retailers, when buying a certain product, consumers will more likely ask for a recommendation from friends or family (Brassington & Pettitt, 2006, p. 103). Besides that, they also sometimes recall the experiences they have had with a previous product, company, or brand as references (Brassington & Pettitt, 2006, p. 103).

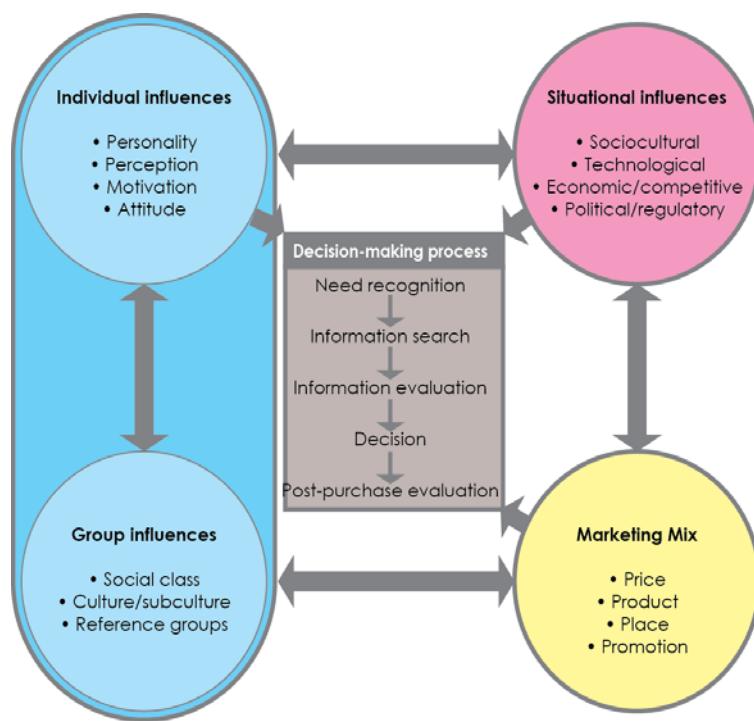


Figure 2. Consumer decision-making process and its influencing factors

Source: Brassington & Pettitt (2006, p. 101)

However, all the information/data gathered are useless until they are being evaluated (Brassington & Pettitt, 2006, p. 106) and until the consumers find out how to prioritize the information to reach the buying decision. Therefore, we are now moving to the third stage, which also the focus of this thesis. This stage is known as the information evaluation, in which all the information gathered is being considered (such as what information is relevant and what is not for making a decision). This stage will eventually lead to the decision itself. According to Abraham & Patro (2014), COO effects are noticed particularly in this stage (p. 312). And this is the reason why I put emphasis particularly in this stage in the buying decision-making process. According to Brassington & Pettitt (2006), marketers can influence this step through, for example, their communication campaign, by stressing the importance of a product attribute (p. 107). Although Hauser et al. (1993) also stress that too much information will backfire, which lead to a poorer buying decision (as cited in Brassington & Pettitt, 2006, p. 103).

In what follows, Brassington & Pettitt (2006) argue, that the buying decision-making process is influenced by a number of factors, both internal and external. Those factors are individual (personality, perception, motivation, and attitude and buying situation), situational (sociocultural, technological, economic/competitive and political regulatory), group (social class, culture/subculture, reference groups and family) and marketing influences (price, product, place and promotion).

### **2.3. The role of country of origin in the consumer buying decision-making process**

The decision-making process is a complex process, where consumers are faced with multiple tasks when they have to make a decision (Abraham & Patro, 2014, p. 310). In the process consumers are being exposed to different information. And in order to help themselves, these consumers are making use of both intrinsic and extrinsic cues in the decision process (Abraham & Patro, 2014, p. 310). Abraham & Patro (2014) further explain, that intrinsic cues can be for example performance and quality. In the same vein, Veale et al., (2006) argue, that intrinsic cues can be any product characteristics ingrained in the products themselves. For instance engine capacity for a car or flavor for a soft drink. Moving to the extrinsic cue, it can be defined as "*product characteristics that are not fundamental to the*

*product itself, but externally attributed to the good or service" (Lee & Lou, 1996; Teas & Agarwal, 2000 as cited in Veale et al., 2006, p. 2).* But since the intrinsic cues cannot be evaluated until the consumers purchase and use the product, the consumers will look into the extrinsic cues such as price, brand, and country of origin (Abraham & Pato, 2014; Tamijani et al., n.d; Veale et al., 2006). Drawing upon these authors, COO is therefore one of the very important cues, that influence the consumers' buying decision-making process (Abraham & Pato, 2014). Baker and Currie (1993) show the importance of COO by arguing that it shall be considered as the fifth element of the marketing mix besides price, product, promotion and distribution/place (as cited in Tamijani et., al, n.d., p. 2). Seeming to agree with Baker & Currie (1993), other authors such as Verlegh & Steenkamp (1999) argue, that COO is not only a cognitive cue for product quality, but it also relates to emotions, identity, pride, and autobiographical memory and, therefore, it is not "*just another*" cue (p. 523).

## 2.4. Country of origin dimensions

As I advance with the literature review in the field of COO, many scholars emphasize and demonstrate the importance of COO in the mind of consumers. Yet, little attention is given to the elements of the country of origin (Mostafa, 2015, p. 71). As it can be read in Chapter 1, Aichner (2013) in his article touches upon this issue by citing from authors such as Vianelli and Marzano (2012), however, he does not elaborate or discuss these distinctions any further. I shall, therefore, criticize these authors for not making such distinction, since there are differences between the different COO elements, for example, Country of Manufacturing (COM), Country of Brand (COB), Country of Design (COD), and Country of Assembly (COA) as can be seen on Table. 1.

But as opposed to many scholars who do not make any distinction of the COO elements, Mostafa (2015) dedicates his study by decomposing elements of the country of origin, such as country of manufacture (COM) and country of brand (COB). Other researchers such as Ulgado & Lee (1993) and Prendergast et al., (2010) for example, emphasize the importance of COB in the consumers' purchase intention (as cited in Mostafa, 2015, p. 73). While, other scholars such as Ahmed & d' Astous (1995) and Saeed et al., (2013), emphasize the importance of COM in the consumers' purchase intention (as cited in Mostafa, 2015, p.

73). But, there are also other scholars such as Chao (1993), who argues that both COM and COB are equally important to consumers (as cited in Mostafa, 2015, p. 73).

In determining quality judgement, Hui & Zhou (2003) argue, that brand name is more important than COM (p. 135). Whereas other authors such as Schaninger (1996) and Pappu et al., (2006) state, that even in the case of prestigious global brands, the consumers' perception of quality as well as their purchase decisions seem to be influenced not only by the brand name, but also by where the products are manufactured (as cited in Fetscherin & Toncar, 2010, p. 8). Finally, by definition country of manufacture is referring to the country, where materials are transformed into final products (Goswami, 2014, p. 15).

## 2.5. The postmodern consumers

Ronald Inglehart (2000) in his publication argues that in general, society can be divided into three layers: traditional, modern, and post-modern (or also known as the post-industrial society). To understand Inglehart's (2000) point, characteristic of each society will be given. First, let us take a look at the traditional society. Its characteristic according to Inglehart is that women's role is viewed as (and limited to only) a child bearer and rearer, whereas the modern society's distinct characteristics are the bureaucracy and the mass production. Moving on to the third layer of society, which is the postmodern, Inglehart characterizes it as society, who "*values self-expression - instead of deference to authority and are tolerant of other groups and even regard exotic things and cultural diversity as stimulating and interesting, not threatening*" (Inglehart, 2000, p. 223). Based on Inglehart's (2000) explanation, therefore, I regard the Danish society as a postmodern society.

Postmodern has been a prominent social theory for almost three decades (Christensen et al, 2005 as cited in Hamouda & Gharbi, 2013). It was first coined in sociology and rose to fame when a French author, Lyotard, used the term in his publication (Giddens, 1990, p. 2). "*I consume, therefore I am*" might be the biggest mantra for the postmodern consumers. Todd (2013) points out that consumption is intimately tied to the process of creation and production of one's identity (p. 48). Yet, the postmodern (which acknowledges how individuals think and act as consumers in contemporary societies) has not been recognized explicitly as an important aspect in the marketing field (Thompson, 2002 as cited in Hamouda & Gharbi, 2013). Further, Hamouda & Gharbi (2013) argue that the consumer

seeks constant personal identity on the basis of what they consume (p. 43). Thus, it can be said, that to consume is the heart of the process of identity construction (Hamouda & Gharbi, 2013, p. 43). In addition to that, Gabriel & Lang (1995) put forth, that the practice of consumption is not only limited to the buying product itself, but also to buy identity (as cited in Hamouda & Gharbi, 2013). One significant finding in the postmodern theories is suggested by Hamouda & Gharbi (2013). They state, that the postmodern consumers are not seeking or trying to impress others, but rather they live deeply in themselves in all identities they build (p. 41). Reflecting from this, the postmodern consumers are not just trying to buy something to impress others, but also to feel good about themselves.

## CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Assessing, choosing, and thereafter applying the most appropriate approach will affect the outcome and quality of a research (Sargeant, 2012). Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to explain my approach in regard to this thesis. The following sections justify my decision in employing the chosen paradigm as well as methods for data collection.

### 3.1. Research paradigm

From the beginning where I spotted the phenomenon (the Mond of Copenhagen case) till I arrived at the research question, one important question has emerged. This question is regarding how I will approach this phenomenon. Some researchers argue, that the research question and phenomenon under investigation should determine the methodology (Busaidi, 2008).

One approach considered was using the quantitative manner, which closely related to the positivist ideology (Carson et al., 2006, p. 6). But coming further to this, I could see some drawbacks of employing a quantitative method. Albeit it allows me to make a generalization of the result (which are usually done by distributing surveys or questionnaires), employing surveys or questionnaires, however, cannot be maximized to explore and reveal the informants' real motivation, feelings, thoughts, attitude, or experience in regard to their consumption practice. As my aim is to give voice to the consumers, quantitative is, thus, not the best suitable approach. Therefore, the qualitative method is employed in order to maximize the exploration of these consumers' subjective experiences.

In addition to that, while positivism glorifies the belief system/worldview as value and assumption-free, I, on the other hand, believe that there is no such thing that is absolute. Because I believe that there are *multiple* answers rather than *a single* answer out there. My point is, that in this thesis, I am studying human-beings (consumers), who are constantly changing and very unpredictable (Sullivan & Pecorino, 2002; Evans, 2001) and also the fact that human experiences are subjective. Therefore, this thesis rejects the positivist ideology, which believes that there is only one singular truth.

Although in many literature, quantitative or qualitative are often considered as two different distinct discourses, e.g.: one refer to as research method and one for the

research paradigm (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006), for the purpose of this thesis, I will define qualitative as the latter.

### 3.2. Research design

Phenomenology is an umbrella term, which encompasses both as a philosophical movement and a range of research approaches (Kafle, 2011, p. 181). It is an inductive qualitative research tradition, which is rooted in the 20th century (Reiners, 2012, p. 1). Scholars such as Ponce, 2014; Creswell; 2013, as well as Marshall & Rossman, 2010 categorize phenomenology as a research design (as cited in Padilla-Díaz, 2015, p. 101). Literally speaking, Smith (2013) defines phenomenology as the study of phenomena, which studies the structure of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view. He further argues, that it is distinct from, but still related to other disciplines in philosophy, such as epistemology, ontology, etc. In the same vein, Bryman (2012) points out that phenomenology is an intellectual tradition, which is concerned with how the individuals make sense of the world around them (p. 30).

From this elaboration, I seem to agree with Smith (2013), who argues that although phenomenology is an independent discipline itself, it is related to or at least it entails some elements of interpretivism (an epistemological stance known as the paradigm that is suggested by Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Another researcher such as Reiners (2012) postulates, that phenomenologist researchers believe that knowledge is achieved through interaction between researchers and participants (p. 1). Moreover, Reiners (2012) argues, that the philosophy of phenomenology is closely allied to the naturalistic paradigm (p. 1). In concordance with Reiners (2012), Lester (1999) claims that phenomenology has overlaps with other essentially qualitative approaches, such as ethnography, hermeneutics and symbolic interactionism (p. 1).

Based on these explanations, I came to an understanding, that phenomenologist researchers are trying to interpret the social world from the informants' perspective, because human action is meaningful (Bryman, 2012, p. 30). And since my purpose is to uncover/reveal the informants' subjective experiences, phenomenology seems to be the most appropriate research design to be applied in this study. My understanding seems to be backed up by Creswell (1998), who postulates that phenomenology is used when the research problem

requires a profound understanding of human experiences common to a group of people (as cited in Padilla-Díaz, 2015, p. 104).

### **3.2.1. Hermenutic phenomenology – a Heideggerian approach**

Although the pure phenomenology researchers argue that a research shall be hypotheses and preconceptions free (Husserlian descriptive phenomenology), more recent humanist and feminist researchers seem to object to this (Lester, 1999, p. 1). They reject the possibility of starting a research without preconception or bias. And instead of agreeing with the pure phenomenologists, who seek to describe rather than explain (Lester, 1999, p. 1), the more recent humanist and feminist emphasize the importance of making clear the role of the researcher in his/her study as well as to emphasize how the researcher arrive at their interpretation (Lester, 1999, p. 1). This is in line with the notion of hermeneutic phenomenology suggested by Heidegger (Reiners, 2012).

Since, I very much agree with this recent movement (Heideggerian), this thesis, therefore, follows the notion of hermeneutic phenomenology. Because by making my role (as a researcher) clear and visible to the readers, it shows that as a qualitative researcher, I am bias and subjective in the way I interpret and make sense of the data. This is due to the reason, that in the qualitative research (through the interview with the informants), I am the instrument for data gathering (Bryman, 2012, p. 405). Moreover, the way I interpret or make sense of the data will also depend on my belief system as well as my background, such as culture, sub-culture, personality trait, and value orientation that I hold (Hirschman, 1986, p. 248). Therefore, there is no guarantee that other researchers will come to the same interpretation as I do. It is in line with the principle suggested by Kvale (1994) "*a legitimate plurality of interpretation*" (p. 157). Based on this principle, readers or other researchers do not necessarily need to agree with my interpretation; instead, they must understand how I could arrive at this interpretation (Niss, 1993).

### 3.3. Data collection

#### 3.3.1. Purposive & Snowball sampling

Padilla-Díaz (2015) argues, that generally the participants in a phenomenological research are chosen through purposive sampling (p. 104), and so are the informants in this thesis. In order to find them, a purposive sampling has been employed. Teddlie & Yu (2007) elaborate, that purposive sampling is primarily used in qualitative studies as a method to select units (such as individuals, groups of individuals or institutions) and has specific purposes to help researcher answering his/her research study questions. In short, it helps me to focus on specific/key informants who are particularly knowledgeable of the issues under investigation (Schutt, 2006 as cited in Anney, 2014, p. 278).

Since I have chosen to advance with young Danish consumers for the purpose of this thesis, some further criteria (which these informants must meet) have been made. But, since there is no exact or absolute definition of "being Danish", in this thesis the definition of young Danish consumers are based on demography and geography. Accordingly, in order to be considered eligible, the informants must:

- Have danish as their mother tongue
- Reside in Denmark and having their address officially registered in Denmark
- Be by the age of minimum 18 years old (but not more than 36 years old) as they are considered as adults (UNICEF.org, 2010). Thereby, consent from the parents will not be necessary.

Additionally, besides applying purposive sampling as its main strategy to gather informants, this thesis also employs the snowball technique, which means that the participants suggest or propose other participants, who have had experiences or characteristics relevant to the research (Bryman, 2012, p. 424). I will discuss this more in the upcoming section.

#### 3.3.2. Informants in this study

As a contrast to the quantitative research, there are no exact numbers of how big a sample size shall be in the qualitative research. Instead, qualitative researchers tend to follow the principle of data saturation (Mason, 2010, p. 2). Nevertheless, this study follows

Creswell's (1998) suggestion, that the studied group of phenomenological research should consist of 3 to 15 members. In this study, there are nine interview participants, which can be seen in the Table. 2 below.

|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Sahra<br>Face to face interview | 26 years old, studying BA in Entrepreneurship in Aarhus                 |
| 2. Eddie<br>Skype interview        | 27 years old, currently a job seeker and lives in Aalborg               |
| 3. Ruben<br>Skype interview        | 31 years old, Master student at Aalborg University, lives in Aalborg    |
| 4. Nathalie<br>Skype interview     | 28 years old, currently a job seeker, lives in Aarhus                   |
| 5. Ida<br>Skype interview          | 31 years old, currently on maternity leave, lives in Sdr. Felding       |
| 6. Mads<br>Skype interview         | 33 years old, works at LEGO lives in Sdr. Felding                       |
| 7. Jacob<br>Skype interview        | 28 years old, Master student at Aalborg University, lives in Copenhagen |
| 8. Caroline<br>Skype interview     | 27 years old, lives in Kolding and works as freelance writer            |
| 9. Emil<br>Skype interview         | 23 years old, lives in Aalborg, Bachelor student at Aalborg University  |

Table 2. List of informants in this study

The process of finding informants was a bit of a challenge. First, I started by sending an announcement/mail (that I am looking for participants for my Master Thesis) to the study secretary of the Culture, Communication, and Globalization (CCG) program at Aalborg University. This announcement was then sent to the students' mails and also posted on Moodle (the intern communication system at the university) by the secretary. In addition to that, I also posted this announcement in my networks on Facebook as well as in different groups on Facebook such as Aalborg University CCG 2014. However, from these two attempts, no one came back at me. Therefore, I chose a more conventional way to find these informants,

which was by asking, both someone I know and did not know in advance, if they were willing to participate in my study.

There are two informants that I did not know beforehand. Those are Sahra and Mads. Sahra, for example (whom I met at the Horsens Public Library), I asked her if she was willing to participate in my thesis and she agreed to it. Sahra is the only informant in this study, whom I interviewed in person. Another informant, whom I did not know in advance, was Mads. He was one interviewee suggested by Ida. Mads and Ida are a couple and living together with one son. The rest of the informants such as Eddie, Caroline, Nathalie, Ida, Ruben, Emil, and Jacob are someone that I have known beforehand (to various degrees) at the University.

One might ask, will interviewing someone the researcher know such as friends and acquaintances reduce the credibility of this research? Reflecting upon Blichfeldt's (2007) research, interviewing someone that the researcher knows (to various degrees), will by no means hampering the quality and credibility of the research. On the contrary, these authors argue that indeed, it is seen as one way to enhance trustworthiness (p. 26). Their argument is, that interviewing acquaintances provides the researcher with a platform of trust and rapport, which do not need to be built from the scratch (Blichfeldt, 2007, p. 22). Especially, when the topic is a more general line of consumption, such as buying clothes, foods, cars, vacation, houses, bikes etc (Blichfeldt, 2007, p. 29).

In line with Blichfeldt (2007), in my own perspective as a qualitative researcher, (who value each individual's meaning), I am not considering that interviewing friends or acquaintances per se reduces the quality of my study. On the contrary, I would think that it enriches my thesis. Because in practice, interviewing someone that I know, will help me to create a more friendly and informal atmosphere between the participants and I. The way I see it, the more relaxed the atmosphere, the more it will have influences on the outcome of the data (such as detailed description and/or richness). This, for example, can be seen from the fact that interviews with Sahra and Mads (whom I did not know beforehand) were shorter (respectively 20 & 15 minutes) compared to the interviews with someone I already know in advance (except the interview with Eddie – 19:02 minutes). But in my own point of view, the length of the interviews also depends on the informants' personality traits. For instance, in this study, informants with extrovert personalities, are more likely to speak longer than those who are not.

The length of the interviews varies from 15:54 for the shortest to 50:17 minutes as the longest, which gives an average of 30,8 minutes per interview. From these nine informants, the data obtained have become repetitive. Therefore, I come to an understanding that the data have saturated. One factor could be because the unit of analysis is quite homogenous (Guest et al., 2006 as cited in Mason, 2010, p. 4).

### 3.3.3. Qualitative semi-structured interview

Since phenomenology research is the study of lived/common experience (Padilla-Díaz, 2015, p. 108), it is evident that the best and most appropriate way to gather an intense, profound, deep information and perception is by in-depth interviewing (Padilla-Díaz, 2015, p. 104). As opposed to surveys or questionnaires, employing one on one qualitative interview will allow me to go deeper, when aiming to gain insight from the informants. Bryman (2012) divides qualitative interview into two: the unstructured and semi-structured (p. 469). This research employs the latter, because it gives me certain flexibilities such as probing during the interview. Probing was done because I might ask them to elaborate their answer more or because I sought to confirm what has just been said. Therefore, they are not necessarily stated in the interview guide. An example of probing in this study could be "*Could you please elaborate that more?*" or "*So you said that .... is that what you meant?*"

Additionally, besides seeking confirmation during the interview, another thing I did during the interview (in order to gain a deeper and profound understanding), was summarizing the whole conversation at the end of the interview. Not only will this help me to synthesize what have just been said from the start till the end (due to the long duration of the interviews), but it is also seen as one way to ensure trustworthiness in the qualitative research. This principle is known as member checking (Koelsch, 2013, p. 168) or in Bryman's (2012) term, it is known as respondent validation in order to seek corroboration (p. 391).

Initially, I also considered Focus Group Discussion (FGD) for data collection as an alternative to in-depth one on one interview. But, given the shortcomings of FGD, I have dismissed the thought. By large, due to these practical issues below, FGD is not the best suitable method for data collection:

- Time and distance limitation. The interviewees in this study reside in different cities in Denmark and due to the scheduling conflict; it is not a possibility to gather them to sit in the same room for one hour or so.
- Since the Focus Group researcher or interviewer must be highly trained (Dzija et.al, 2005), it would be too mouthful to conduct a Focus Group as I am a single researcher in this research.

Eventhough if time and distance were not the issues, I realized that FGD is still not the best suitable method, when I aim to gain a deeper insight from the informants. Some several reasons are:

- First, I could risk, that one informant is being dominant and influence other informants (peer pressure), which can lead to bias.
- Second, although some might think that the theme of this study is not sensitive, participants cannot exercise the right to have a privacy in Focus Group. And I could risk that informants are afraid of uttering their true opinion because they are afraid of being judged by others in the room.

All in all, from the elaboration above, Focus Group is therefore not an appropriate approach for data gathering, due to those practical issues above and due to its credibility as data collection method for this study.

### **3.3.4. Skype interview**

Most of the interviews are conducted through Skype. But as I stated earlier, the only interview in person was with Sahra (see Table 2). Ideally, interviewing in person would be the best suitable method of data gathering, so that I can establish eye contact, gesture, and most importantly to minimize delays or any other technical problems that might occur during the interview. But as I also have elaborated earlier, the main challenges are in fact time and distance. Thus, Skype interview was conducted in order to save these issues (Bryman, 2012, p. 477). Even so, Skype interview can have its disadvantages. For instance, in some interviews,

due to some technical problems, sometimes I could not hear what the other part said and vice versa. And I admit that it influences the quality of the data.

### **3.3.5. Interview guide**

As it is explained in Chapter 2, interview questions in this study are inspired by the existing literature in the Country of Origin (COO), the postmodern consumers as well as in the field of consumer buying decision-making process suggested by Brassington & Pettitt (2006). Although the current existing theories in the given fields are used as sort of guidance, the direction of this study is still determined by data or findings from the field. Meaning, that I am open to the new discoveries that the data might bring during the research process.

For starters, all informants were asked the same questions. But during the interview, some other questions were arisen due to probing. Additionally, demographic questions such as educational background, personal (for example age, hobby) and situational background (such as student, working or job-seeker) were also asked. Not only because I use these questions for "breaking the ice", but these questions will also give me a context and a better understanding about my informants that can be relevant for answering my research question.

### **3.3.6. English as a mean of communication in this study**

As a mean of communication, this thesis employs English as its main strategy. Eventhough as a researcher, I also speak and understand Danish to a certain extent, but for the purpose of this research, I have chosen to conduct the interview in English. Not only because this thesis shall be formally written in English, but I also feel more comfortable of conducting research within the language that I know better. In the beginning (before the interview even started), however, some Danish conversations were used. This is simply done in order to reduce awkwardness, since most of the informants and I know each other. But, most importantly, I see this as a warming up session as I aim to create a more relaxed atmosphere (that again might influence the quality of the data), before coming to the interview itself.

However, I can also see the drawback of interviewing in English, since it might hamper the way of my informants thinking and uttering their experiences. For example, after finishing the interview, one of my informants Nathalie (28) confessed that it would be much better to utter her experiences, thoughts and feelings if it was conducted in Danish. During the interview, she occasionally used some Danish words, which can be listened from the interview with her (see Appendix 3).

### 3.3.7. Data transcription

I will start this section by admitting that fully transcribing is the ideal way to get a better overview of the data (both for the readers' and my sake) and especially when reflecting the principle of openness and transparency in the qualitative research. But due to time limitation, I have chosen to transcribe the interviews partially for my own use. As for documentation, I have attached the link to the raw data (recording of interviews with informants) in Appendix 3 and it can be accessed without any login required. Transcribing partially, however, has its drawbacks. For instance, I have to listen to the recordings several times in order to familiarize myself with the data. I will explain this more in the analysis section in Chapter 5.

## 3.4. Analytical approach

As a method of data analysis, this thesis applies thematic analysis. Braun & Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as "*a method of identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data*" (p. 6). What is more, Holloway & Todres' (2003) postulate, that thematic analysis is one of a few generic skills across qualitative analysis (as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 4). Relating this to my thesis, I was dealing with a large amount of information from the fieldwork. And in order to be useful, this huge amount of data has been reduced to only some data that I regard as interesting and relevant to the research question. My decision is supported by Mason (2010), who emphasizes that researcher shall know when to cut the data where necessary as the analysis begins to take shape (p. 2).

### 3.5. Source criticism

To increase the credibility of a research, source evaluation is necessary (source criticism–library.au.dk, 2017). For example, to my best knowledge, I choose only articles, journals, and online book with credible sources that can be held accountable. They were found by means of Aalborg University Library Database called *primo.aub.aau.dk* as well as by means of Google Scholar. Physical books such as Brassington & Pettitt (2006), Bryman (2012) and Niss (1993) are also used. Needless to say, articles, journals or E-books that are not scholarly such as Wikipedia or other materials with unreliable sources, are therefore excluded. Although, I may admit that some sources used in this thesis are rather old, however, I have tried my best to only use theories that are still relevant and acknowledged by other scholars. Moreover, I also choose scholarly articles that are peer-reviewed. Unfortunately, it is not always the case. Finally, to my best effort, I also try to not use sources that are bias by having a certain ideology or agenda.

### 3.6. Ethical consideration

This section outlines the ethical considerations and implications in this thesis. But first, I will start this section by discussing the element of ethical consideration in a research proposed by Dienner & Crandall (1978) as well as Coontz (2006). Second, it will be followed by the discussion of the ethical dilemma from the standpoint of Athanasoulis & Wilson (2009) as well as Tai (2012) and the discussion of its relation to this thesis.

Coontz (1999) posits, that in order to learn to do a good research, it is not only important to be able to use the appropriate methods, but also employing ethical standards throughout the research process (p. 3). Thus, reflecting from Coontz (1999) above, it can be said that ethic and research go hand in hand (p. 3).

In general, the term "ethic" can be understood as a norm for conduct (Resnik, 2015). Albeit many scholars emphasize the importance of ethic in conducting a research, still, there is no consensus of how ethic should be applied (Resnik, 2015). Neither does Kimmel (1988) give any specific definition of ethic in research. Although, he explains that ethic is about the value that we hold, as an example; what we perceive to be right or wrong (as cited in Coontz, 2006, p. 3). From the way I see it, such value is problematic, because what one sees as right or wrong, is very subjective and different from person to person. However, Dienner &

Crandall (1978) provide me (as a novice researcher) with some aspects that need to be considered in a research. Those are informed consent, privacy/confidentiality, potential harm, and deception (as cited in Coontz, 1999, p. 5).

First, I will start by arguing the most essential aspect in a research, namely credibility (Tai, 2012, p. 220). Research's credibility relies heavily on obtaining informed consent from the participants (Tai, 2012, p. 220). Coontz (1999) argues, that informed consent means that participation in a study is not coerced. In other words, participation in a research is voluntary. There are two things that I have done in practice in regard to the informed consent in this study:

- First, is about the informant criteria. From the beginning, I have decided that my participants shall at least be 18 years old, so that they can give consent with their free will.
- Second, is the use of recording tool. In order to make me focused when conducting the interviews, I have made use of a recording tool. But, before I started to record (audio only), I have given notice to the informants and asked for their permission. None of the interviewees objected to this.

Now, moving to the second part of ethical dimension, which is privacy and confidentiality. But since the aim of privacy/confidentiality is to protect the participants from any possible harm, I will, therefore, merge both aspects. To the best of my knowledge, I have applied this principle also since the beginning of this thesis journey. This, for example, is reflected in the informants' recruitment process, where I evidently wrote that interviewees' identity would be kept confidential if needed (see figure 3 below). Because even though the theme of this study is neither sensitive, taboo nor it physically harmed participants, the informants still, however, could be "harmed" in a different way, such as psychologically and socially (Coontz, 1999). Therefore, I offered them an anonymity; for example, if they wished to be referred only by their first name etc. This, is done so that they can freely utter their feeling without being afraid to be judged by the readers. And even though all informants in this study do not mind having their full name disclosed, I have decided to identify them only by their first name. Because in my perspective as a researcher, their full names will not have any influences on the quality/outcome of the data.

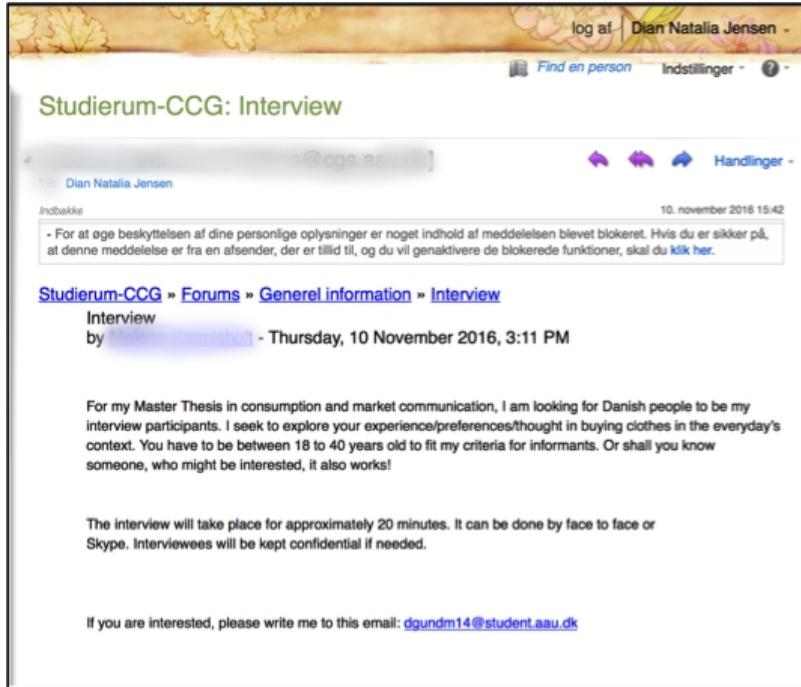


Figure 3. Documentation of recruitment process in the intern Aalborg University mail

The last aspect in the ethical consideration according to Dienner & Crandall (1978), is deception. There has been an ongoing discussion (which seems to be endless) about whether or not deception shall be allowed in some context (Athanasoulis & Wilson, 2009). Coontz (1999) refers deception as intentionally misleading the participants about the purpose of the study. From the Athanasoulis & Wilson's (2009) standpoint, deception can arise when the researcher provides certain kinds of information about the study, which lead the participants to modify the behavior in light of knowledge (p. 3). Added by the Committee for Protection of Human Subjects from University of California, Berkeley, their definition of deception is as follows: "*Deception occurs when an investigator gives false information to subjects or intentionally misleads them about some key aspect of the research.*" From the three definitions given by these independent authors, it became evident to me that they entail the same element, namely the intention. They all emphasize on whether or not the investigator intends to deceit the informants and to what extent investigator deploys deception in a research.

Relating this to my thesis, in the recruitment process I wrote, that I sought to explore their experience/preference in buying clothes without specifying that I wanted to

examine how the country of origin/manufacture may play a role and affect their decision. At that point, I was in a dilemma. I stood between situation, either I let them to fully know beforehand what the real topic is all about, which I could risk that the data obtained was contaminated (because participants might have prepared the answers or they might want to present themselves with a more favorable image), or I chose to not fully reveal the real topic in order to minimize bias and achieve objectivity (Tai, 2012). I have chosen the latter, because otherwise the information obtained would have been meaningless and unreliable. Moreover, at that point, I also thought that it would be easier for the potential participants to relate to the topic when it is about their experiences in buying clothes. Instead of using technical jargon or term, which makes it more difficult to understand.

For some scholars, what I did above, can be considered as a deception (albeit to a lower extent). Because, I somehow withheld some information and not fully disclose it to my informants (Tai, 2012). To compensate this, at the end of the interview, the informants and I reviewed and discussed the interview session we just did. We also talked about other stuff that is not necessarily related to the research. Coontz (1999) calls this process as debriefing session (cooling-down) in order *"to discuss their feelings about their involvement and to neutralize the negative reaction"* (p. 7). I myself find this post-interview stage to be significantly important. Because I am aware that I intrude their lives by asking questions (Coontz, 1999), which might push their button. For instance, I might ask personal questions that made them feel embarrassed and uncomfortable (such as their personal situation as being unemployed or their buying situation etc.). Or they might feel that they were being judged by what they were saying and so on.

To sum up this section, it is not and has never been my intention to mislead the participants (by not fully disclose the topic). And it is not my intention either, to gear them toward certain directions for this thesis' sake. On the contrary, I value the individuality and the subjectiveness of each answer from each participant. Because this is the aim of this research, trying to understand the phenomenon from the informants' very own point of view, hence phenomenology.

## CHAPTER 4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, theories such as ethical consumption, brand avoidance as well as transparency are applied in order to analyze the emergence of data (themes) brought by participants in this study. The aim of this chapter is twofold. First, together with Literature Review in Chapter 2, this chapter aims to provide frameworks that are useful as tools for analysis. Secondly, this chapter also aims to show readers, how my research fits into the body of knowledge.

### 4.1. Ethical consumption

Crane & Matten (2004) define ethical consumption as the following, "*the conscious and deliberate decision to make certain consumption choices due to personal moral beliefs and values*" (as cited in Chatzidakis & Lee, 2012, p. 194). Whereas Webster (1975) define ethical consumption as the act of taking into account the public and societal consequences of one's private decision (as cited in Rindell et al., 2013, p. 484). The notions of ethical and sustainable consumptions, however, seem to be overlapped. This, for instance, can be seen in Black & Cherrier's (2010) research, which used these two terms interchangeably. But Welch (2014) seems to disagree. He argues, that the two are distinct because sustainable consumption can be achieved by scaling up ethical consumption. Meaning that, if everyone was ethical, consumption would be sustainable. On this matter, I tend to share the same view exhibited by Welch (2014).

In general, ethical consumption can be divided into three major elements: the well-being of humans (including human rights and FairTrade), animals, and environmental (Tallontire et al., 2001; Rindell et al., 2013). What is more, Vitell et al., (2001) find out, that ethical consumers are guided by principles rather than consequences, regardless demographic (as cited in Wheale & Hinton, 2007). Findings in some studies (Black & Cherrier, 2010; Rindell et al., 2013) show, that ethical consumers have a viewpoint in line with general anti-consumption. Additionally, some scholars such as Wheale & Hinton, 2007; Black & Cherrier, 2010 argue, that the concept of ethical consumption is closely related to green consumption. That being said, these consumers are concerned with the effects of a

consumption choice, not only to themselves, but also to their external world (Rindell et al., 2013, p. 489).

## 4.2. Brand avoidance

Lee et al., (2009) define brand avoidance as "*the incident in which consumers deliberately choose to avoid a brand*" (p. 170). The concept of brand avoidance is only applicable when consumers avoid brands, even though they are available and have the means (such as financial) to purchase the brand (Lee et al., 2009). Lee et al., (2009) identify four different types of avoidance. Those are experiential, identity, deficit-value avoidance, and moral avoidance. Since findings in my thesis point out mostly on the latter, I will therefore only putting the emphasis on the moral avoidance.

Moral avoidance relates to consumers' perception of brands, which the perceived impact is on the wider society, beyond their own personal (Rindell et al., 2013). In conformity with these authors, Knittel et al., (2016) posit, that in moral avoidance, consumers avoid dominant brands to prevent monopolies or because they are associated with corporate irresponsibility. The latter is in conformity with the findings in my study, where most informants in this study, exhibit this moral avoidance which includes the act of boycotting certain brands, that consumers find to be causing societal problems (Rindell et al., 2013). Consumers who are concerned about the social/human well-being, will try to avoid the products, and the company who makes them (Rindell et al., 2013). Nevertheless, studies show, that brand avoidance can also happen due to consumers' past experience (Rindell et al., 2013).

## 4.3. Transparency

There is a growing concern about the manner in which businesses perform today (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011, p. 136). Buyers today feel responsible for ensuring that products are produced under humane and fair condition (Emmelhainz & Adams, 1999, p. 53). Consequently, therefore, for consumers who are very concerned about the environment and society, information on business transparency can be important for their purchase and consumption choices (Emmelhainz & Adams, 1999, p. 53). Highlighting the importance of transparency in doing business, Ha-Brookshire & Hodges (2009) postulate, that transparency

is essential for evaluating the sustainable practices and is also highly sought by today's consumers, who tend to be more socially and environmentally conscious (Ha-Brookshire & Hodges, 2009, as cited in Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011, p. 138). Doorey (2011) argues, that factory disclosure has now become a new corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategy to signal that corporations have nothing to hide (p. 588).

The demand for a more transparent way of doing business, seems to be heightened (Ha-Brookshire & Hodges, 2009 as cited in Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011, p. 138). But despite the findings in my study as well as other studies (such as Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011; Singh et al., 2008; and Ha-Brookshire & Hodges, 2009) strongly suggest that consumers are interested in obtaining information about transparency (in the way of firms doing business), it seems they are still having difficulties in obtaining information (as cited in Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011). As Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire (2011) put it, "*Today's consumers seem to have insufficient access to information about sustainability efforts carried out by businesses*" (p. 136).

Reflecting from Lafferty & Goldsmith's (1999) standpoint, it is very important that firms put their focus on transparency, since consumers are more favored toward and more likely to purchase from transparent business practices than those that are not (as cited in Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011, p. 137). To build trust, firms need to take distance from less ethically orientated firms to present a positive ethical stance (Ha-Brookshire & Hodges (2009 as cited in Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011, p. 138), because corporate reputation is increasingly recognized by the ethical consumers (Wheale & Hinton, 2007).

## CHAPTER 5. ANALYSIS

The aim of this chapter is to describe findings from the field as well as my interpretation of the data gathered. As opposed to the deductive approach, which categorizes findings based on the existing/available theoretical frameworks (Schadewitz & Jachna, 2007), findings and analysis in this study are grounded from data in the fieldwork. The process of data analysis is as follows: First, I started by listening each interview and then wrote down the essence of each interview. I repeated the same procedure by listening to the recording over and over again to make the analysis sharper (since I did not fully transcribe the interviews – see Chapter 3). Thereafter, I started to look for patterns such as similarity across interviews to find the overall/major themes that were interesting and relevant to my research question.

The analysis phase was started already during the data collection phase, since it is a simultaneous process. What is more, to give me a better overview of the data, a matrix has been employed. This matrix contains verbatim quotations from the informants (word for word of what the informants said), which are used in the analysis section. Although, with an exception that small word such as "*umm..*" and repetition are not being transcribed for the sake of an easier understanding for the readers.

The structure of this chapter is as follows: I will start by elaborating more general findings from the field. Followed by an elaboration of more specific findings/themes that kept recurring among participants. Those are the workers'/employees' welfare and transparency. Originally, there was a third theme that I found interesting, namely personal/political preference. But since this theme was only recurring to few informants and without much similarity, I decided to exclude this from the analysis. In what follows, an interpretation and a discussion of the findings will be given from my own perspective as a researcher.

## 5.1. Findings from the field

### 5.1.1. *The role of country of manufacturing in their information evaluation process*

Although the focus of this thesis is not to investigate whether or not the informants are aware of where their clothes are produced, still, in the scenario of buying clothes, informants were asked if they ever checked the label inside (if they notice the COM and if they had any preferences regarding COM). This question was asked in order to give me a ‘picture’ of the importance of COM in the mind of the informants. And also, because each stage in the buying decision-making process is interrelated. Therefore, I cannot just look only at the information evaluation stage without looking at the other stages in the pre-purchase stage too.

Findings suggest, that country of manufacturing does not interest them. As a matter of fact, they do not even check the “*Made In*” label inside the clothes. Accordingly, informants unanimously answer, that they do not have any preferences regarding the COM of their clothes. What they do, however, when buying clothes, is checking the label inside in regards to size and its materials (such as fabrics, washing instruction etc.). Some of their narrative can be seen as below:

*“It’s actually a good question, no actually I don’t check the label every time. That’s true, actually I don’t”* (Ruben, Appendix 3, 5:19-5:26).

In the same vein with Ruben, but in a more confident way, Jacob and Mads seem pretty convinced, that COM is not a significant factor when buying clothes. They state very shortly (but sure) as the following:

*“That’s not in my consideration, that does not really affect my decision where it’s from”* (Jacob, Appendix 3, 3:16–3:24).

While Mads answers very to the point, *“No, it doesn’t interest me!”* (Mads, Appendix 3, 4:48–4:49).

The same also goes for female interviewees, albeit with a more elaborated answer. This is represented by Nathalie's narrative as below.

*"When we're talking about it now, as I told you, it's not something I reflect on everytime I buy clothes. I look at the label, but I would say I would look at the label because I want to know how to wash the clothes, I want to know who make the clothes, I want to know if it's polyester or what it is..., You know the material! (Nathalie, Appendix 3, 23:28–23:54).*

To conclude this section, findings in the field suggest, that country of manufacturing (COM) does not play a big role in their information evaluation process in the buying clothes context, since all interviewees in this thesis agree that COM does not affect their decision. Among answers, design and quality were at the top, while COM is rather low in the hierarchy when buying clothes.

### **5.1.2. COM is not an indicator of quality, brand is!**

One reason why informants in this study could not care less about the COM of their clothes, might be due to the fact that they do not link COM and quality together. To them, a brand is still a decisive factor to define quality. This, for instance, is shown from Nathalie's narrative below. Continuing from her viewpoint in section 5.1.1 above, Nathalie, who shops clothes quite often further stated,

*I look at where it's made and I would think, okay they made in Italy, Nice! Then Made in China but they are not nice. I mean the quality looks good and whatever. But when we're talking about it in the moment, I'd say – okay I don't think clothes made in China would have as good quality as clothes made in Italy for instance. But that's only I have it in my mind. If you can say it... (- shift to Danish – (Det er kun en ting at tænke over)). Because you know, I don't think it depends on the country, I think it depends on the brand. And that's why I don't have [...] I don't want to say anything about any country, because for me it's about the brand! Where am I buying my clothes, do I know this brand? If I know this brand, I would know that the quality is good. If I don't know the brand, I would see okay the quality actually looks good, what kind of company is it?! And then.. the country of production, that comes last!" I don't have these considerations about Asia*

*like Asia is doing bad thing. But of course, I know that good quality doesn't necessarily come from China" (Nathalie, Appendix 3, 23:55-25:44)*

Supporting Nathalie, other interviewees such as Caroline and Ruben also share the same view. They claim, that clothes made in developing countries are not always bad quality or vice versa. Take for instance Caroline, for her, just because clothes made in China, does not mean it is a bad quality since China is a big country.

*"Well for me, if I hear something is produced in China, I don't necessarily think it's a low quality. Because it depends on where it's produced and who is producing it, because China is so big, so obviously China would have those good and bad fabrics that produce things. So I don't necessarily think of China as a product being cheap or bad (Caroline, Appendix 3, 8:20-8:48).*

Their fellow interviewee, Ruben, also exhibits this belief. He argues, that he hardly can see any differences in the clothes' quality, whether the clothes are made in developing countries or well developed countries. He stated the following:

*"I don't think as per se that the clothing is too much lower standard than other clothing that would be like a T-shirt made in China or England or Bangladesh or Spain. I mean they could be the same for me pretty much" (Ruben, Appendix 3, 26:14-26:34).*

Drawing from the findings above, I come to an understanding, that it does not really matter for the informants, whether the clothes are "*Made in China*" or "*Made in Bangladesh*" or "*Made in England*" or "*Made in Italy*". Because findings show, that they do not use COM as an indicator for a sign of quality, instead, they use the brand and who is behind that brand. This finding actually strengthens what other researchers also found, that brand name is more important than country of manufacturing itself in defining quality judgment (Hui & Zhao, 2003, p. 135).

### **5.1.3. Danish companies gain a more favorable position in the mind of the informants**

Continuing from section 5.1.2 above, another finding that I find interesting and relevant, is that Danish companies enjoy certain privileges in the mind of the informants. To understand this better, examples can be seen from Nathalie and Jacob's narrative such below:

Nathalie: *"But in Denmark, I don't consider it that much to be honest. I don't have these considerations"*

Researcher: *"So it's like contextual for you? If it's in Denmark, you trust more? Rather than when you're abroad?"*

Nathalie: *"Yes. Because it has to do with the Danish rule and how I am raised. I think I would trust Danish companies more than I would trust other"* (Interview 4, Appendix 3, 13:40-14:18).

Jacob seems to share the same belief as Nathalie. In the interview with him, he explains repeatedly, that country of brand (COB) is more important to him rather than the country of manufacturing (COM). This can be viewed below:

*"I wasn't thinking it was a good quality because it says Mads Norgaard Copenhagen, it's just I know that brand and it's a very old brand in Denmark and I know what it stands for"* (Jacob, Appendix 3, 9:00-9:11)

And further in the interview, he states the following:

*"But it does not really matter as long as the brand is Danish, so they can sort of make it where they want. So if they want to produce it in Bulgaria, it's still a Danish brand. I guess I am more about where the brand is from, not so much where they produce the clothes"* (Jacob, Appendix 3, 17:29-17:48).

Drawing upon the findings above, the reason that Danish companies gain a more favorable position in the mind of these informants, could be due to some regulations and rules that these companies are under in Denmark. Or could be because it is simply part of being Danish, as it is part of their upbringing. What informants (as represented by Nathalie and Jacob)

exhibit here is actually in line with what Abraham & Patro (2014) call, "home country bias", where consumers have the tendency to favor products from their own country.

#### **5.1.4. Brand = branding**

What I also find interesting is that informants in this study genuinely know, that buying brand (read: expensive clothes) equals to pay for branding (the effort to make that brand). To prove this, let us take a look at Emil's opinion such below.

He says, *"If it's expensive you pay normally for the quality, but a lot for the branding and the design... But if I'm willing to buy it I don't think it should be cheaper just because it's made in the low income countries"* (Emil, Appendix 3, 14:41-15:14).

Seeming to agree with Emil, most of the informants do not seem to be bothered by this. One reason being could be because they have some certain expectations to that brand. Take, for instance, Nathalie and Jacob's statements below:

*"If you buy something expensive I think it's like that for everyone. Like when they buy expensive things, they expect that the quality to be good. They expect that, the things functioned. And when we're talking about clothes, if it's jeans, a jacket, then you use it once or twice and some people have these for years. So I'm paying to get a good quality so if it's not good I'll go and complain"* (Nathalie, Appendix 3, 16:52-17:19)

Followed by Jacob, he states:

*"When I'm buying a product like Mads Nørgaard, I know the quality I'm getting. I know that his brand is a good quality. So I couldn't really care less where it was made. I know I'm getting a quality product or that at least what I'm thinking* (Jacob, Appendix 3, 6:09-6:30).

From section 5.1.3 and 5.1.4, it becomes clear to me that when they shop a brand, they also shop for the guarantees given by that brand. And therefore, to them, it is the brand that guarantees quality and not the COM. As long as the brand can be held accountable for the

assurance of quality, the role of COM will fade away. Because obviously, a brand has an interest to maintain its credibility (Kotler et al., 2009, p. 443), and thereby cannot afford bad publicity. Furthermore, still from these findings, I come to an interpretation that as consumers they feel more secure by buying clothes from a brand (especially Danish brand).

### **Sub-conclusion:**

So far, there are two things that I can conclude from the more general findings (section 5.1.1 to 5.1.4). First of all, the informants do not see COM per se as a sign of quality; instead they are using the brand for indicating the quality. This, somewhat contrasts with the presupposition I had before entering the field, that products made in developing countries would be perceived to be a more negative. This, is also inconsistent with many studies which have claimed, that consumers typically view products made in developing countries less favorably (Cordell, 1992; Wang & Lamb, 1980 as cited in Chu et al., 2008).

Most of the informants in this study are emphasizing more on (COB) rather than (COM) in accordance with what Ulgado & Lee (1993) and Prendergast et al., (2010) have argued (as cited in Mostafa, 2015, p. 73). This also means, that to some extent these findings are consistent with Hausruckinger (1993), who argues that people often linked country of origin as a signal of quality (as cited in Aichner, 2013, p. 82). Although in this case, it is the country of brand (COB). But as much as I agree with Hausruckinger (1993), I also shall criticize him for not making such a clear distinction between different dimensions of a country of origin. Because clearly, findings in this study indicate that the difference is huge. Hence, it is important to distinguish these different dimensions of COO in order to get a more precise portrait of the phenomenon.

Second, most informants in this study, are still exhibiting what Balabanis & Diamantopoulos (2008) have put forth, that brand is still recognized and valued by consumers, albeit it is widely known that they have their things produced in the developing countries. Thus, at the same time, this finding is also opposing with what Abraham & Patro (2014) had postulated, that in the field of fashion it is more acceptable when it is associated with Paris or Italy (p. 315). At least this is not valid within the everyday's fashion (ready to wear) context as shown in this study.

### **5.1.5. 'Two sides of the same coin'**

As promised in the beginning of this chapter, I am now moving to more specific findings that are kept recurring among participants. In the analysis earlier in section 5.1.1, all of the informants state that COM does not influence their decision when it comes to buying clothes. Eventhough COM seems rather not important at all for informants in this study, I somehow arrive to an interpretation, that COM does matter anyway (albeit indirectly). For instance, all informants utter their concerns regarding the workers' welfare, when they were asked about their opinion in regards to clothes that are produced in the low-income countries.

Moreover, from informants in this study, it is revealed that the concept of workers' welfare can be understood two-dimensional; the welfare of those, who are involved in the production and those, who work in the shops in Denmark. What is more, it is also important for these informants that the workers are not children. This can be viewed from some of their narrative below.

Ida for instance, she utters,

*"If I know that there is a scandal and if I know consciously that me buying the product is going to contribute to something terrible, then no, I wouldn't buy it"* (Ida, Appendix 3, 6:40-6:48).

Agreeing with Ida, Eddie expresses a similar opinion to it. He states the following,

*"If I knew that the workers on this factory have a horrible condition, I probably wouldn't buy the clothes"* (Eddie, Appendix 3, 5:03-5:13).

In the similar vein, albeit in a different understanding of the term "workers", Nathalie and Jacob also concern more about the employees in the shop in Denmark. They state as the following:

*"There is Danish brand that is called Moss Copenhagen, and I think a few months ago I saw a documentary about how they treat their employees and that the owner of the company, he didn't pay them well and the employees who were working in the store, they were treated really bad."*

*"They were not paid very well, even though they work a lot, as much as they could do. Trust me I didn't buy there in a long time, because I don't like to support this kind of company" (Nathalie, Appendix 3, 31:05-31:54).*

In concordance with Nathalie, Jacob states the following,

*"Especially when it comes to Samsøe & Samsøe, there is also some cases that they did not really treat their employees really well, and they did not get paid and then there is a lot of bad cases I guess... Yeah' I'm not going to buy anything from their shop again" (Jacob, Appendix 3, 26:20-26:41)*

Albeit most informants acknowledge that there is a problem in the textile industry such as exploitation of the workers, below minimum wage, etc., but as the title of this section is "two sides of the coin", some informants also choose to see the phenomenon from a brighter side. Say, for instance, Ida, who grew up internationally, her approach to this problem is not just "black and white". It can be seen from her narrative below:

*"Some people might think if it's made in the Far East, for example, there might be ethic issues and so on. I think my approach to ethics is also that it provides people with the job and it might not be under the same let's say work condition we have in Denmark or in Europe, but it is also different country and sometimes the fact that people have a job is maybe more important than the fact that how many hours they work and the condition and the safety equipment" (Ida, Appendix 3, 4:18-4:59).*

Ida's argument seems to be supported by Emil. He states as the following,

*"I think it's good for the country in some way because they can produce some clothes and therefore become a richer country. But I think, it was in Indonesia, where their factories collapsed and there was a lot of the workers killed. I think when they used their workers I think it's very bad. But if they can in some way higher their living standard because they can produce clothes, I think it's very good for the country" (Emil, Appendix 3, 7:27-8:01).*

In a more general note, informants in this thesis understand that in order to be competitive, companies must move their production abroad to the lower income countries. As Ruben put it in his own words,

*"If you want to stay competitive in the business, it's cheaper to do your production abroad from Europe for example"* (Ruben, Appendix 3, 13:49–13:59).

As I am trying to understand the world from their perspective, I arrive at an understanding, that these consumers are indeed in a dilemma. On the one hand, globalization of market is helping to increase production in the lower income countries and thereby increasing their welfare. On the other hand, it also has its dark side (exploitation of the workers). Reflecting further on this, my further understanding is that as consumers they are "forced" to accept the situation as it is, which can be seen from Sahra's statement below:

*"I think I've gotten used to the way things are and being consumer. Not that I'm not willing to take the blame but you know it's like a collective way of thinking just use, you go through it. That's the way we made this world"* (Sahra, Appendix 3, 4:23–4:49).

### **Sub-conclusion:**

It becomes evident to me, that although at first COM was rather less important and low in the hierarchy in the interviewees' information evaluation process, my interpretation of the analysis in section 5.1.5 indicates, that COM actually does matter anyway. Maybe not directly, but it lies under their subconscious mind, especially when they are using it as an indicator of the workers' welfare. What I can summarize so far is the way informants in this study see and understand the social world, cannot be categorized as black/white or one-sided. On the contrary, they see this phenomenon with their open mind. However, still, these informants feel the urge to verify their concerns in regards to the workers' welfare, in which I will elaborate further in the upcoming section.

### 5.1.6. Transparency

Following the workers' welfare, transparency is the second most salient themes brought by the participants. In the previous section, I argue, that country of manufacturing (COM) does matter anyway in their information evaluation process, albeit indirectly. My presumption on why COM is still present in their information evaluation process, could be due to the fact that as consumers they do not have direct sources of information or facts about the working condition. Instead, as consumers, they are "forced" to trust the companies blindly or use the COM as an indicator of the working condition. This can be seen from Caroline and Emil's statement below:

*I don't think I can say specifically it would be a bad thing that it is made in Asia. But I think it's a bad thing that as a consumer you don't have many ways to see like under which conditions that your clothes were produced" (Caroline, Appendix 3, 5:20–5:35).*

Similar to Caroline, when Emil was asked how he could make sure about the working condition, he stated the following,

*"As a consumer right now, I do not have the information to make that decision based on fact" (Emil, Appendix 3, 18:01–18:07).*

Some other informants at least tries to verify this kind of information by doing some research on the company's website. Take, for instance, Ruben, who claims that he browses H&M's website and take the company's words for granted. His narrative can be seen below:

*"A year ago I was trying to look more into how H&M operates these days, and they said that on their homepage that they guarantee the working conditions for their workers in Bangladesh is good and they provide safety and security for their workers and they guarantee that they make a good wage which pay them well enough to not working over hours. And I believe it that it's true if they have good working conditions. Then I think it's alright that they have their clothes made in Bangladesh as long as the workers are doing well. But should I trust H&M when they write that on their webpage? Should I feel confident that's the truth? I mean who doesn't want have*

*their popular face outward to their customers. It would be bad publicity if people knew that H&M take advantages of children to do that dirty work. I take their word on the webpage for good words. So I guess I trust them to treat their workers well" (Ruben, Appendix 3, 10:08-11:46).*

These findings clearly indicate, that as consumers they do have some expectations to the firms/companies. Not only in terms of quality as it has been explained in section 5.1.2 and 5.1.4, but also in terms of transparency in the way of companies doing business. This is reflected not only by what Ruben has stated above, but also by Ida's statement below:

*"I am also aware for example, if I shop H&M clothes... I believe that they are very conscious about the conditions that their employees are hired under. Maybe not for the sake of the market, but for the sake of the buyers here, you know, it matters to this part of the world. And I believe that they are transparent and that they work for those issues" (Ida, Appendix 3, 5:29-5:56).*

### **Sub-conclusion:**

Findings and analysis in both section (5.1.5 and 5.1.6) clearly indicate, that as consumers these informants actually do care about the workers' welfare, however, they just could not obtain proper information regarding the workers' welfare. Further, analysis also indicates, that these consumers are longing for more transparency from the companies' side.

## **5.2. Discussion**

The aim of this section is to discuss the significance of the findings as well as to discuss its implications with my own subjective interpretation. Drawing upon findings and analysis above, informants in this study do not consider COM as a stamp of quality. Not only does this finding contrasts to my presumptions before entering the field (as I have stated earlier), but this finding is also opposed to what Schaninger (1996) and Pappu et al., (2006) have stated; that even in the case of prestigious global brands, the consumers' perception of quality as well as their purchase decisions seem to be influenced not only by the brand name, but also by where the products are manufactured (as cited in Fettscherin & Toncar, 2010, p. 8). This is not the case for the informants in this study, because whether the clothes are labeled

with "Made in Italy", "Made in France" or "Made in China" "Made in Indonesia" (well-advanced countries VS developing countries), have no significance or influence on these informants. Therefore, Shakespeare's quotation that I brought in Chapter 1 fits in describing this phenomenon, that name of origin does not really affect what things really are (in the context of everyday's fashion). This important finding also answers the hypothesis that I pose in Chapter 1, regarding the distinction of countries of manufacturing in the mind of Danish consumers. Finding in this study clearly shows, for young Danish consumers, there are no distinctions. However, one shall bear in mind, that this is only limited to the context of ready to wear clothes. I presume if it was custom-made (just like the Mond of Copenhagen case), the result might have been different. My presumption, though, shall not be taken granted; therefore, a further study is strongly encouraged.

I am noticing that COM becomes an interesting factor for the interviewees in order to give an indication of the workers' welfare. As, for example, when they heard the phrase "Made in Bangladesh" or low-income countries in general, they associate it with a more negative workers' welfare (exploitation etc.). Hence, it can be said that COM does play a role (although vaguely) in their information evaluation process. And as long as these consumers cannot obtain sufficient information about the workers' welfare, COM will still continue to influence or be present in their information evaluation process. But if the consumers can get a better or more precise info about the workers' welfare, the importance of the COM will fade away. Simply put, if companies get their products produced in the low-income countries, but still are able to prove that the workers have a good/decent working condition, it would not be a disadvantage. On the contrary, companies will gain a more competitive advantage by highlighting these issues as these consumers are exhibiting an ethical consumption.

This is where transparency's role becomes evident, because it makes it possible for the public to audit the working condition, especially when buyers today feel responsible for ensuring that products are produced under humane and fair condition (Emmelhainz & Adams, 1999, p. 53). Today, factory disclosure has become a new corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategy to signal that corporations have nothing to hide (Doorey's, 2011, p. 588). Relating this to the real-life business context, some giant apparel companies have realized the importance of transparency. Take the Swedish company H&M, for instance, who dedicates transparency, ethics and the supply chain in their website *sustainability.h&m.com*. Or

the American clothes producer, LEVI's, who published their supplier list back in 1995 (Doorey, 2011, p. 587). For Bestseller (the biggest Danish clothing company), however, it is still not the case. They are still hesitating to publish the list of their manufacturers in the name of competition, even though there is severe pressure from the NGO's (Politiken, 2016). Findings in this study as well as findings from other researchers' studies such as Ha-Brookshire & Hodges, 2009; Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011 suggest, that a wish for a more transparent way of doing business does not come only from the NGO's or media, but it stems directly from the consumers.

Discussing the "why" question that I pose in the research question, the fact that my informants are the generation Y and highly educated persons, might play a big role for having such mindsets. My argument is supported by Bilkey & Ness, 1982 (as cited in Abraham & Patro, 2014, p. 314) who quoted other researchers such as (Anderson & Cunningham, 1972; Schooler, 1971; and Wang, 1978), that highly educated persons and higher income persons seem to favor foreign products in comparison to their counterparts. With these open-minded personalities, they then accept that the market has become more globalized. They accept that in order to be competitive, production must be done abroad, where labor forces are cheaper. At the same time, these informants also feel good about it, because they believe that when they have their clothes produced in these developing/low-income countries, it will help improving the local economy.

### **5.2.1. Managerial implications**

Most literature in the country of origin field emphasize, that products made in low income/developing countries are seen as less favorable (Cordell, 1992; Wang & Lamb, 1980 as cited in Chu et al., 2008). But findings and analysis in this study show that it does not have to be that way. Especially when firms are aiming to target the highly educated consumers (as informants in this thesis). By strengthening, communicating, telling a story and being transparent about the workers' conditions, the negative effect of country of manufacturing (especially from the low-income areas) will be reduced. Moreover, marketers can influence these consumers by stressing the importance of disclosure. Not only by addressing this issue on the company's website, but also on the product/clothes itself (see picture below).



Figure 4. Jacob's clothes label

Foto credit: Jacob (one of the informants in this study)

Although not directly related to "workers' welfare" issue, the picture above indicates that companies have understood the importance of highlighting "story" or ethics in the product/clothes itself, as it will help consumers to make a decision faster when they stand in the shop. Rudell (2001) seems to share the same view; she argues that labels are seen as a more helpful decision tool for shoppers than a published list of stores or companies (p. 115). As the theory says, marketers can influence the information evaluation stage through their communication campaign, for example by stressing the importance of the product attribute (Brassington & Pettitt, 2006, p. 107). In this case, by highlighting the workers' welfare in the buying situation, marketers will:

- Help to reduce consumers' hesitancy in regards to workers' welfare and thereby also reducing the negative effect of the clothes made in low-income countries.
- Increase the importance of the workers' welfare in the consumers' information evaluation process. Findings show, that consumers do care for the workers' welfare. The degree of it is still unknown. Ultimately, if marketers highlight the worker's welfare in the buying situation, it will become on top of the consumers' mind or at least higher in the hierarchy (as opposed to the current findings) of their information evaluation process.

### 5.3. Trustworthiness

The qualitative researcher has often been accused of being too subjective and bias (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 413). But despite many critics and reluctance to accept the trustworthiness of qualitative research, frameworks for ensuring the rigorousness of qualitative research have existed for many years (Shenton, 2004, p. 63). Irrespective of the research paradigm, Guba (1981) argues that researchers must consider categories for trustworthiness. Accordingly, Guba (1981) raises four questions as below (as cited in Anney, 2014, p. 275).

1. How can a researcher establish confidence in his/her findings? Or how do we know that findings presented are genuine? (Truth-value concern)
2. How do we determine the applicability of the findings in other settings or with other respondents? (Applicability concern)
3. How can one know if findings would be repeatedly consistent with the same or similar participants in the same context? (Consistency concern)
4. How do we know that findings come solely from participants and the research is not influenced by the bias of the researcher (Neutrality concern)

Many scholars argue, that qualitative studies shall be evaluated and judged using different criteria than those used to evaluate the quantitative studies (Bryman, 2012, p. 390). And since Guba & Lincoln's (2004) construct has been accepted and acknowledged by many (Shenton, 2004, p. 64), it will therefore be used to assess the trustworthiness of this study. Those criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

#### 5.3.1. Credibility

Guba & Lincoln (2004) argue, that credibility is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004, p. 64). Basically, credibility concerns with whether or not the research is carried out in accordance with the good practice. To reflect on the credibility of this study, several points will be elaborated. However, I am not going to go into details, because I have touched upon some of these issues earlier.

Since in this study, I function as the tool for data gathering (Bryman, 2012), I admit that bias may occur because analysis and interpretation are subject to my belief system as a researcher. In order to minimize these biases, several things have been performed which can be seen as below:

1. Criteria for informants were made. This is done in order to ensure that informants are eligible to participate in the study.
2. To minimize biases, respondent validation has been employed during the interview (Bryman, 2012, p. 391). As an instance, probing and summarizing interviews were done in order to seek corroboration from the participants.
3. Another thing I do in order to minimize bias is the use of the verbatim quotes from the informants. This is done so that readers can evaluate and judge on how I could arrive at this interpretation.
4. To increase the credibility of this study, instead of using only one source or author, I have used several authors to establish knowledge. By doing this, I gain a different, bigger and more objective perspective rather than following only one author "blindly".
5. As I have touched upon this issue in the ethical consideration section earlier, to increase the credibility of this paper as well as to minimize biases from the informants, I deliberately chose to not fully reveal the real topic of this thesis in the recruitment process. Instead, participants were "only" told that I aimed to examine their experience in buying clothes (please refer to the ethical consideration section for further elaboration).

### 5.3.2. Transferability

The second criterion proposed by Guba (1981) is transferability, which is the equivalent to generalizability in the quantitative studies (Anney, 2014, p. 277). Since the characteristic of qualitative research is focusing on depth rather than breadth, qualitative researchers are therefore encouraged to produce what is called a *thick description* in order to enable other researchers for making a judgement about the possible transferability to another context (Bryman, 2012, p. 392). Relating this to my study, I have tried my best to provide

readers with thick description (especially in regards to methodology), so that readers can get a deeper picture of the phenomenon under investigation. Still in regards to this second criterion, several points will be elaborated as below:

First, this study lacks generalizability, which means that the result is not valid for ALL young Danish consumers unless further study confirms so. But it shall be remembered, that it was not and has not been my intention to make a generalization out of 9 informants. Therefore, in order to get a more conclusive and representative result, a further study needs to be conducted (a quantitative manner is encouraged).

Secondly, the result of this study is contextually limited. Meaning, that it is limited within the context of ready to wear clothes. That being said, the result is not transferable to another context such as custom-made or luxury clothes. Also, the context is limited to clothes (and only clothes). As informants also stress, that supposed it was footwear (shoes) then the role of COM might become more important. Therefore, to see if the results are also transferable to another form of fashion (such as shoes, handbags and etc.), a further study needs to be conducted.

Third, it shall be noted that the result of this research is applicable in the Danish context, which features the characteristics of the postmodern consumers. Had it been consumers in a traditional or modern country, I presume that country of manufacturing would serve a different role. For instance, clothes "*Made in Italy*" or "*Made in France*" might be worthier than clothes "*Made in China*" or "*Made in Bangladesh*" because it has to do with status symbol (Choo et al., 2012).

### **5.3.3. Dependability**

Bitsch (2005) defines dependability as the stability of findings over time (as cited in Anney, 2014, p. 278). This includes providing records of the phase of the research process, such as problem formulation, selection of participants, fieldwork notes, interview transcript in an accessible manner so that the research process can be "audited" by peers or other researchers (Bryman, 2012, p. 392). Although, Niss (1993) argues, that the principle of openness is difficult to comply a 100% (p. 83), because qualitative research very often generates extremely large data sets, which make it more difficult in the process of "auditing" (Bryman, 2012, p. 392).

Further, Niss (1993) argues that transparency or openness can be achieved by being transparent in terms of data gathering and interpretation such as making the approach of the interviews, data analysis and interpretation as transparent as possible, in order to make it possible for other researchers to consider the applied methods as well as the foundation for the researcher's interpretation of the data collected (p. 82). Relating this criterion to my thesis, as I have written in the previous section, I have done my best to provide readers with thick description and justification of the research process. But since I have chosen to not fully transcribe the interview due to time limitation (please refer to data transcription section in Chapter 3), I have attached the recording of interviews for peers to evaluate instead (as found in Appendix 3).

#### 5.3.4. Confirmability

Guba (1981) explains that confirmability concerns with the idea that bias or personal value should not get in the way of the researcher (Bryman, 2012, p. 392). To some extent, I will have to disagree with Guba (1981) on this. This thesis adopts hermeneutic phenomenology, where I as a researcher cannot just put aside or bracketing those presumptions prior to the research process. What I did, however, although I had presumptions in the back of my head, I did not let these restrict me. Instead, I led data or findings to guide me. Furthermore, to establish confirmability, Anney (2014) suggests the use of a reflexive journal (p. 279). This reflexive journal includes events that happened in the field, personal reflection in relation to the study, which also including the "ah" experience (Anney, 2014, p. 279). Therefore, I will dedicate the next section to discuss the research process from my own perspective.

### 5.4. Reflection

As the saying goes "*nothing is perfect*", so is this research. Therefore, in this section, I will try to reflect upon the research process with my own critical eyes as well as to discuss the learning outcomes that I have gained during the research process. Several things will be discussed as follows:

First, regarding biases that could be derived from the informants (source criticism). I have a presumption, that in a real-life situation where they have to buy clothes, they are maybe not even bothered by the country of manufacturing at all. But due to the circumstances (that they are being exposed to an interview for a scientific purpose), they might exhibit a more politically correct opinion by mentioning about the worker's welfare in order to achieve social desirability. That being said, data that were obtained could be bias. But given the principle of phenomenology, which tries to understand the world from the viewpoint of the subject being researched, I would argue that the outcome is legitimate. The extent of it, however, is arguable.

Second, is regarding the methodology applied in this thesis. To begin with, I would like to stress the iteration process that this thesis underwent. My initial research question was "*How does country of origin influence young Danish consumers in their information evaluation process, when it comes to buying clothes and why?*". But since I advance more with findings and data analysis, I found out that I myself have not made a clear distinction of the country of origin in the beginning. As my aim has always been to examine the country of manufacturing, the research question has therefore revised to the current, "*How does country of manufacturing influence young Danish consumers' information evaluation process when it comes to buying clothes and why?*". This might be the downside of not reviewing literature extensively from the very early stage in the research process. However, it also leads to the "new discoveries" that are not necessarily given beforehand.

Third, is regarding the data collection. A phenomenological interview is complex and time-consuming; therefore, the interviewer must have an excellent skill and competency in interviewing (Padilla-Díaz, 2015, p. 104). As a novice researcher, I must admit that I might not be skilled enough to conduct a phenomenology interview. But I have tried my best to accommodate this by following scientific procedures as well as applying the ethic of conduct in a research. For example, during the interview, I have tried as much as I could to avoid leading the informants. But, again, as much as I tried to minimize bias, in practice, I might not be able to fully avoid it.

Fourth, although the tendency of this thesis is more inductive, where I took my starting point from a specific observation and moving to a more general or broader generalization, in practice, however, this thesis adopts both strategies. As Bryman (2012) also indicates, no research is either fully deductive or inductive but it more likely entails both

elements (p. 26). This method is known as an iterative process, where the researcher goes back and forth between data and theory (Bryman, 2012, p. 26). Reflecting upon Bryman (2012), in practice I had to go back and forth not only between data and theory, but also between each section in every chapter in order to achieve coherences. This process is actually also in line with the principle of hermeneutical phenomenology (Reiners, 2012). Additionally, employing an inductive strategy has been quite challenging. As opposed to the deductive strategy (which will make use of available theories to categorize the findings upon), the analysis in this thesis has become much messier and unstructured as I generated a huge amount of data. What I did, was to select data that were actually interesting and relevant to the research question.

Fifth is regarding the “What if” question I asked myself. What would I do, if I had unlimited resources? First, I would most definitely transcribe the interview fully as it is the best suitable way to get an overview of data. Moreover, (as I have discussed this earlier), by providing both full transcription and raw data (the recording of the interviews), it also reflects the principle of transparency and openness in the qualitative research. Hence, increasing the research’s credibility. Secondly, since I act as a single researcher, again, I admit that bias may shape the way I interpret the data. Thus, if I had an unlimited resource in regard to the time frame for this project, I would have asked a second opinion from other experts (e.g.: professor in the field of COO or consumption in general) in order to give a different perspective of the phenomenon under investigation. I could use this as one way to increase trustworthiness, as this method is also known as triangulation (Bryman, 2012, p. 392). Lastly, is regarding the data collection. For future research, if I had unlimited resources, I would most definitely opt for interviewing my respondents in person in order to minimize communication barriers.

Finally, reflecting on the overall thesis writing, although the process has been challenging and time-consuming, however, I also think that the process has been academically rewarding. Since the biggest time portion was allocated for literature reading (as these would help me to build knowledge upon writing), I have gained deeper knowledge on the phenomenon under investigation.

## CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

The aim of this section is to provide readers with a summary of this research. Since sub-conclusions have been performed during analysis in the previous chapter, this chapter will, therefore, mainly address the overall conclusion. Additionally, this chapter will also provide readers with the research's contributions, limitations, as well as suggestions for future research. To remind readers, the research question that needs to be answered in this study is as follows.

### **How does country of manufacturing influence young Danish consumers' information evaluation process when it comes to buying clothes and why?**

As opposed to much literature in the field of country of manufacturing, this research has discovered that the country of manufacturing has no or very little influence in how young Danish consumers' perceive the quality of the clothes, instead they are using the brand as a sign of quality. The role of country of manufacturing only seems to become prominent, when these consumers are using it as an indicator for the workers' welfare when no other indicators are present. Analysis show, that as long as companies do not provide these consumers with sufficient information regarding the workers' welfare, the negative effect of country of manufacturing will still continue to be present in the consumers' information evaluation process. As it is discussed in the previous chapter, marketers can influence this by highlighting the importance of workers' welfare in a way that helps consumers to make a decision faster in an otherwise overloaded and crowded buying decision process. This, for instance, can be done by providing information on the product itself (in this case the clothes).

Answering the 'why' question above, the fact that these consumers are the Millennials/generation Y and highly educated people, might play a big role in shaping their way of thinking. Thus, they become more open to the idea of clothes made in developing countries as well as globalization in general. Ultimately, exactly in the ready to wear context, production in low-income countries is the rule rather than the exception, which could also be a contributing factor to why these consumers do not see country of manufacturing as important.

## **6.1. Contributions, limitations and future research**

This study enriches the knowledge in the field of country of origin, especially in regards to the COM effect in the fashion industry within the Danish context. This study's contribution is that it comes with something new regarding that COM does not have as big an influence as other researchers have argued. Additionally, I also believe, that this study contributes to the study of ethical consumption among young Danish consumers.

This study, however, also has its limitations. This study lacks generalizability due to the small size sample (9 interviewees) and also the fact that the unit of analysis is homogeneous (Young Danish consumers). For future research, it will be interesting to examine this phenomenon from the counterparts' perspective. Therefore, other researchers are encouraged to investigate the phenomenon from the perspective of older Danish consumers, Danish consumers who are less educated, or simply a more heterogeneous unit of analysis in order to give a more nuanced and deeper understanding of the Danish consumers' behavior. As one of the major findings in this research is that brand is still highly appreciated by the consumers, one big question has not been answered yet. What if the brand is not yet known? Will country of manufacturing have a bigger effect? Future research might want to address this issue.

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