Storytelling as a Tool for Brand Differentiation: The Case of Søstrene Grene

Title sheet

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate how brands can use storytelling marketing effectively, with a particular focus on Søstrene Grene.

Purpose: The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how Søstrene Grene utilize storytelling marketing as a branding strategy to differentiate itself in the Danish market.

Aim: To explore how Søstrene Grene's storytelling reflects the brand's identity and values, resonates with Danish consumers, and achieves market differentiation.

Methodology/Approach: This thesis was conducted utilizing both primary and secondary research. A thorough review of previous existing literature about storytelling as a branding strategy was based on secondary research. The primary research consisted of a content analysis of Søstrene Grene's storytelling across multiple touchpoints like, social media, advertisements, in-store experiences and press materials.

Findings: The Findings of the thesis reveal that Søstrene Grene's storytelling is deeply rooted in Scandinavian values, like simplicity, sustainability, and creativity, which are reflected through recurring themes like DIY, hygge and responsibility. In addition, the analysis highlights how storytelling is tailored to resonate and relate to Danish consumers through cultural references and emotional engagement. Lastly, the study exhibits that Søstrene Grene uses cohesive and consistent storytelling across touchpoints to differentiate itself successfully from competitors.

Keywords: Storytelling, Søstrene Grene, branding, brand differentiation, hygge, brand value, communication, content analysis.
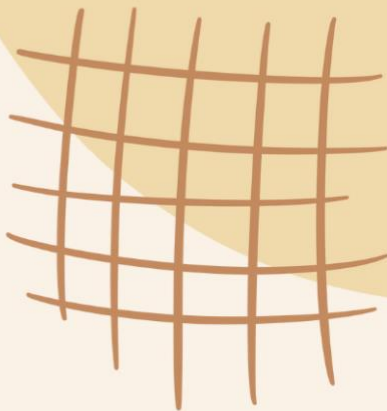
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INTRO

1. **Introduction**

"Once upon a time…" every great story begins this way, captivating our imagination and evoking emotions that stay with us. This sentence is very nostalgic to many of us, and we have heard this since childhood. In today's competitive market, brands must capture attention and develop emotional connections with consumers. Strong brands benefit from customer loyalty, the potential to charge premium prices, and significant brand power to support new product and service launches. To achieve this, firms need an exhaustive understanding of customer beliefs, behaviours, product or service attributes, and competitors (Ghodeswar, 2008, p. 4).

Storytelling has emerged as a powerful branding tool, allowing companies to humanize their brands, evoke emotions, and communicate values. Through storytelling, brands can create narratives that resonate with consumers, inspiring loyalty and distinguishing themselves in crowded markets (Mills & John, 2021). This thesis explores the use of storytelling as a branding strategy, focusing on its ability to engage audiences and build strong brand identities. In addition, the concept of "*hygge*" will play a central role in understanding how storytelling can reflect cultural values and foster emotional connections.

This paper investigates how storytelling can be effectively utilized in branding, with Søstrene Grene serving as a case study. By analysing their unique narrative strategies, this thesis aims to uncover the elements of successful brand storytelling.

1.1 **Problem Formulation**

Søstrene Grene represents a great example of how storytelling can create a distinctive brand identity in a competitive market. At the heart of their branding strategy are the fictional sisters, Anna and Clara, who embody creativity, tradition, and hygge. These personas are woven into every aspect of Søstrene Grene's communication, from in-store experiences to online marketing materials, crafting a world that invites consumers to slow down and savour moments of joy and inspiration (Søstrene Grene, 2023).

The two sisters have become the "faces" of the brand, representing its values and identity. Although Anna and Clara are fictional, their presence creates a personal connection with consumers, making them an integral part of Søstrene Grene's storytelling universe (Søstrene Grene, 2023). This unique approach makes Søstrene Grene an ideal case study for exploring the potential of storytelling as a branding tool.

This thesis will investigate:

- The elements of successful brand storytelling.

- How Søstrene Grene's narrative strategies establish a unique brand identity.

- The impact of storytelling on consumer perception and loyalty in the Danish market.

The main research question guiding this study is:

"How can storytelling be effectively utilized as a tool for brand differentiation among Danish consumers in highly competitive markets?"

1.1.1 Research Questions

1. What is storytelling, and how is it applied in the context of branding?

2. What are the key elements of Søstrene Grene's storytelling strategies, and how do they reflect the brand's identity and values?

3. How are Søstrene Grene's storytelling strategies targeting Danish consumers across different touchpoints (e.g., social media, adverts, and in-store experiences)?

4. How does Søstrene Grene's storytelling differentiate them from competitors in the Danish market?

1.2 Introduction to Søstrene Grene

Søstrene Grene is a Danish family-owned company founded in Aarhus in 1973. Over the last five decades, Søstrene Grene has expanded significantly, consisting of more than 300 stores across 16 European countries and a robust online presence in 11 markets. Despite its growth, the brand has remained deeply rooted in its Danish heritage and values, offering a mix of simplicity, functionality, and affordability. It has become synonymous with creativity, aesthetic inspiration and a unique retail experience that takes you through a journey. Søstrene Grene's brand story begins with its founders, Inger Grene and Knud Cresten Vaupell Olsen, whose vision was to create a retail experience that felt like a small, serene escape from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Today, the company remains a family-owned enterprise, managed by

the second generation of the Grene family, the two brothers, Mikkel and Cresten Grene (Søstrene Grene, n.d).

At the heart of the brand's narrative are two fictional sisters, Anna and Clara, who represent the company's values and identity. Anna, the creative that sees the aesthetic in everything, and Clara, the practical and organised one. Together they embody the essence and core of what Søstrene Grene is and offer. The two sisters are polite, traditional and recommends how consumers can let creativity, joy and beauty in everyday life. Through these two personas, which they address them as their hosts, Søstrene Grene invites consumers into their "wonderful world" that consists of (Søstrene Grene, n.d):

Honest Responsibility: Through responsibility from product idea to consumer, Søstrene Grene aspire to make a significant difference for people, wildlife, and environment. According to Søstrene Grene, this is a process that they will continuously expand and their ambitions about this strategy are high (Søstrene Grene, n.d).

The 'Hygge' Experience: Whether the consumers visit Søstrene Grene in their physical stores or online, they promise to create a space where the pace of everyday life slows down. Their physical stores are designed to inspire both body and soul with classical music, creative displays, and the *hyggelige* aisles that offer surprises around every corner. They strive for consumers to always have a *hyggelig* experience when they visit Søstrene Grene (Søstrene Grene, n.d).

The Joy in Beauty: At Søstrene Grene, they always focus on the joy that naturally arises when one sees the aesthetics in the small things of everyday life. Here consumers will find a wide selection of products that are inspired by their Nordic heritage. Søstrene Grene believes that beauty can be found in the details, and being surrounded by high aesthetic quality can bring joy into daily life (Søstrene Grene, n.d).

The Great Finds: Søstrene Grene defines this a being the combination of beauty and price. They promise the consumers that their products never cost more that they need to. Through a targeted and responsible purchasing strategy as well as the elimination of unnecessary intermediaries in their supply chain, they manage to keep prices down (Søstrene Grene, n.d).

Creative Inspiration: Søstrene Grene believes that creativity makes life a wonderful experience, therefore they make an effort to inspire their surroundings to express

creatively. Their hosts, Anna and Clara, share new creative DIY projects and decorating ideas every week (Søstrene Grene, n.d).

Continuous Renewal: New items arrive to the store every week in order to ensure consumers have a new and exciting experience every time they visit. The items includes everything from food products, to interiors to painting supplies (Søstrene Grene, n.d).

The creative director Cresten Grene also expresses how storytelling is engrained in their brand:

*"Our parents were ahead of their time when they introduced a store with a self-service concept inspired by the marketplace, with elements from the world of ballet, and where the products couldn't cost more than they should. Exploring was central, and it still is today. It is still the treasure hunt, the scents, the **storytelling**, the classical music and the little break from everyday life that are central to the Søstrene Grene concept as we know it today...*" (Søstrene Grene, 2023).

At Søstrene Grene, storytelling is not just a marketing tool but a central aspect of the brand's identity and differentiation strategy. The use of storytelling can be seen across various touchpoints, from the *hyggelige* in-store ambiance to the engaging narratives shared online and in press materials. Anna and Clara, the fictional sisters, are engrained in this storytelling, crafting an emotional connection with consumers and communicating the brand's core values of **joy**, **aesthetics**, **ever-changing**, **finds**, **creativity**, and '**hygge**' (*Søstrene Grene Brand Book* 2017, p. 7).

1.2.1 **The Role of "Hygge"**

The concept of *hygge* plays a central role in Søstrene Grene's branding and storytelling. *Hygge* is defined early in this thesis to ensure clarity. The Oxford English Dictionary describe it as:

"With reference to Danish culture: a quality of cosiness and comfortable conviviality that engenders a feeling of contentment or well-being; contentment from simple pleasures, such as warmth, food, friends, etc." (Oxford University Press, n.d).

According to Søstrene Grene's brand book,

"Hygge is a feeling you cannot translate. Hygge is a state of joy, contentment and warmth. A sense of belonging to the moment. Hygge occurs when you live in the present and have fun. When you "hygger", you frame the great moment and notice all the positive qualities that add to the wonderful feeling" ((*Søstrene Grene Brand Book* 2017, p. 36).

Hygge reflects the brand's efforts to create an inviting and memorable consumer experience. By aligning their storytelling strategies with hygge, Søstrene Grene appeals to cultural values that are deeply ingrained in Danish society. This makes the brand an ideal case study for exploring how storytelling can differentiate brands in competitive markets.

1.3 **Delimitation**

This thesis focuses exclusively on the Danish market and does not include quantitative methods, such as surveys. Instead, it conducted a qualitative content analysis to examine Søstrene Grene's storytelling across captions on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. The scope is limited to exploring storytelling elements and their role in brand differentiation, leaving out other aspects of branding, such as pricing or product innovation.

1.4 **Structure of the Thesis**

Here is an outline of the structure of the thesis to provide an overview:

Chapter 1 – Introduction: This chapter introduces the research focus, problem formulation, and research questions. It also provides an overview of Søstrene Grene as a case study and explains the central role of storytelling and hygge in the thesis.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review: This chapter discusses key theoretical concepts, including storytelling, branding, consumer perceptions, and the role of cultural values such as hygge. It establishes the foundation for analysing Søstrene Grene's strategies.

Chapter 3 – Methodology: This chapter outlines the qualitative research approach, specifically the content analysis of Søstrene Grene's social media captions and other marketing materials. It explains the data collection and coding processes.

Chapter 4 – Analysis: This chapter presents the findings from the qualitative content analysis, identifying recurring themes, emotional appeals, and storytelling strategies employed by Søstrene Grene.

Chapter 5 – Discussion: This chapter links the findings to the research questions and literature review, exploring how Søstrene Grene's storytelling strategies impact brand differentiation and consumer loyalty.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion: This chapter summarizes the key findings, highlights the implications for branding strategies, and provides recommendations for future research.
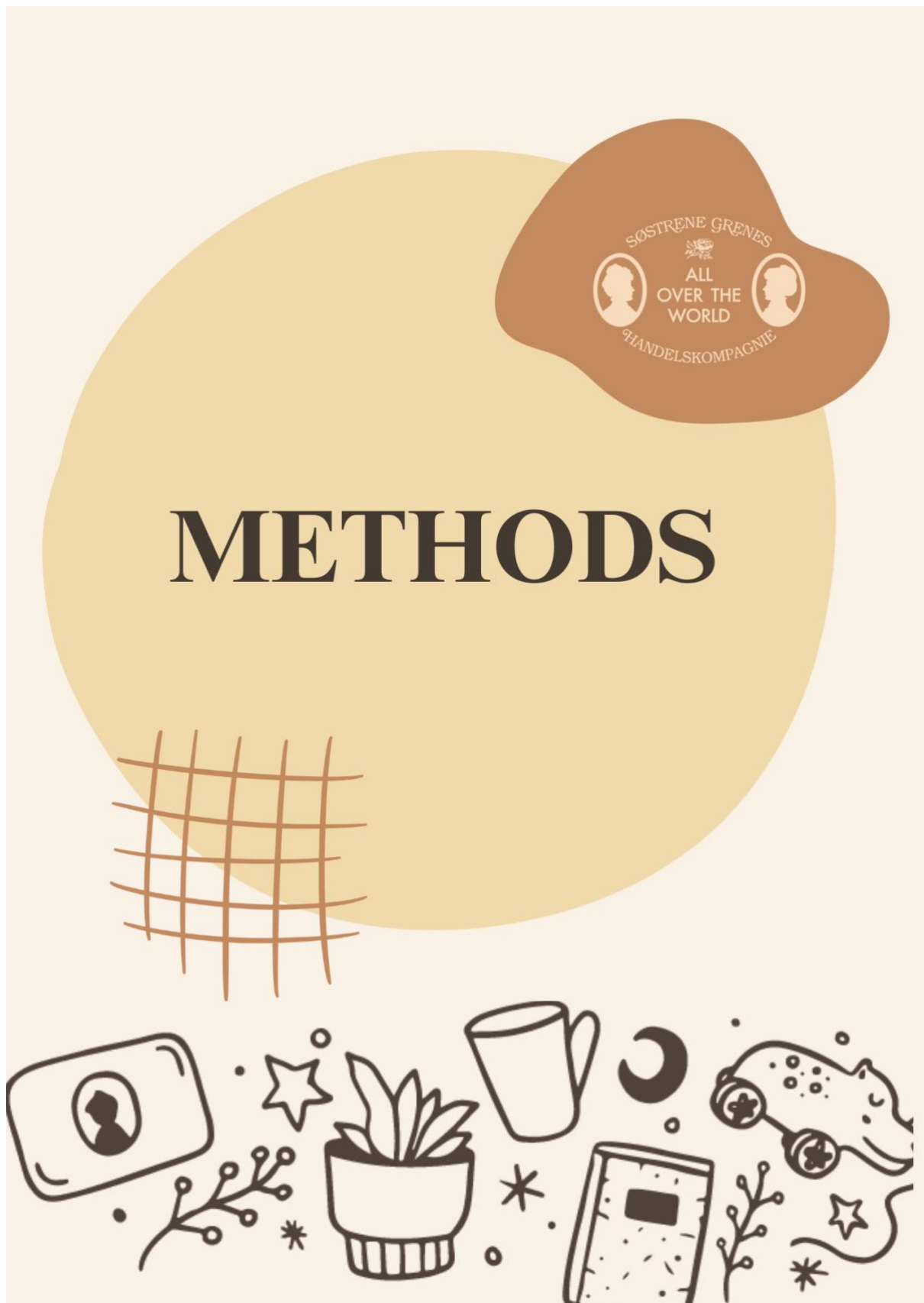
METHODS

3. **Methodology**

This chapter will present the methodological approach of this thesis to study how Søstrene Grene utilizes storytelling as a branding strategy to differentiate itself in the Danish market. It will consist of the philosophy of science, the research methods, the data collection, the validity, reliability, and the methodological limitations will also be described.

3.1 **Philosophy of Science**

Philosophy of science explores the essence of scientific research, exploring its nature and the different methods and theories involved in its emergence. It provides a basis for an evaluation of past actions (**Egholm, 2014, p. 25**). A paradigm in social research is a set of values and assumptions about how social research should be done in response to certain types of research problem or question (**Hackley & Chris, 2024 p. 12**). It consists of a 'world view', a position on the very nature of the phenomenon being studied (**Hackley & Chris, 2024 p. 134**).

3.1.1 **The Ontological Approach**

Hackley and Chris (**2024, p. 54**) describe ontology as a standpoint on the nature of the social world. Social constructionism is the belief that the social world is self-constituting in a way that. The social world, according to the social constructionist ontology makes up its own ways of being and does not always operate to universal laws. Human beings construct our social world through our talk, interaction and symbolic practices, according to the social constructionist ontology. This may be influenced by factors beyond our control like, economic, social, biological, and evolutionary behaviours. However, according to the social constructionist ontology, these influences impact our social world, but they do not determine it (**Hackley & Chris, 2024 p. 54-55**).

This ontological perspective aligns with the focus of this thesis on storytelling, as narratives and symbolic communication are central to the construction of brand identity and consumer perceptions.

3.1.2 **The Epistemological Approach**

Previously, it was described how ontology is a standpoint on the nature of the social world. Epistemology is a set of assumption about the appropriate methods with which to generate knowledge about this world (**Hackley & Chris, 2024 p. 12**).

Theoretically framing a research study (p. 131)

This thesis utilises a qualitative epistemology, as it seeks to explore the meanings and interpretations behind storytelling as a branding tool. By analysing the narratives in Søstrene Grene's marketing materials, this approach aims to uncover deeper insights into how storytelling fosters brand differentiation.

3.2 **Research Methods**

The research methods utilised in this thesis include thematic analysis and case study research, both of which are well-suited for exploring the narratives and themes in Søstrene Grene's branding.

3.2.1 **Thematic Analysis**

Thematic analysis is a method used to identify and interpret patterns or themes within data (Hackley, 2024 p. 119). This thesis applies thematic analysis to examine captions from Søstrene Grene's social media posts, focusing on themes such as creativity, hygge, and emotional appeals. Hackley highlight that thematic analysis is useful in marketing research because it helps uncover deeper meanings within texts and shows how brands connect with their audiences. Starting with an open review of the data to identify themes, followed by grouping them into meaningful categories or codes. This analysis maintain focus and ensures that the findings reflect the patterns present in the data (Hackley, 2024 p. 120).

The thematic analysis conducted in this thesis is guided by the framework proposed by Mills and John (2021), which identifies plot, character, and purpose as key components of effective brand storytelling. This framework provided a structured lens for identifying and interpreting patterns in the data.

3.2.2 **Case Study Research**

Case study research provides an in-depth exploration of a specific instance, making it ideal for studying Søstrene Grene's unique approach to storytelling. This method enables a detailed

understanding of how the brand's narrative strategies differentiate it from competitors in the Danish market.

3.3 **Data Collection**

The data collection process involved a content analysis of Søstrene Grene's marketing materials. Content analysis is particularly useful for studying how brands communicate their messages through text (Hackley, 2024 pp. 135-136). For this thesis, captions from Søstrene Grene's Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube posts were analysed to explore how the brand expresses its values and connects with its audience. These captions provide rich textual data for examining how the brand communicates its values, engages with consumers, and incorporates storytelling elements.

3.3.1 **The Content Analysis**

Content analysis focuses on identifying patterns and themes in textual data (Hackley, 2024 pp. 135-136). For this research, captions from Søstrene Grene's social media posts were examined to identify key themes such as DIY, Exploring, sustainability, and hygge. These captions were chosen because they represent the brand's storytelling and how it reaches its audience. The analysis followed a simple yet structured process to ensure that the findings accurately reflected the content.

3.4 **Methodological Limitations**

Despite its strengths, this research has some limitations. Subjectivity should be addressed. As qualitative research, the analysis is influenced by the researcher's interpretations. Efforts were made to avoid this as much as possibly through systematic coding and triangulation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

4. **Literature Review**

This chapter will explore previous academic studies with key theories and research about storytelling marketing, consumer behaviour and branding. The literature review will be a theoretical framework that the analysis of Søstrene Grene will be based on.

4.1 Introduction to Storytelling in Branding

Storytelling has emerged as a powerful branding strategy, enabling brands to communicate their identity, values, and purpose in ways that resonate deeply with consumers. According to Mills and John research (2021), storytelling should be viewed as a strategic tool for brand management. The authors propose a framework highlighting three essential components of brand stories: **plot, character, and purpose**. These elements work together to shape consumer perceptions, emotional connections, and brand loyalty.

- Plot refers to the narrative structure, where tension is resolved through the use of a product or service, fostering consumer engagement (Mills & John, 2021).

- Characters personalize the narrative, enabling audiences to relate to the story. These can be the brand itself or consumer figures (Mills & John, 2021).

- Purpose conveys the emotional takeaway or "moral" of the story, ensuring consumers understand the brand's intended message and values (Mills & John, 2021).

Mills and John emphasize that brand stories must evoke emotion and be perceived as authentic to establish trust and connection with audiences. They argue that managers can leverage narrative indices like familiarity, empathy, and relevance to make brand stories more impactful. However, their research primarily focuses on outbound storytelling, leaving inbound storytelling (consumer-created narratives) unexplored.

Complementing this perspective, Fog (2005) argues that storytelling is not merely a creative endeavour but a strategic framework for structuring brand communication. For storytelling to be effective, it must be authentic, emotionally engaging, and consistent across all brand touchpoints. These qualities build credibility and trust, which are essential for fostering consumer loyalty. Additionally, Fog (2005) emphasizes the role of cultural and contextual relevance in crafting stories that resonate with diverse audiences.

Further extending Mills and John's framework, Woodside, Sood, and Miller (2008) introduce the concept of consumer storytelling, which explores how consumers use brands as props in

their own narratives. Their analysis demonstrates how brands can reflect archetypal myths like heroism, sophistication, or seduction, allowing consumers to express aspects of their identity. This consumer-driven storytelling offers critical insights for marketers aiming to align their brand narratives with universal human experiences, strengthening brand identity and relationships.

These perspectives establish storytelling as a transformative approach in branding, allowing companies to connect with consumers on deeper levels while creating memorable and differentiating brand identities. How storytelling can set brands apart in competitive markets will be elaborated in 4.3 Storyelling and Brand Differentiation

4.2 Storytelling and Consumer-Brand Relationships

Storytelling is widely recognized as a critical tool for building and maintaining consumer-brand relationships by fostering emotional, cognitive, and behavioural engagement. Crespo, Ferreira, and Cardoso (2023) argue that storytelling strengthens these connections by influencing three key dimensions:

- Cognition: Storytelling enhances consumer-brand identification as consumers align the brand's narrative with their self-concept.

- Emotion: Storytelling drives affective involvement, creating deep emotional ties that foster loyalty.

- Behaviour: Cognitive and emotional responses act as mediators, increasing purchase intention and other positive actions.

Their study demonstrates the strategic role of storytelling in fostering stronger consumer relationships through narrative elements that resonate emotionally and logically.

Similarly, Kim, Park, and Park (2018) explore storytelling's impact on brand image and consumer attitudes. Their findings suggest that storytelling enhances brand image by creating consistent and meaningful narratives that communicate the brand's values. These fosters trust and engagement, leading to more favourable consumer attitudes. Importantly, they highlight the authenticity of stories as a key determinant of success; consumers are more likely to trust and connect with brands delivering authentic and emotionally compelling narratives.

Building on these perspectives, Lundqvist, Liljander, Gummerus, and van Riel (2013) focus on firm originated stories. Their research highlights the power of storytelling in enhancing

consumer loyalty and emotional engagement by aligning the brand's narrative with consumers' aspirations and values. The study emphasizes that storytelling goes beyond functional benefits by fostering experiential and emotional value, significantly strengthening consumer-brand relationships (Lundqvist et al., 2013)

These studies highlight storytelling's ability to deepen consumer-brand relationships by aligning brand narratives with consumer values and aspirations.

4.3 Storytelling and Brand Differentiation

In today's highly competitive markets, brands must develop strategies that go beyond functional benefits to achieve differentiation. Storytelling has emerged as a critical tool for creating unique brand identities, enabling companies to stand out by communicating values, culture, and emotional resonance.

Ghodeswar (2008) provides a conceptual model for building brand identity through strategic storytelling. The study emphasizes storytelling's role in highlighting a brand's core attributes such as authenticity, emotional appeal, and cultural relevance, to create a distinct and memorable identity. By crafting narratives reflecting a brand's unique heritage and values, storytelling fosters strong consumer connections, differentiating the brand from competitors.

Expanding on this, Aimé (2023) explores how brands continually adapt their narratives to maintain differentiation and relevance in evolving markets. Aimé highlights the dynamic nature of storytelling, suggesting that brands must refresh and refine their stories to align with consumer expectations and societal trends. The study emphasizes the importance of cultural alignment and adaptability, noting that emotionally driven themes like empowerment, nostalgia, or belonging to give brands a competitive edge by making them relatable and memorable.

Chiu, Hsieh, and Kuo (2012) focus on aligning brand narratives with product offerings. They argue that inconsistencies between a brand's story and its products can lead to consumer scepticism and reduced trust. For instance, a brand emphasizing sustainability but failing to offer eco-friendly products risks losing credibility. The study demonstrates that storytelling must differentiate the brand while authentically reflecting its offerings to enhance credibility and loyalty (Chiu et al., 2012).

By crafting dynamic, authentic, and product-aligned narratives, brands can distinguish themselves in competitive markets, fostering emotional engagement and building long-term trust and loyalty.

4.4 Storytelling in Social Media

In the digital age, social media has become a powerful platform for storytelling, enabling brands to connect with consumers in real-time, foster engagement, and build lasting emotional connections. Eveliina Tarvainen (2013) emphasizes the unique role of social media in storytelling, highlighting its creativity, interactivity, and adaptability. Unlike traditional branding channels, social media allows brands to share dynamic, evolving narratives across diverse platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube (Tarvainen, 2013).

Tarvainen (2013) argues that effective storytelling on social media requires balancing creativity and authenticity, as consumers are attuned to inauthentic or overly polished content. Successful narratives often incorporate real life stories, user-generated content, or behind-the-scenes glimpses, fostering intimacy and trust. For instance, brands sharing authentic stories about their values or sustainability practices are more likely to create emotional connections with consumers (Tarvainen, 2013).

Moreover, Tarvainen (2013) highlights social media's interactive nature, allowing consumers to participate in and co-create brand narratives through likes, comments, shares, and hashtags. This interactivity enhances brand loyalty by creating a sense of belonging and community. For example, user-generated content campaign where consumers share personal experiences with a brand, which can amplify storytelling efforts by adding relatable voices to the narrative.

Finally, Tarvainen (2013) underlines the importance of visual storytelling on platforms like Instagram and TikTok. Visuals make stories emotionally engaging and consistent with broader brand identity, helping brands stand out in crowded social media spaces. Social media storytelling represents a critical evolution in branding, combining creativity, interactivity, and visual engagement to build deeper emotional connections with consumers.

ANALYSIS

5. Analysis

This chapter explores how Søstrene Grene utilizes storytelling to reflect its brand identity and values, resonate with Danish consumers, and differentiate itself in the market. The analysis is shaped by the insights from the literature review and supported by a content analysis of the brand's marketing materials, particularly the captions from Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube posts.

5.1 Elements of Søstrene Grene's Storytelling

Storytelling lies at the heart of Søstrene Grene's branding strategy. Through engaging narratives, the brand communicates its identity, fosters emotional connections, and differentiates itself in the Danish market. This chapter will apply Mills and John's framework; plot, character, and purpose (Section 4.1), to analyse Søstrene Grene's storytelling strategies. It also examines recurring themes, patterns and impact of storytelling across multiple touchpoints.

5.2 Character, Plot and Purpose

According to Mills and John (2021), effective storytelling in branding relies on three essential components: plot, character, and purpose. This framework provides a structured lens to evaluate how Søstrene Grene communicates its brand identity and engages with consumers.

Plot

The narratives of Søstrene Grene revolve around themes of discovery, creativity, and hygge. This is known to be their brand values, and it is clearly noticeable in their content. For example, captions like, "*Bring joy into everyday moments*" and "*Think outside the box*" invite consumers to integrate Søstrene Grene's products into their daily lives (Appendix 9.1).

In addition, seasonal campaigns also play a critical role in the brand's storytelling. Winter and autumn campaigns, for example, may trigger cosy and nostalgic feelings tied to the Danish concept of hygge, while spring campaigns focus on DIY projects and renewal. These types of plots can align with consumer emotions and the brand's Nordic heritage as a source of creative inspiration (Appendix 9.1).

Character

Anna and Clara, the fictional sisters, are central to Søstrene Grene's storytelling. These personas are consistently featured in captions, such as "It is okay to make a weekday festive," Anna says with a sparkle in her eye" (Appendix 9.1). Anna embodies creativity and aesthetic inspiration, while Clara represents practicality and organization. Together, they reflect the brand's core values, offering consumers relatable and aspirational figures to connect with (Søstrene Grene, n.d). These personas make the brand feel more humanised and relatable, serving as guides within the "world" of Søstrene Grene. Beyond Anna and Clara, the implied characters like the consumers themselves, are encouraged to participate in the brand's stories through call-to-action captions like "Discover the collection in-store or online." This dual-layered character strategy fosters deeper engagement and loyalty, which also was pointed out in the.

Purpose

The overarching purpose of Søstrene Grene's storytelling is to convey joy, creativity, and responsibility. The brand's captions often include messages promoting sustainability, such as "Our products never cost more than they should," which emphasizes affordability and eco-consciousness. These messages not only reflect the brand's values but also strengthen trust and credibility. Additionally, the emotional takeaway of Søstrene Grene's storytelling of finding beauty and joy in life's small moments aligns with the aspirations of its target audience, further reinforcing consumer loyalty.

5.3 Key Themes from Content Analysis

The thematic analysis of Søstrene Grene's captions uncovered several recurring patterns and themes, each reflecting a core aspect of the brand's storytelling strategy. These themes form the foundation of Søstrene Grene's ability to connect emotionally with consumers, highlight its values, and differentiate itself in the market. The most significant themes identified are explored in detail below.

5.3.1 **Hygge and Cosiness**

A recurring theme in Søstrene Grene's storytelling is the emphasis on hygge, the quintessentially Scandinavian concept of coziness and contentment. Captions such as "Let colourful ceramics and lovely details add HYGGE to the dinner table," (Appendix 9.1) underlines the brand's cultural identity and emotional resonance. Through this theme, Søstrene Grene invites consumers to slow down and enjoy simple, comforting moments. The concept of hygge aligns seamlessly with the brand's products and physical store environments, which are designed to evoke warmth and contentment (Appendix 9.2). More examples are this description in one of their YouTube videos:

Welcome the cosy atmosphere of autumn into your home with the sisters' homemade autumn lanterns. Take the little ones on a charming forest walk and gather beautiful, colourful leaves. With just a few simple supplies, the leaves can be transformed into autumn lanterns, which will undoubtedly enhance the autumn HYGGE of your home." Content 28 (Appendix 9.1).

By embedding hygge into its narratives, Søstrene Grene positions itself as a lifestyle brand that goes beyond offering products, instead providing experiences that enhance everyday life. This thematic approach strengthens the brand's emotional appeal and deepens its cultural relevance for Danish consumers, because they can mirror themselves in those values.

5.3.2 **Creativity and inspiration**

Creativity is another key theme that permeates Søstrene Grene's captions. The brand's messaging often emphasizes DIY projects and artistic inspiration, as seen in captions like "With a touch of creativity, one thing can be transformed into something entirely different." (Appendix 9.1). These narratives frame Søstrene Grene as a source of innovative ideas, encouraging consumers to view its products as tools for self-expression. By promoting creative activities, Søstrene Grene fosters a sense of empowerment among its audience, inviting them to actively participate in shaping their living spaces. This is especially a clear message that they are sending to their consumers by creating a space for them on Facebook. It is called "Søstrene Grenes Creative Community" (Appendix 9.3)

This theme resonates particularly well with consumers who value individuality and personal expression. Furthermore, the emphasis on creativity aligns with the personas of Anna and

Clara, who are frequently portrayed as imaginative and resourceful characters within the brand's storytelling universe. This alignment reinforces the brand's identity and strengthens its connection with consumers seeking inspiration and originality. Creativity is another key theme that permeates Søstrene Grene's captions. The brand's messaging often emphasizes DIY projects and artistic inspiration, as seen in captions like "With a touch of creativity, one thing can be turned into another." These narratives frame Søstrene Grene as a source of innovative ideas, encouraging consumers to view its products as tools for self-expression. By promoting creative activities, Søstrene Grene fosters a sense of empowerment among its audience, inviting them to actively participate in shaping their living spaces. This theme resonates particularly well with consumers who value individuality and personal expression. Furthermore, the emphasis on creativity aligns with the personas of Anna and Clara, who are frequently portrayed as imaginative and resourceful characters within the brand's storytelling universe. This alignment reinforces the brand's identity and strengthens its connection with consumers seeking inspiration and originality.

5.3.3 **Sustainability and Responsibility**

Messages about eco-consciousness and affordability are consistent, as seen in captions in Appendix 9.1. Sustainability and eco-consciousness are central to Søstrene Grene's messaging, reflecting the brand's commitment to responsible consumption. The captions highlight this theme, reinforcing the idea that quality and affordability can coexist with environmental responsibility. By emphasizing sustainable practices, Søstrene Grene not only addresses growing consumer concerns about environmental impact but also positions itself as an ethical and forward-thinking brand.

"The sisters encourage you to think outside the box – "or outside the folding box," Anna chuckles.
Create your own shoe shelf with the sisters' folding boxes simply by letting one of the sides stay down. "Simple and at a reasonable price," Clara smiles."
Content #5 (Appendix 9.1)

This theme is further supported by the brand's product offerings, which often include eco-friendly materials and designs. Søstrene Grene makes sure to include eco-friendly certificates in their captions, like "*Certified by Ecocert Greenlife, license number 197533*" (Appendix 9.1) For most brands this is mostly informed to consumers on a brand's website. It shows a

great level of transparency and authenticity. By consistently integrating messages of sustainability into its storytelling, Søstrene Grene cultivates trust and loyalty among environmentally conscious consumers, while differentiating itself in an increasingly competitive market.

5.3.4 **Exploration and Discovery**

Søstrene Grene encourages consumers to view their stores as treasure hunts filled with delightful surprises. Captions like:

"Discover more lovely finds for table arrangements at your nearest Søstrene Grene store, in the app or online at sostrenegrene.com"

This invites consumers to embark on a journey of exploration. Exploration and discovery are recurring themes in Søstrene Grene's storytelling, inviting consumers to view the brand's stores as treasure troves of delightful surprises. Captions like "Discover the beauty in simplicity" evoke a sense of curiosity and wonder, encouraging consumers to engage with the brand as an experience rather than merely a retailer.

Also, the TikTok videos captioned "My Thursday Favourites", where the narrator takes you through the store, on a journey, and shows you the new products that have landed on the shelves (Appendix 9.1) This theme is reinforced through the brand's in-store design, which features curated displays and ever-changing product selections that mimic the excitement of a treasure hunt. By highlighting exploration and discovery, Søstrene Grene taps into the joy of finding unexpected items, creating a sense of novelty and excitement.

This approach not only enhances the shopping experience but also reinforces the brand's identity as a source of inspiration and creativity. Additionally, this theme helps Søstrene Grene build a unique position in the market by offering more than just products it offers an adventure.

DISCUSSION

6. Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings of the analysis in relation to the literature reviewed, focusing on how storytelling shapes brand identity, enhances consumer-brand relationships, and enables differentiation. By utilizing theoretical insights from Mills and John, Fog, Crespo et al., and others, this chapter evaluates Søstrene Grene's storytelling strategies and their implications for the brand's positioning in the Danish market. The discussion explores the balance between storytelling's emotional and functional dimensions, providing a nuanced understanding of its role as a strategic branding tool.

6.1 Storytelling as a Strategic Branding Tool

Søstrene Grene's storytelling approach exemplifies Mills and John's framework of plot, character, and purpose. The "Tiny Stories" campaign demonstrates how the brand structures its narratives to resolve tensions and foster consumer engagement. "*Every home tells its own story. The sisters now present this year's autumn collection 'Tiny Stories', which offers exclusive novelties and inspiration for decorating your home creatively and efficiently and fill it with personality – without breaking the bank.*" (Appendix 9.1)

The campaign aligns with contemporary home trends while encouraging consumers to see their living spaces as reflections of their individuality. This narrative structure resolves the tension between consumers' aspirations for creativity and the practical need for affordability, positioning Søstrene Grene as a brand that understands and fulfils these two needs. This approach reinforces Mills and John's assertion that storytelling serves as a strategic tool for shaping consumer perceptions and fostering emotional connections. Fog's emphasis on authenticity and consistency across touchpoints is also evident in Søstrene Grene's holistic storytelling. The brand's narratives seamlessly transition from digital platforms to physical stores, where classical music, curated displays, and a treasure-hunt atmosphere echo themes of hygge and discovery. This integrated approach builds credibility and trust, aligning with Fog's argument that effective storytelling must resonate across all brand interactions. Additionally, Søstrene Grene's ability to incorporate cultural relevance, particularly through its Scandinavian roots and the concept of hygge, further enhances the authenticity and relatability of its narratives, engaging a diverse audience.

6.2 Enhancing Consumer-Brand Relationships through Storytelling

Storytelling emerges as a key driver of consumer-brand relationships by fostering cognitive, emotional, and behavioural engagement. Crespo et al.'s (2023) framework, which highlights the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions of storytelling, offers valuable insights into Søstrene Grene's strategies. Cognitively, the brand's narratives enable consumers to align their self-concept with Søstrene Grene's values of creativity, sustainability, and affordability. Campaigns consistently emphasize these values, positioning the brand as a partner in consumers' aspirations for a more inspired and thoughtful lifestyle. Emotionally, Søstrene Grene's use of characters like Anna and Clara humanizes the brand, fostering intimacy and trust. These personas serve as relatable guides within the brand's narratives, evoking affective involvement and creating a sense of connection. For example, captions such as "Clara recommends this wonderful seat for a little rest" reinforce the sisters' roles as trusted influencesc, bridging the gap between the brand and its audience. This aligns with Crespo et al.'s (2023) argument that storytelling fosters emotional ties, which are critical for building loyalty. Furthermore, Lundqvist et al.'s focus on experiential and emotional value is reflected in Søstrene Grene's storytelling strategies. By emphasizing themes like hygge, joy, and discovery, the brand transcends functional benefits to create immersive experiences that resonate on a deeper level. This experiential focus not only strengthens consumer-brand relationships but also fosters long-term loyalty and advocacy.

6.3 Differentiation through Storytelling

In the competitive retail market, storytelling functions as a critical tool for differentiation. Søstrene Grene's narratives highlight values like creativity, affordability, and sustainability which set it apart from competitors focused solely on product features. Ghodeswar's (2008) conceptual model for building brand identity underscores the importance of authenticity and emotional appeal in creating a distinct and memorable brand. Aimé's (2023) perspective on the dynamic nature of storytelling further illuminates Søstrene Grene's approach. The brand's ability to adapt its narratives to evolving consumer preferences like the increasing demand for repurposing ensures its continued relevance. Seasonal storytelling refreshes, like the autumn collection's focus on individuality and creativity, keep the brand's identity vibrant and aligned with market trends. This adaptability not only reinforces differentiation but also positions Søstrene Grene as a forward-thinking and consumer-centric brand.

6.4 The Balance between Emotional and Functional Storytelling

A key strength of Søstrene Grene's storytelling lies in its ability to balance emotional and functional dimensions. While the brand's narratives evoke emotions tied to hygge, creativity, and joy, they are grounded in practical benefits such as affordability and functionality too. They have engrained this in their hosts of the brand, in the personality of each sister. As mentioned previously, Anna is more creative and aesthetic, and Clara is the practical and organised (Anna og Clara n.d). Chiu et al.'s (2012) argument that storytelling must align with product offerings to maintain credibility is evident in Søstrene Grene's campaigns (Chiu et al., 2012). For example, the "Tiny Stories" campaign integrates product features like innovative storage solutions and aesthetic design into narratives that inspire emotional connection. This alignment ensures that the brand's storytelling remains both authentic and impactful, fostering trust and reinforcing consumer loyalty.

CONCLUSION

7. **Conclusion 2-3 pages**

This thesis has explored how Søstrene Grene utilizes storytelling as a strategic branding tool to reflect its identity and values, resonate with its audience, and differentiate itself in the Danish market. By analysing the brand's marketing materials, particularly social media captions, and applying a thematic analysis guided by Mills and John's framework, the study has revealed several key insights.

First, Søstrene Grene's storytelling is deeply rooted in its Scandinavian heritage, with recurring themes of hygge, creativity, sustainability, and exploration. These themes are carefully woven into the brand's narratives, enabling it to communicate its values effectively. **Hygge** is used to evoke feelings of cosiness and **simplicity**, while creativity is highlighted through **DIY** projects and artistic inspiration. **Sustainability** is presented as a core value, reflecting the brand's commitment to responsible consumption. Together, these themes construct a cohesive narrative that reflects Søstrene Grene's identity as a brand that prioritizes both emotional and practical needs.

Secondly, Søstrene Grene's storytelling resonates strongly with Danish consumers by aligning with their cultural values and lifestyle preferences. The emphasis on hygge, simplicity, and sustainability taps into deeply rooted cultural ideals, fostering a sense of relatability and trust. By using personas like Anna and Clara, the brand creates a humanised and approachable identity that appeals to its audience. The use of emotional and cultural references ensures that the brand's narratives are not only engaging but also highly relevant to the Danish market.

Finally, storytelling contributes significantly to Søstrene Grene's ability to differentiate itself in a competitive retail landscape. By integrating storytelling across multiple touchpoints from social media to in-store experiences, the brand thereby creates a consistent and immersive experience that sets it apart from competitors. The narratives emphasize both emotional resonance and functional benefits, such as affordability and sustainability, enabling Søstrene Grene to appeal to a broad spectrum of consumers.

In conclusion, Søstrene Grene's storytelling strategies demonstrate the transformative potential of narrative-driven branding. By aligning its narratives with its values and cultural

identity, the brand fosters strong emotional connections, builds trust, and establishes a unique position in the market. This thesis highlights storytelling as a powerful tool for branding and offers valuable insights for other brands seeking to leverage narratives to enhance their identity, consumer relationships, and market differentiation.

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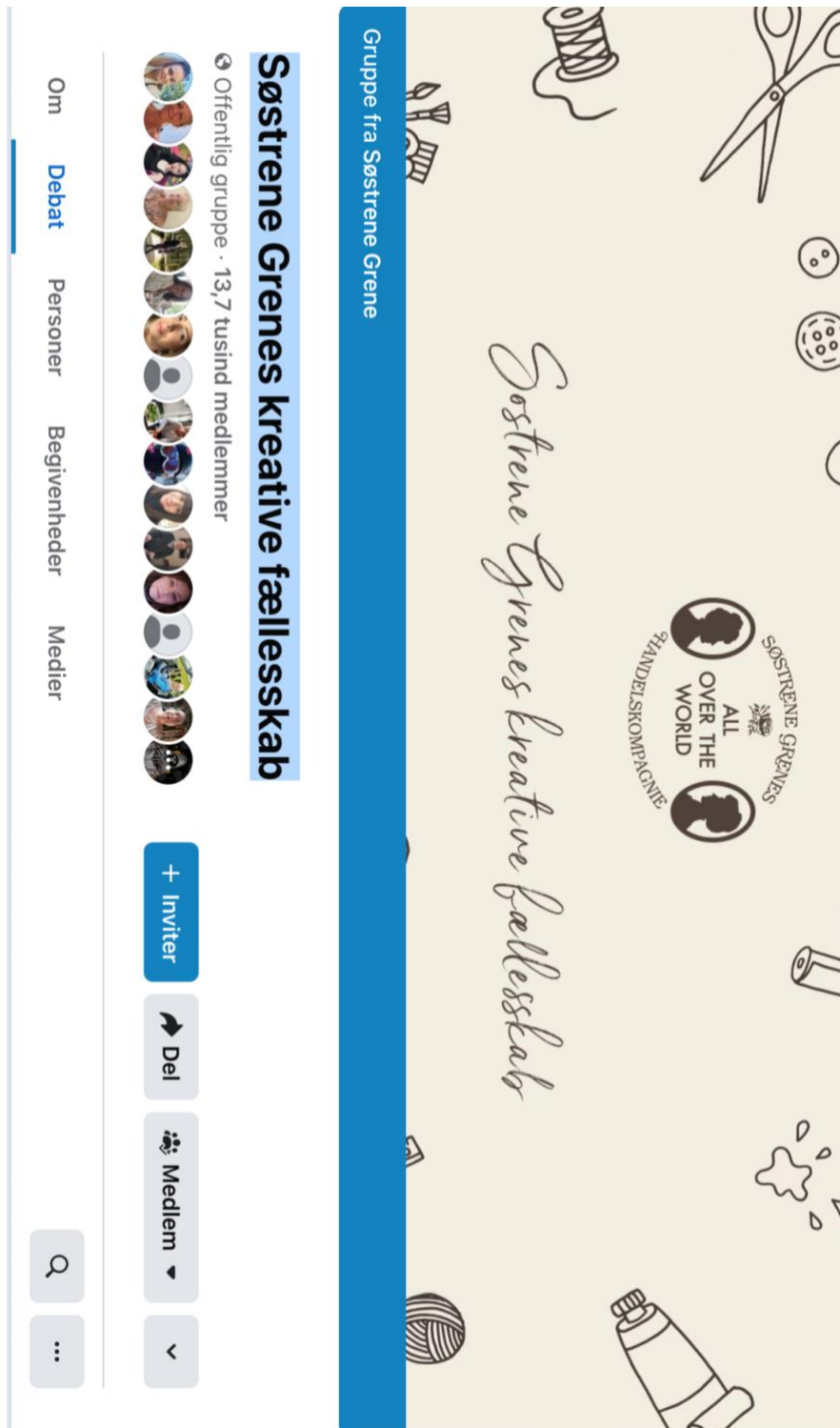
APPENDIX

9. Appendix

9.1 Data Spreadsheet for Content Analysis

This spreadsheet has been sent in as an attachment

9.2 Søstrene Grene's Creative Community

9.3 Pictures of Søstrene Grene In-store experience