CONSUMERS´ ONLINE AND OFFLINE SHOPPING BEHAVIOR

A research into Swedish consumers´ applied product attributes within and across online and offline channels.

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ABSTRACT

This research is conducted with the aim to explore how Swedish consumers evaluate garments within and across online and offline shopping channels and in specific; what product attributes consumers use to evaluate garments online and offline, whether consumers choose the same garments in an online and offline channel, what consumers’ online and offline channel choice motivations are and how consumers use product attributes when shopping across online and offline channels. In order to answer these questions, an experiment is conducted by making use of a simulation technique, in which a group of 13 Swedish females were asked to choose 3 garments in the retail laboratory of the University of Borås, functioning as a physical store environment, and from the online store www.ellos.se, functioning as an online environment. The participants were asked to choose from 19 tops that were identical in both the retail laboratory and the online shop. After the experiment, an in-depth interview was conducted with each participant by making use of a semi-structured questionnaire.

The research found that in order to evaluate garments online and offline, both intrinsic and extrinsic product attributes are applied. The mostly applied intrinsic product attributes are; print, color, material, natural fibers and fit. The mostly applied extrinsic product attributes are; spring/summer, simple, match with specific garment, wear on specific moment, something to have in wardrobe and the picture with the model. Even though the same product attributes were applied in both the online and offline channels (with exception of the product attribute picture with model) these product attributes were not perceived identically online and offline. This resulted in the product attributes existing in an online and offline form. The product attribute picture with model was found as an online specific product attribute, meaning that it was only applied within the online channel.

In general it cannot be concluded that consumers either do or do not choose identical garments online and offline as this was found to be highly dependent on the person and the product. Consumers that shopped online first and then offline however were found to choose slightly more identical garments, as they had been able to better visualize the garments within the offline environment after seeing it being displayed on a human model within the online environment.

Consumers use product attributes across online and offline channels and try to find whether the product attributes they applied in one channel correspond to those found in the other channel. The product attributes applied in the first channel thus form a benchmark to evaluate the product attributes in the latter channel. Consumers furthermore perform research shopping, where the online channel is used to perform research and the offline channel is used to perform purchase.

The motivations to choose for an online channel were found to be mostly liked to convenience driven by functional motivations, where the motivations to choose for an offline channel were found to be mostly linked to experience and driven by hedonic motivations.
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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................. II

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .......................................................................................... III

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................ VII

1. INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................... 1

1.1 Introduction ......................................................................................................... 1

1.2 Problem description ............................................................................................ 1

1.3 Purpose ................................................................................................................ 3

1.4 Research questions .............................................................................................. 3

1.5 Limitations .......................................................................................................... 3

1.6 Definitions .......................................................................................................... 4

1.7 Overview ............................................................................................................. 4

2. THEORY .................................................................................................................. 5

2.1 Product attributes ............................................................................................... 5

2.2 Value .................................................................................................................... 5

2.3 Apparel and fashion ............................................................................................ 6

2.4 Involvement ........................................................................................................ 7

2.5 The decision making process ............................................................................ 8

2.5.1 The information searching process ............................................................... 9

2.5.2 The alternative evaluation process ............................................................... 9

2.6 Online and offline shopping channels ................................................................. 10

2.6.1 Online and offline channel characteristics ............................................... 10

2.6.2 Shopping channel preference ...................................................................... 11

2.7 Summary ............................................................................................................ 12

3. METHOD ............................................................................................................... 13

3.1 Data collection method ...................................................................................... 13

3.2 The sampling unit .............................................................................................. 13

3.2.1 The sampling procedure .......................................................................... 14

3.2.1 The sample size .......................................................................................... 14

3.3 The test product ................................................................................................ 14

3.4 Set-up ................................................................................................................. 15

3.5 Procedure ........................................................................................................... 15

3.6 Questionnaire design ........................................................................................ 16
REFERENCES .................................................................................................................. 41
APPENDIX A: E-MAIL TO TEST PARTICIPANTS ............................................................ 50
APPENDIX B: CONFIRMATION E-MAIL TO TEST PARTICIPANTS ............................... 51
APPENDIX C: THE PROFILES OF THE PARTICIPANTS ............................................ 52
APPENDIX D: TEST-GARMENTS ................................................................................. 53
APPENDIX E: IMAGES OF TEST SET-UP ..................................................................... 54
APPENDIX F: QUESTIONNAIRE ............................................................................... 55
APPENDIX G: PRODUCT ATTRIBUTES ..................................................................... 56
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Number of identical garments chosen..........................................................20
Table 2 Style attributes.........................................................................................22
Table 3 Material attributes..................................................................................22
Table 4 Fit attributes............................................................................................23
Table 5 Product display attributes......................................................................25
Table 6 Connotative attributes............................................................................26
Table 7 Performance attributes...........................................................................27
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The fast changing fashion market requires companies to be flexible and adaptive (Chan and Chan, 2010) as the taste of consumers changes dynamically (Marufuzzaman and Ashan, 2009). Focusing on the right requirements of consumers could lead to improving the performance of the company (Saricam et al., 2012) and a company’s target group should be served by considering their favorite requirements and priorities (Sekozawa et al., 2011). Companies must make sure that they deliver on the values that their target consumers desire and it is thus desirable for a company to know what consumers want and how to deliver on those values (Sheth and Mittal, 2004).

Values represent the basic needs and goals that people use to guide their beliefs and evaluations of products and guide the decision making process (Kim, 2005). Product attributes are used as selection criteria to make a decision on a purchase and form the basis of evaluation (Zhang, 2002). Nevertheless, there is a lack in knowledge explaining what consumers find important with regards to apparel buying decisions, and in specific how they make trade-offs between various product attributes when making apparel purchasing decisions (North, 2003).

From the point of view of a company, product attributes are important because they are recognized as an opportunity to set a brand apart from competition (Akpoyomare et al., 2012). Product attributes are furthermore used for the development of new products and positioning strategy and subsequently advertising strategies can promote specific product attributes to distinguish themselves from competition (Akpoyomare et al., 2012). An understanding of how consumers make purchase decisions and what they value in products provides companies of information that they can use to develop attributes that represent the consumers’ expectations (Oyatoye, 2011). Consumers evaluate products based on attributes that are important for them, that can furthermore go beyond physical product features as consumers often link attributes to the consequence of buying or using a product (Akpoyomare et al., 2012).

Until now, little attempt has been made to establish a list of attributes that are considered by consumers during the purchase and usage of apparel and to find apparel attributes, studies where consumers can discuss product features important to them during evaluation are needed (Abraham, 1992). It is thus important to identify the product attributes in the minds of the consumers and find influential attributes to attract more consumers (Lee and Lee, 2006).

1.2 Problem description

Within the fashion industry different types of channels have been established (Lee and Lee, 2006). Besides the traditional retail channel, the online channel has
emerged and grows substantially; the amount of online retail consumers in the 17 European nations is estimated to grow from 275 million to 303 million in 2016 and online retail sales are estimated to grow with 11% a year from 2012 to 2017 (Forrester research, 2012).

The generic model of consumer decision making exists of five stages, namely need recognition, search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase and post-purchase (Dewey, 1910). With the emergence of the online channel in addition to the traditional channel, consumers can perform the decision making process in both channels and across these channels. For example, the search and evaluation phases do not have to be executed in one channel (Chatterjee, 2010) since a consumer can perform the search stage online and perform the purchase stage in a physical store and vice versa (Chatterjee, 2010). Lenvin et al. (2005), for example, found that consumers prefer performing the search stage online, and the purchase stage offline. According to the Consumer Barometer (2013) most Swedish consumers do research in the channel where they purchase.

The consumer decision making process is considered a complex process (Zhang, 2002). Schiffman et al. (1991) state that the extent of decision making is influenced by how well established the consumers’ criteria for selection are. These criteria for selection are evaluated in the evaluation stage, which is the process where a choice alternative is evaluated and selected in order to meet the consumers’ needs (Engel et al., 1993). Within this stage the consumer needs to decide which choice alternatives to consider and what criteria to use to evaluate each brand (Schiffman et al., 1991) and the consumer then has use the criteria to judge the performance of the considered alternatives (Engel et al., 1993). As a result of a growing economy and increasing product variety and complexity, consumers have to choose among products differing in attributes (Sun, 2011). Mowen (1993) refers to product attributes as “the elements or features that an object may or may not possess.” Wilkie and Pessemier (1973) define product attributes as “consumers’ subjective notions of features possessed by a product”.

Consumers assess the product in a process in which the product information is identified, evaluated and integrated, based on multiple attributes (Abraham, 1992) and therefore the topic product attributes has received considerable attention in previous studies. Martin (1971) and Szybillo and Jacoby (1974) for example found attributes such as price, store image, fiber content, department of store and salesgirl evaluation. Hansen (1969) found that when studying attributes, not only tangible attributes should be considered, but also a reflection of consumers’ perceptions should be given. After all, product attributes are not only the physical properties of a product (Wu, 1988), but instead they include criteria such as style, benefit or value as well, that are subjective (Grapetine, 1995; Jamal and Goode, 2001). Later studies have therefore also focused on product attributes such as fit, comfort, style, brand, country of origin, ethics, physiological comfort, usefulness, suitability to individual
preference and care (Abraham-Murali and Littrell, 1995; Jegethesan et al., 2012; Skgkao, 1994; Zhang et al., 2002).

Earlier studies found that the products that consumers feel they need to touch or try on are products that require a presence or at least purchase within an offline channel (Chiang and Dholskia, 2003; Lynch et al., 2001). Levin et al. (2003) found that being able to personally encounter a product prior to purchase is an underlying factor of the preference for an offline shopping method for products such as clothing. However, textile and clothing have found the biggest acceptance in online retail and no branch of the industry is affected by the internet as retail sales have (Heinemann and Schwarzl, 2010). Apparel and accessories is the category that grows fastest, with a 16.4% growth through 2016 compared to 13.3% growth for all e-retail (eMarketer, 2012).

An online channel has distinct characteristics from a physical channel (Wang et al., 2013). For example, the absence of the experience of examining the physical product within an online channel (Alba et al. 1997). The previously done studies to product attributes by Abraham-Murali and Littrell (1995), Jegethesan et al. (2012), Martin (1971), Skgkao (1994), Szybillo and Jacoby (1974), Zhang et al. (2002) do not focus on product attributes evaluated within and/or across online and offline channels. It is thus unknown how products are evaluated in terms of product attributes in various channels. This study seeks to find product attributes in both an online and offline channel.

**1.3 Purpose**
This research aims to explore what product attributes Swedish consumers apply to evaluate garments within and across online and offline shopping channels.

**1.4 Research questions**
Main question: How do Swedish consumers evaluate garments within and across online and offline shopping channels?

- What product attributes do consumers use to evaluate garments online and offline?
- Do consumers choose the same garments in an online and offline channel?
- What are consumers’ online and offline channel choice motivations?
- How do consumers use product attributes when shopping across online and offline channels?

**1.5 Limitations**
- This research is limited to the online and offline shopping channels.
- This research focuses on consumer's evaluation of apparel by making use of product attributes.
- This research focuses on the information search and alternatives evaluation stages of the decision making process.
This research focuses on value and involvement with regards to the decision making process.

1.6 Definitions
- Clothing: garments collectively; raiment, clothes, apparel, covering (Craik, 2009).
- Fashion: a prevailing custom or style or dress, etiquette, procedure; a shared and internalized sense of the modish style of the time (Craik, 2009).
- Offline: not controlled by or directly connected to a computer or internet (Oxford Dictionaries, 2014).
- Online: available on or performed using the internet or other computer network (Oxford Dictionaries, 2014).
- Product attributes: the elements or features that an object may or may not posses (Mowen, 1993).
- Style: a combination of silhouette, construction, fabric and details that make the performance of an outfit distinctive (Craik, 2009).

Within this report the terms apparel, clothing and garment are used interchangeably.

1.7 Overview
This report first provides a theoretical framework in chapter 2 that includes the topics; product attributes, value, apparel and fashion, involvement, the decision making process and online and offline shopping channels. Then the method in chapter 3 provides insights on the data collection method, the sampling procedure and size, the test product and set-up, the procedure, the questionnaire design, the data analysis method and ethical considerations. The outcomes of the research are then analyzed in chapter 4 of which conclusions are drawn in chapter 5. Chapter 5 furthermore includes the contribution of this research, the assessment of the methodology and at last gives limitations and grounds for future research.
2. THEORY

The following chapter provides a theoretical framework where attention is given to the topics; product attributes, value, apparel and fashion, involvement, the decision making process and online and offline shopping channels. At last a summary is given.

2.1 Product attributes

Product attributes play an important role in the decision making process, because consumers evaluate and compare competitive products based on its attributes and thus, the outcome of a purchase decision is determined by attributes (Akpoyomare et al., 2012). A product is characterized by a set of attributes (Koufaris, 2002) and a product can have one, two or more attributes (Yan and Sengupta, 2011). In general, consumers can use up to six products attributes (Engel et al., 1995) but the more important the consumer is considering the purchase to be, and the more experience he/she has with the product category, the more product attributes are used (Rothschild and Houston, 1977).

Product attributes have previously been classified into intrinsic and extrinsic categories (Hatch and Roberts, 1985; Jacoby et al., 1971; Szybillo and Jacoby, 1974; Wheatley et al., 1981). Intrinsic product attributes cannot be changed or manipulated without also changing the product’s physical characteristics and extrinsic product attributes are not part of the physical product but instead are applied by the retailer or manufacturer (Eckman et al., 1990). O’Neal (1990) has distinguished five product attribute dimensions related to apparel quality, that are; physical, performance, affective, aesthetic and connotative. The physical dimension refers to clothing features, the performance dimension refers to use attributes, the affective dimension relates to subjective, emotional attributes, the aesthetic dimension refers to factors contributing to the perception of beauty and the connotative dimension includes extrinsic properties, such as brand and price (O’Neal, 1990).

An important attribute is one that offers an important benefit in order to satisfy the consumers needs (Aaker et al., 1991). The most salient attributes however are not necessarily the most important ones to consumers, but maybe salient because the consumer is more familiar to those attributes (Kotler, 2002). Consumers focus on product attributes that are most important and relevant to them when they decide on a purchase (Kotler, 2002) and these are referred to as determinant attributes (Alpert, 1971).

2.2 Value

Values represent the basic needs and goals that people use to guide their beliefs and evaluations of products (Kim, 2005). They thus serve to achieve consumption goals and guide the decision making process (Kim, 2005). They furthermore guide a
person's attitude towards a product and the importance of the product to the person (Kim, 2005). Product attributes are the reflections of consumers' underlying values and attitudes (Eckman, 1990).

Product attributes are not only the physical properties of a product (Wu, 1988), but instead they also include intangible criteria such as value. Hollbrook (1998) refers to consumer value as an experience, meaning that the consumer value lies in the consumption experience that is derived from the acquired product. This argument originates from the belief that all products provide a service by creating experiences satisfying needs or wants (Morris, 1941) and people wanting products because of the experience they hope the products will bring (Abbott, 1955). Consumers thus often link attributes to the consequences that purchasing or consuming products brings (Akpoyomare et al., 2012). An example is aesthetics value, which is a special form of consumer value, occurring in everyday objects, through experience of beauty (Hollbrook, 1998). Related to fashion products, aesthetic value is derived from a consumers’ perception that meets a set of utilitarian and social needs (Hollbrook, 1998). For everyday objects, such as clothing, aesthetic aspects are becoming more important for differentiation (Hollbrook, 1998). Perceiving an aesthetic object is an important experience, and even though beauty on itself doesn't have a practical purpose, it is important as it meets a so called fundamental need of mind (Santayana, 1955). Aesthetic value meets needs that include self-realization, personal enrichment and cognitive complexity (Hollbrook, 1998). The aesthetic function of a fashion object is to make the consumer more attractive and enables others to make references about the characteristics of the person wearing it (Hollbrook, 1998). Also, apparel is used to express and communicate values to others (Kaiser, 1997). The belief that consumers appreciate fashion for non practical reasons indicates that the aesthetic value of fashion products is extrinsic (Morganosky, 1987).

2.3 Apparel and fashion

The fashion consumption activity provides the consumer of value that is symbolic, immaterial and hedonistic and goes beyond the consumer's need that is based on the benefits that apparel can offer (Dobers and Strannegard, 2005). With their clothing, consumers can make social identity statements (McIntyre and Miller, 1992). However, where clothes and apparel products have similar utilitarian value in the sense of functionality (Naderi, 2013), fashion products have a hedonistic value, referring to fashion products being used for the emotional value that they provide (Sheth and Mittal, 2004). Fashion goes beyond solely protecting but functions as a self expression, (Gwozdz et al., 2013) or symbolic product (Niinimakì, 2010). Clothing is argued to differ from fashion, as clothing is fulfilling physical needs for protection and functionality where fashion expresses individual personality by marks, symbols, brands and status items; fashion melts together with emotional needs (Gwozdz et al., 2013). The consumption of fashion is therefore
defined as “the use of clothing for purposes that go beyond utilitarian needs” (Gwozdz et al., 2013).

Apparel is a high body involving product of which the consumption is related to fit (Rosa et al., 2006). Body image is a person's mental picture of their bodies (Fallon, 1990) and has been found to be associated with the consumption of apparel (e.g., Cash and Cash, 1982; Solomon and Douglas, 1985). Consumers with high body satisfaction are found to use clothes more to express their individuality where consumers with low body satisfaction are more interested in clothes that provide camouflage (Kwon and Parham, 1994). Tiggemann and Lacey (2009) define five different functions of clothing which are;

- Fashion; fashionable clothes
- Camouflage; camouflaging clothes
- Assurance; clothes that make the consumer feel more sure
- Individuality; clothes that make consumers distinctive
- Comfort; comfortable clothes

Apparel product attributes such as care and comfort that are connected to clothing (Zhang et al., 2002; Jegethesan et al., 2012; Skgkao, 1994; Abraham-Murali and Littrell, 1995) can only be evaluated until usage of the product, implying that clothing is an experience product, which refers to products of which attributes cannot be known until the product is purchased and used (Wang et al., 2012). Apparel being an experience good is also found by Ekelund et al (1995) arguing that its quality can only be fully determined after purchase.

2.4 Involvement

Personal values or needs that are motivators of consumers’ interest in products have been linked to involvement (DeBruicker, 1979; Lastovicka and Gardner, 1979; Li, 1997; Tyebjee, 1979). Involvement is a motivation factor shaping the decision making process and is furthermore found to, amongst other factors, affect the product attributes that are evaluated by consumers (Engel et al., 1993). Involvement is defined by Zaichkowsky (1985, pp. 342) as “a person’s perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests.” In this sense values play an important role in forming involvement with products (Kim, 2005). It is the link between values, the product and the product-related attitude that influence a person’s level of involvement (Laaksonen, 1994). Rothschild (1979) defines involvement as “a motivational state of arousal and interest, evoked by external factors (e.g. situation, the product, the communications) and internal factors (e.g. ego, central values).” A consumer will thus become more involved when the product is perceived as important, meeting a consumer's needs, goals and values (Engel et al, 1993).

Fashion clothing is regarded as a high-involvement product category (O’Cass, 2004) and to indicate the interest of apparel products, the term “fashion involvement” is
applied (Kim, 2005). Fashion involvement is defined by O’Cass (2000, p.870) as “the extent to which a consumer views the related fashion activities as a central part of their life” (Gwozdz et al., 2013). Michaelidou and Dibb (2006) developed a “Involvement with Clothes” scale that includes the dimensions hedonism, importance, self-expression, interest and sign value;

- **Hedonism**; buying clothes gives pleasure and enjoyment
- **Importance**; clothes are important to me
- **Self-expression**; clothes express who I am and are part of my self-image
- **Interest**; clothing interests me a lot, not at all, I am indifferent
- **Sign-value**; clothes do not reflect who I am

Kapferer and Laurent (1985) found that self-identity might trigger product involvement across product categories. The self is defined by Dittmar (2008) as something that a person actively creates, and is thus partially created through consumption. The self exists in different forms, namely the actual or current self, which is how a person perceives himself, the ideal self, which represents the qualities that an individual would like to possess, but doesn’t and the social self is the perception of the individual of how others see him (Banister and Hogg, 2007).

Identity is a form of social representation mediating the relationship with the individual and the social world (Chryssochoou, 2003). In order to develop and maintain their identities, consumers use brands (Philips, 2003). For that reason, the symbolic meanings that fashion products hold play an important role in the process of identity construction and maintenance (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998; Banister and Hogg, 2007).

### 2.5 The decision making process

A decision is the selection of an option from two or more alternatives, so in order for a person to make a decision, a choice of alternatives needs to be available (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007). The decision making process consists of five stages that are need recognition, search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase and post-purchase (Peter and Olson, 1994). The classification of the decision making process in stages is a rational approach to decision making (Punj and Srinivasan, 1992; D’Astous et al., 1989). This rational approach refers to the weighing and evaluation of product attributes (Solomon, 1996; Engel et al., 1995). It is found however that during decision making, consumers are involved in non-conscious behavior, referring that decision making can be a subconscious act (Bozinoff, 1982). Consumer decision making does not only involve what products do but also what they mean to consumers and because consumers are driven by emotional needs, they are limited in the options they are willing to consider (Bettman, 1993; Schiffman and Kanuk, 2000). It should be taken into account that consumers may have limited knowledge and skills, and certain values could dominate goals and decisions (Erasmus et al., 2001).
2.5.1 The information searching process
The consumers’ knowledge about fashion products becomes outdated quickly because of the dynamic nature of fashion (Frings, 2005). After the first step of the decision making process, the problem recognition, the consumer enters the search stage (Dewey, 1910) where information is required in order to satisfy a need (Brennan and Gallagher, 2002; Retief and De Klerk, 2003; Solomon and Rabolt, 2004). The search for information begins with the memory of the consumer, or internal search, as consumers have stored information through previous experiences (Backwell et al., 2006; Baron et al., 2006; Cant et al., 2006; Hoyer and MacInnis, 2007; Solomon and Rabolt, 2004). It is found that internal search is applied often when the quality of products is derived from extrinsic product attributes (Hoyer and MacInnis, 2007). The consumers that have little experience of a fashion product rely on the extrinsic product attributes of the products in order to evaluate the quality (DeKlerk and Lubbe, 2004). The information search however can be a combination of internal search and external search (Park and Stoel, 2005; Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007), in which environmental influences are used to obtain information (Cant et al., 2006). A consumer might apply less external search when the previous experience is significant (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007) but if the internal search is found unsatisfactory, the consumer might turn to external search (Hoyer and MacInnis, 2007; Rousseau, 2007). The amount of information search applied by consumers can vary because of several factors, such as the knowledge about the product, the perceived risk, the availability of product alternatives, available time, availability of products and product attributes (Taylor and Cosenza, 2002).

Not all consumer decision making require the same amount of information search; this depends on the level of decision making (Sheth and Mittal, 2004). Extensive (or extended) problem solving occurs when the search is extensive, for example for purchases that are not made before or that involve high risk of making a wrong decision (Sheth and Mittal, 2004). High involvement purchases, such as fashion products, are considered important purchases for a consumer and thus require extensive problem solving (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007). It is furthermore found that consumers use more cognitive effort to important purchases (Erasmus et al., 2001) even though the information processing is both cognitive and emotional (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2000; Loffman, 1991; D’Astous et al., 1989). Where cognitive information processing refers to planning and goal directed behavior, emotional information processing refers to evaluating product alternatives within more abstract parameters (Erasmus et al., 2001).

2.5.2 The alternative evaluation process
From the information search stage, the consumer enters the alternative evaluation stage, where is decided what criteria to use to perform evaluation (Schiffman et al., 1991). The evaluation of alternatives stage of the consumer decision making process exists of consumer decision strategies that are the procedures that consumers use to
make choices and provide guidelines that make the decision process less burdensome (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007). Consumer decision strategies can be based on compensatory decision rules, where a product is evaluated in terms of attributes that are weighted and can balance out a negative evaluation on another attribute (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007). A consumer decision strategy can also be based on non-compensatory rules, where a minimum acceptable level is selected for each attribute (conjunctive rule), or for all attributes that meet or exceed the minimum acceptable level of any attribute (disjunctive rule) or by ranking the attributes in terms of relevance or importance (lexicographic rule) (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007).

2.6 Online and offline shopping channels
In order to sell fashion products to consumers, the online and offline channel are believed to have similar attributes, such as benefit and cost (Kim et al., 2008) but the online channel must respect the characteristics that the internet brings (Lee and Lee, 2007). While selling the same physical product, through the online and offline channels, different value propositions can be created and delivered (Chatterjee, 2010). Heinemann and Schwarzl (2010) distinguish the channel attributes entertainment, social interaction, safety, points of contact, selection, information possibilities and fulfillment when comparing the online and offline channels.

2.6.1 Online and offline channel characteristics
In comparison to the offline channel, the online channel affects all the consumer decision making stages (Sheth and Mittal, 2004). For example, the information search process online differs with the information search process within a traditional channel, as consumers are usually limited to a narrow evoked set in a traditional store, but as the internet increases the ease of accessing information (Sheth and Mittal, 2004). The interactive nature of the internet furthermore improves the availability of product information, makes attribute comparisons possible and therefore increases the online shopping efficiency (Alba et al., 1997). The internet increases search benefits with a broader amount of product alternatives available for little extra search cost (Bakos, 1991). Variety was also found by Lee and Lee (2007) as online channel attribute. In addition, by eliminating the consumers’ travel to and from a shop, the convenience of online shopping refers to both where and when a consumer can shop (Childers et al., 2001). Another benefit of the internet in the decision making process is the interactivity and flexibility of the channel to access and control product information and its 24 hour availability that is accessible through more than one location (Alba et al., 1997; Hoffman and Novak, 1996; Lee and Lee, 2007). Peterson and Merino (2003) mention the internet to replace many traditional search methods. Consumers may focus less on brand information and instead focus on the attributes of their product searching goal (Lenvin et al., 2005).
The attributes of the offline channel have been investigated by Kolsaker and Galbraith (2000), Kunz (1997) and Taylor and Cosenza (2000) who found attributes such as responsiveness, empathy, assurance, liability, control, quality, variety, customer service, price, ease movement and ease of return. But the main difference between the internet and a physical shopping channel is found to be the absence of the store experience and possibility to physically examine a product (Alba et al., 1997). Not being able to physically examine a product makes it impossible to examine tactile product attributes (for example texture) that according to Childers et al. (2000) is considered critical. Clothes are found to have the highest return rate of all the items that are purchased online and the return rate of products bought online is higher than the return rate of products bought within a physical store (Capital Partners, 2013). The online channel has therefore evolved to compensate for the lack of physical contact with a garment (Childers et al., 2001) in the form of product virtualization technologies, such as 3-D rotation views and Virtual Try-on technologies (Kim, 2007). It is however found that consumers perceive more entertainment than usefulness when using product virtualization technologies (Kim, 2007).

2.6.2 Shopping channel preference

Shopping within an online and traditional channel is influenced by functional and hedonic motivations (Childers et al., 2001), where functional motives refer to making the right choice and hedonic motives refer to enjoying the shopping process (Babin et al., 1994). Consumers that have functional motivations are more concerned with buying in an efficient and timely way to achieve their goals with a least amount of effort, but consumers that have hedonic motivations are concerned with the entertainment and enjoyment of shopping (Kim and Forsythe, 2007). The consumers that shop for apparel have both functional and hedonic motivations for shopping (Kim and Forsythe, 2007).

According to Huang and Oppewal (2006) consumers’ shopping channel preference is affected by four situational factors, namely delivery charge, time availability, travel time to the store and trip purpose. Lenvin et al. (2005) found that consumers’ preferences for shopping online or offline for different products is dependent on the channel in which consumers feel they can evaluate the attributes best. Thus the extent to which the important attributes are perceived to be better delivered online or offline decides whether products are evaluated online or offline (Lenvin et al., 2005). Furthermore Neslin et al. (2006) found that previous experience and assortment factors are determinants of channel usage. Sales could shift from one channel to another, when the other channel provides the consumers of features that are more appealing, for example time savings (Alba et al., 1997). It is thus the attributes that are connected to the retail channel can make consumers switch channels (Paulins and Geistfeld, 2003; Wilde et al., 2004). According to Baal and Dac (2005), 20 percent of consumers also switch retailers when they switch channels during the search and evaluation phases. Especially within the online channel,
consumers can move easily from one online store to another, as the costs of switching are low (Sheth and Mittal, 2004).

The perceived advantage of one channel over the other is referred to as attribute advantage by Verhoef et al. (2007) who found that the internet has an attribute advantage over a store for the search stage, but the store has an attribute advantage over the internet for the purchase stage. Even though the majority of consumers prefer to buy offline, the internet is used for information search with regards to product prices and features (Lenvin et al., 2005; Mendelsohn et al., 2006). The phenomenon of doing research online and purchasing offline is called research shopping by Verhoef et al. (2007).

According to Neslin et al. (2006), the online and offline channels generate a substitution effect, which is a negative influence of the one channel to the other, while the performance of the latter channel decreases. To understand this substitution effect, evidence is collected from the perspective of product attributes by Wang (2013). The study found that the choice of consumers for a traditional channel in the search stage has a negative influence on the choice of an online channel for a purchase. Furthermore Wang (2012) found that the online channel negatively affects the traditional channel, because of the difficulty for consumers to acquire product information within a physical store. When channels are integrated however, it gets easy for the consumer to choose the most convenient channel (Blattberg et al., 2008). Furthermore, consumers who buy from two channels, buy more than the customers who buy from only either one of those channels (Blattberg et al., 2008). Multichannel shoppers thus buy higher volumes (Neslin et al., 2006).

2.7 Summary

The decision making process is a process in which consumers choose among two or more alternatives (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007). The decision making process exists of five generic stages (Dewey, 1910), but the search and evaluation stages can be performed in an online or offline channel and across those two channels (Chatterjee, 2010). In the evaluation stage, consumers evaluate and compare competitive products by making use of product attributes (Akpoyomare, 2012). Product attributes are elements or features that an object may or may not possess (Mowen, 1993) or consumer’s subjective notions of product features (Wilkie and Pessmier, 1973). The decision making process is shaped by involvement, which is a person's perceived relevance of an object (Zaichkowsky, 1985). Values play an important role in forming involvement (Kim, 2005) as they represent a person's basic needs and goals. They thus also guide the decision making process (Kim, 2005). Involvement, as being a person's perceived relevance of an object (Zaichkowsky, 1985), affects the product attributes that are applied by consumers (Engel et al., 199). The product attributes that are used to evaluate and compare products are therefore representations of consumers’ underlying values and attitudes (Jenkins and Dickey, 1976).
3. METHOD

3.1 Data collection method
As data collection method an experiment is conducted, which is an observation under controlled options (Beckmann and Elliott, 2001), in which a group of participants is asked to choose a set of garments in both an online and offline store environment. For the research a simulation technique is applied, meaning that a real-world condition is created within a laboratory to study the behavior of consumers and to forecast how consumers would behave in the real marketplace (Sheth and Mittal, 2004). Even though simulation is referred to as a quantitative form of an experimental method, this research uses simulation as qualitative research technique, because this research tries to extract meaning from the data and the focus of the research is texts and words opposed to numbers that are retrieved in quantitative research (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011).

Denzin and Lincoln (2011, pp. 3) offer a generic definition of qualitative research:

“Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.”

This research applies an inductive approach to using theory, meaning that it aims to generate theory from the findings. The experiment is combined with in-depth interviews as this method can be used in conjunction with other methods to gain exploratory findings to generate theory (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). In-depth interviews are conversations between researcher and respondent requiring active asking and listening and are a way of gaining understanding and information from persons on a specific topic (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). In-depth interviewing is in this case found suitable as there is a specific topic to focus on and to gain information about from the participants. Furthermore, quantitative interviews consist of standardized questions to find standardized data (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011) but qualitative interviews instead bring knowledge that is “contextual, linguistic, narrative and pragmatic” (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 18) which is what is desired within this research.

3.2 The sampling unit
According to Zhang (2002) consumer behavior is influenced by social environment. Swedish consumers may thus differ from consumers in other countries with regards to product attributes applied to choose garments. For that reason, the sample is conducted among Swedish participants only, meaning participants with the Swedish
nationality that have spend at least a continuous form of residency in Sweden for at least five years (Migrationsverket, 2014).

Gender is found as an important factor affecting online shopping behavior by Hasan, (2010) that examined gender differences across three attitudinal components and found a gender difference on the value of utility of online shopping. A study by Gwozdz et al., (2013) found that women buy on average more often than men and thus may be able to provide more useful insights in shopping behavior. This study is therefore limited to female participants.

Assael (2005) found that heavy users of the internet are three times more likely to use internet to gather information on clothing than other internet users and 90% more likely to buy clothing online. According to the Statistiska Centralbyrån (CBS), more than 80% of Swedish women in the age group of 16-54 use the internet every day, or almost every day. The sample is therefore women between the age of 16 and 54 years.

3.2.1 The sampling procedure
In order to collect the sample, a convenience sampling method is applied as the most accessible population members are selected (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007). The participants either signed up for the test on own initiative through the website of the Swedish Institute for Innovative Retailing (SIIR), www.siir.se or were approached by SIIR to participate in the test after having signed up earlier. After the participants agreed to participate, a time and date was set with them through e-mail (see appendix A). The participants were then sent a confirmation by e-mail with their assigned time and location (see appendix B).

3.2.1 The sample size
In total, 13 participants were found willing to participate in the experiment. The sample is thus 13 Swedish females between the age of 16 and 54. This sample is found appropriate because qualitative research often contains small sample sizes, which means that the findings cannot be generalized to larger populations but are mostly used to get new ideas that can be further investigated in larger and more comprehensive studies (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007).

The profiles of the participants are presented in appendix C.

3.3 The test product
As a stimuli in this research, physical and virtual products are used, as previous research found that accuracy suffers when the participants have to imagine garments and that participants must touch apparel products in order to be able to evaluate them realistically (Eckman et al., 1990).

A research of Kim (2008) exploring the domain of concerns with fit and size of garments shows that lower body garments (jeans and pants) were mentioned most often by interviewees in concerns of garment dimensions not fitting the body,
related to specific parts of the bodies. For this reason the choice is made to use upper body garments as test products.

In total, 19 upper body garments of Ellos’ private label are used as test-garments in the experiment (appendix D). The sizes of the garments used in the experiment are small to medium or size 38-40 in order to display garments in the physical store that are identical or at least comparable to the garment worn by the model on the online shop. The sizes of the garments used in the experiment are hidden to not influence those participants that do not carry the size that is used in the experiment.

During the experiment, the garments that were personally selected by the participants were used as stimuli.

### 3.4 Set-up

In order to simulate an offline shopping environment, the experiment is performed in the retail laboratory at the Swedish school of Textiles, which is part of the Swedish Institute for Innovative Retailing (SIIR). SIIR is a research and development program of the University of Borås, aiming to deliver research resources and a research environment to the field of retailing (SIIR, 2014).

To simulate the online shopping environment, the online shop of a large Swedish online retailer is reconstructed. For the experiment the 19 test-products are demonstrated physically in the offline, and virtually in the online store environments. In order to find various product attributes, the group of participants is asked to choose 3 garments that they would choose, or would be most likely to choose when they go shopping. 7 respondents shopped online first and then offline. 6 participants shopped offline first and then online.

After the participants had chosen the garments, the garments where compared in order to see whether or not the participants had chosen the same, or different garments online and offline in order to find answers to the question:

- Do consumers choose the same garments within an online and offline channel?

Then, an in-depth interview was conducted with each participant. Research has pointed out that snap judgments (quickly made decisions) can be more accurate than judgments that are resulting from thought (Kardes et al., 2010). The participants are therefore asked to choose garments without motivating their decisions and are interviewed afterwards.

### 3.5 Procedure

Within the offline environment, the test-garments were presented on clothing hangers on a clothing rack of which the participants were asked to take out 3 garments. The participants were not required to try the garments on, if desired they were allowed to make use of a mirror. Since the offline environment was simulated in the retail laboratory of SIIR, visual merchandising techniques as they may occur
within a physical store were limited to store atmospherics (sight, scent and touch appeal) and store theatrics (in this case a mannequin) (Manganari et al., 2009).

In order to perform the testing in the online environment, participants made use of a computer where they were landed directly on the test-page of the online store where the 19 test-products were demonstrated. In order to pick 3 garments, participants were able to make use of all means available on the online shop, such as seeing the garment on a human model, make use of zoom functions and see a catwalk video. The participants were asked to place the 3 chosen items in the shopping bag. Within the online store environment the current visual merchandising techniques, as occurring on the online shop, were applied.

The visual merchandising conditions, in their forms present in both channels, were identical for each participant.

Prior to shopping in one channel, the participants were not told they were to shop in another channel afterwards and in neither of the environments were the participants exposed to garments other than the test-garments. The garments picked by the participants were visible during the interview. The participants were not given a time limit, meaning that they got to use as much time as they felt necessary.

Images of the retail laboratory and the test set-up are attached (Appendix E).

### 3.6 Questionnaire design

Prior to the testing, a pilot study is conducted in order to tackle possible bottlenecks. In the pilot study it was found that usage of the vocabulary, “product attributes” and “offline”, were too vague and complex terms. Instead of using the word product attributes, the participants were asked why they choose the specific garments, as consumers evaluate and compare products based on attributes (Akpoyomare et al., 2012) and product attributes represent the underlying values and attitudes (Jenkins and Dickey, 1976). Instead of using the word offline, the words “in a physical store” were used. No additional changes were required. The questionnaire was developed and executed in English. The testing took place over 3 days and was done with one participant at the time, during the maximum time span of an hour of which the in-depth interview accounted for approximately 20 minutes. The interviews were filmed and then documented in the form of transcripts. Due to the large volume of the transcripts, they are not attached to this document but will be provided upon request.

The choice was made to apply a semi-structured questionnaire design, meaning that the interviews relied on a set of questions to guide the conversation, but the participants were allowed to talk about their interests and what is important for them so new topics could be explored (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011).
The questionnaire consists of three parts: the first part covers demographic information, the second part focuses on product attributes and the third part focuses on online and offline shopping. The questions that are addressed are the following:

- What product attributes do consumers use to evaluate garments online and offline?
- What are consumers’ online and offline channel choice motivations?
- How do consumers use product attributes when shopping across online and offline channels?

Research by Shim et al. (2001) found that consumers that have a positive attitude towards online shopping are more likely to search and purchase online, and a higher number of experiences with buying online results in higher search and purchase intentions online. For this reason, participants were asked whether they ever buy clothes online and how often they buy clothes online. Whether or not the participants had ever bought from Ellos was asked in order to find whether participants could be familiar with the brand of the test-garments used in the experiment. Furthermore participants were asked about their age and to find experience with fashion due to education or employment, they were asked whether or not they have studied and/or worked within the fashion industry. In order to gain this information, the interview started by asking the following questions:

- How old are you?
- Do you (or have you) either studied, worked or both within the fashion industry?
- Have you ever bought clothes online?
- How often do you buy clothes online?
- Have you ever bought clothes from www.ellos.se?

Instead of making use of preselected criteria (with exception for the product attribute price) the choice is made to ask questions allowing free response, because usage of preselected criteria was found to reflect the researchers’ judgment about what criteria are important to consumers (Webb et al., 1966) and predetermined criteria may increase the responses based on social desirability instead of consumers’ actually believe (Eckman et al., 1990). Participants therefore identified their own criteria for evaluating garments. As the product attribute price is a re-occurring product attributes in many previous studies (for example Jegethesan et al., 2012; Martin, 1971 and Szybilio and Jacoby, 1974) a separate question is added mentioning this product attribute. In order to find what product attributes consumers use to evaluate fashion products online and offline, the following questions were asked:

- Why did you choose these garments?
- Would you have bought any of the items? If yes which ones, why? If not, why not?
- Have you considered the prices of the garments?
In order to get information about the usage of product attributes across online and offline channels, the following questions were asked;

- Have you ever seen any of the items before? Do you own any of the items? Did that affect your choice?
- Did you notice that the test-garments in both the online shop and the rack are the exact same?
- Are you aware that you chose X of the same garments?
- Did you recognize the garment chosen online from the rack and vice versa?
- Did recognizing the garment from online/on the rack affect your decision to choose or not choose the garment online/on the rack? Why?

A consumer will become more involved when the product is perceived important (Engel et al., 1993) and use more product attributes depending on the perceived importance of the product (Rothschild and Houston, 1977). Furthermore, value guides the importance of a product to a person (Kim, 2005). In order to get insights into consumers’ value and involvement of garments, the following question was asked;

- Are garments important to you and why?

An important attribute is one that offers an important benefit (Aaker et al., 1991). In order to find consumers’ perceived important benefits of garments, the following question was asked;

- Do you feel a garment brings you benefits, and if yes what benefits?

At last, to gather information on consumers’ channel choice, the following questions were asked;

- What is important to you when choosing a garment online and in a physical store?
- Do you prefer to shop online or in a physical store? Why?
- When do you prefer to shop online and when in a physical store?
- Do you feel there is an (dis)advantage to shopping online? If yes, what?
- Do you feel there is an (dis)advantage to shopping in a physical store? If yes, what?

The questionnaire is attached (attachment F).

**3.7 Data analysis method**

The garments that the participants pick in the online and offline environment will be written down and comparisons will be made to see whether or not and if so, how many of the same garments the participants pick in the online and offline environments.

The transcripts of the interviews will be documented by translating oral to written language, regarded as the truth, where each transcript will contain a one-to-one
correspondence between what is said and printed (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). The text will then be coded, meaning that the data is read-through to find the major categories and concepts (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). Coding consists of identifying meaningful parts in the data and giving each of those a label, called the code (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). The coding is done without using a predefined set of coding categories, but instead the text will be analyzed inductively, meaning that it will be read until themes, concepts become apparent in the data (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011).

To analyze the mentioned product attributes, clustering is applied as it is used to group and conceptualize objects that have similar patterns or characteristics (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

3.8 Ethical considerations

Prior to the experiment, the participants were send an invitation stating the test dates and times that the participants could choose from and mentioned that the test language would be English. Furthermore it stated that the participants would be rewarded for their participation with a 150 SEK gift card for www.ellos.se. The participants chose a time and date that suited them and were then send a confirmation through e-mail (appendices A and B).

In order to ensure the confidentiality of the participants, their names were not used in the experiment. Instead they were assigned a number. The first participant was numbered "participant 1"; the second participant was numbered "participant 2" and so forth. The interviews were videotaped only if permission was given by the participant. The participants were informed that the video footage would be used for transcription of the interviews only. During the experiment pictures were taken when participants gave permission to do so.

The participants were asked to choose three garments that they would choose, or would be most likely to choose when shopping. They were informed that the size they carry was irrelevant to the testing. In the physical store environment the sizes of the garments were hidden. In the online store the participants were asked to choose a random size so they could place the chosen product in the shopping bag. Participants were furthermore informed that no conclusions would be drawn from their personal taste that is reflected by the garments they chose.

By making use of a semi-structured questionnaire, the participants were allowed to talk freely about their interests and what is important for them. In case names of companies or brands were mentioned by the participants other than the brand of the test garments, the names are not mentioned in this report due to ethical considerations.
4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Chosen garments
The amounts of identical garments that the participants chose in both the online and offline environments are demonstrated below in table 1. Within the table a distinction is made between the participants that shopped offline first and then online, and those who shopped online first and then offline. For each group an average of how many identical garments are chosen per participant is calculated.

Table 1 Number of identical garments chosen

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offline - online</th>
<th>Number of identical garments chosen</th>
<th>Online - offline</th>
<th>Number of identical garments chosen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total identical garments chosen</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Average per participant | 1.33 | | 1.57 |

As shown in the table, the participants that shopped online first and then offline chose slightly more of the same garments. The findings point out that the participants that shopped online first were able to see what the garment would look like on a mannequin and used this to evaluate the garment in the rack.

"It’s a bit the same online and offline, but it’s somewhat easier looking it online because you can see it on the model."

"Yes this you could not see when it was just hanging you know, but there you could see how it falls on the body."

The models on which the garment was displayed were however not always considered to give a clear representation of what the garment would look like on the participant;

"Mannequins are always skinny and super like everything fits very well."

However, they were believed to improve product information and provide clear visualization of what the garment would look like on a body.
“First I looked at the pictures and the videos. The videos are really important because then you can see how it falls on the body, even if they are like super nice models, but anyway you can somehow visualize it and so on.”

These findings are conform the findings of Alba et al. (1997) mentioning that internet improves the availability of product information. Because apparel is a high body involving product of which the consumption is related to fit (Rosa et al., 2006), evaluation of a garment on a model provides a better visualization than when the garment is hanging in a rack.

4.2 Product attributes

In total, 67 product attributes were mentioned by the participants referring to both the garments that were chosen in the test and product attributes that the participants said to apply when choosing garments. A full overview of all product attributes can be found attached (appendix G).

The product attributes are grouped into 6 clusters that are;

- Material attributes*; product attributes referring to the material and fiber content including treatment thereof (Eckman et al., 1990).
- Fit attributes*; product attributes referring to the judgment of how the garment conformed to the body (Eckman et al., 1990).
- Style attributes*; product attributes referring to silhouette, construction, fabric and details making the performance of the outfit distinctive (Craik, 2009).
- Connotative attributes; product attributes referring to extrinsic properties (O’Neil 1990).
- Product display attributes; product attributes referring to visual merchandising (Bell and Ternus, 2006).
- Performance attributes; product attributes referring to use (O’Neil 1990).

* Mentioned as product attribute by respondents during the interviews.

The product attributes called mostly (five times or more by different participants) are analyzed in the following paragraphs. Here a division is made between intrinsic and extrinsic product attributes.

4.3 Intrinsic product attributes

The mostly applied intrinsic product attributes are; print (called 11 times), color (called 10 times), material (called 7 times), natural fibers (called 5 times) and fit (called 9 times). The product attribute print was previously also found by Eckman et al. (1990) that referred to it as pattern. The product attributes color and fit were previously also found by Zhang et al. (2002) and Eckman et al. (1990). And the product attributes material and natural fibers were previously found by Martin (1971).
The intrinsic product attributes that were found are not channel specific, meaning that they were called and to be evaluated in both online and offline environments.

**4.3.1 Intrinsic style attributes**
The product attributes *print* and *color* are grouped into the style cluster, as these are product attributes referring to silhouette, construction, fabric and details making the performance of the outfit distinctive (Craik, 2009). The product attribute *print* was applied 11 times and *color* was applied 10 times.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product attributes</th>
<th>No. of times mentioned</th>
<th>Offline or Online specific</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Color</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The product attributes *print* and *color* were called when evaluating garments in both the online and offline channels. However, these product attributes were not perceived identically in both channels, meaning that they were applied to in an offline form, by participants also called ‘‘in real life’’ and in an online form.

‘‘I thought it looked different, the leopard one looked better in real life than online. In the online shop the turquoise looks more, it spoke more to me in the online shop than in the rack.’’

‘‘I chose the one in lime not offline because I did not like the color. I saw the offline choices online; I did not even look at the pink shirt online.’’

Even though identical product attributes were applied to evaluate garments online and offline, the implications that these product attributes brought were different in the online and offline channel. Where *material*, for example, could be a reason for participants to pick the garment in one channel, it could be a reason to not pick it in the other.

**4.3.2. Intrinsic material attributes**
The product attributes *material* and *natural fibers* are grouped into the material cluster, since these product attributes refer to the material and fiber content including treatment thereof (Eckman et al., 1990). The product attribute *material* was applied 7 times, and *natural fibers* was applied 5 times.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product attributes</th>
<th>No. of times mentioned</th>
<th>Offline or Online specific</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural fibers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Also the product attributes *material* and *natural fibers* were called when evaluating garments in both the online and offline channels but as with the style attributes *print* and *color*, they were also not perceived identically in both channels.
Material and natural fibers are both product attributes that by Childers et al. (2000) are considered impossible to examine without physical contact. In this study however, these product attributes were applied in online channels also. Calling the product attribute material, for example, within the online channel was not based on physical examination but instead on a perception of what the participants thought the material would be like, when being able to physically encounter it.

“"I thought the fabric was much thicker and that the pattern would be more intense like an application. This one I picked because of the material, the fabric is silky; online it looked like an ordinary shirt."

“I don’t know whether that was on the web page. It was? I didn’t see it. When I saw it in real life I could see its half transparent. I was surprised that the black one did not look the same on the web. I did not even see it on the website, and it was the first I saw on the rack.”

The evaluation of product attributes material and natural fibers online is based on the information derived from the product description and a perception of how it would be when being physically encountered, while evaluation of these product attributes within an offline channel is based on physical examination. This confirms the findings of Childers et al. (2000) that material and natural fibers as product attributes that are impossible to fully examine without physical contact, even though it was found that they are also applied within an online environment.

4.3.3 Intrinsic fit attributes

The product attribute fit is grouped into the fit cluster which includes product attributes referring to the judgment of how the garment conformed to the body (Eckman et al., 1990). The product attribute fit was applied 9 times.

Table 4 Fit attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product attributes</th>
<th>No. of times mentioned</th>
<th>Offline or Online specific</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic Fit</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regards to the intrinsic fit attributes (fit), participants mentioned that the expectations of the garment in one channel do not always meet the expectations of the garment in the other channel.

“"It’s hard to decide the fabric and this looks a bit more loose than I thought."

“"I bought enough clothes online knowing that on the picture it looks ok and when you get it at home, I mean it surprises you a lot of times and it’s really good but at the same time it could be crap.”

As mentioned earlier, apparel is a high body involving product of which the consumption is related to fit (Rosa et al., 2006) and thus being able to evaluate on fit within an online channel is important.
4.3.4 Offline evaluation of intrinsic attributes

As important functions of clothing, comfort and camouflage were most often mentioned by the participants, meaning that the participants find it important to feel comfortable in their clothes and to wear clothes that provide camouflage. This confirms the findings of Akpoyomare et al. (2012) that found that consumers often link attributes to the consequences that purchasing or consuming products brings.

“It makes me feel comfortable and that’s mostly what I look for. I try to look for something that makes me not think about my clothes in a specific situation. That’s why I talk a lot about the feel. If it’s too clingy I will become too self-conscious.”

“If I am in a bad mood and I choose something I really like in my wardrobe and put on some make up the day gets better usually, or the other way around if I don’t feel comfortable in what I am wearing the rest of the day will be affected. That I feel uncomfortable and not sure of myself.”

Despite the intrinsic attributes print, color, material, natural fibers and fit also being mentioned within an online environment, being able to evaluate these product attributes within an offline channel is mentioned by the participants to be important in order to be comfortable in clothes and wear clothes for camouflage.

“Offline you can try it on. And see if it actually looks like you thought. I prefer going to a shop. You can feel the fabric and see if it is stretchy or not and you can see it in the right light.”

“Online I am always insecure about the feel, specifically the softness. I don’t like soft materials because they cling too much. So then I want to see is it a clingy material or is it going to be, and if I am not certain I am going to discard the garment.”

This again confirms the findings of Childers et al. (2000) that mention that physical examination of a product is needed to find tactile product attributes.

4.4 Extrinsic attributes

The mostly applied product attributes are; spring/summer (called 10 times), simple (called 5 times), match with specific garment (called 7 times) wear on specific moment (called 7 times), something to have in wardrobe (called 5 times) and picture with model (called 6 times).

The product attribute spring/summer is found as an emerging product attribute in these studies. This product attribute refers to the participants mentioning spring/summer in their choice of a garment.

The product attribute simple was previously found by Eckman et al. (1990) and Zhang et al. (2002) that referred to this product attribute as style or styling. The product attributes match with specific garment, wear on specific moment and something to have in wardrobe were previously also found by Eckman et al. (1990) that referred to the latter two as utility. The product attribute picture with model is
the second emerging product attribute in these studies. This product attribute refers to the participants mentioning the picture with the model wearing the garment on the online shop, in their choice of a garment.

4.4.1 Extrinsic product display attributes

The product attribute *picture with model* is grouped into the product display cluster, including product attributes that refer to visual merchandising. The product attribute *picture with model* was applied 9 times.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product attributes</th>
<th>No. of times mentioned</th>
<th>Offline or Online specific</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extrinsic</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture with model</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The product attribute *picture with model* was by the participants only applied within the online channel, making this an online specific product attribute.

"The picture caught my attention, because it showed how it was nicely done and cut. On the model it was very nice."

"I thought the color was nice and it looks good on the model."

Participants that shopped offline first and thus were able to evaluate the physical garments first, chose other garments online for the reason of liking the presentation of the garment on the model.

"I cannot explain why I did not pick the black one with the print. I guess when I saw them on the model I guess I liked those better."

"I looked at the pictures in the web shop as well for this one but I didn’t like how they presented it on the model. I think that’s why I did not pick it."

This implies that the consumption of fashion goes beyond basic needs based on apparel benefits, which was also found by Gwords et al. (2013) but provides immaterial and hedonistic value, found by Dobers and Strannegard (2005).

4.4.2 Importance of clothes

When asked whether clothes are important and why, most participants mentioned clothes to be of importance, confirming that clothes are a high-involvement product, found by O’Cass (2004). Most motivations of fashion involvement by the participants referred to the dimensions of self-expression by Michaelidou and Dibb (2006) referring to wearing clothes as they express who a person is and that they are a part of the self-image.

"Yes it expresses my identity."

"Yes I think it’s a way of expressing yourself so it is very important."
These findings are in line with the findings of Kapferer and Laurent (1985) that refer to self-identity triggering product involvement. And with the findings of Dittmar (2008), mentioning that the self is something that is partially created through consumption and through the symbolic meanings that fashion products hold.

“Yes, very, the way I dress reflects who I am and who I want to be perceived as. It’s a part of my identity and to be able to show who I am.”

“Yes of course, oh yeah it is, because it defines your personality, I mean, not personality but it’s like a mood you know some day you wake up you want to have black, some day you want to have blue depending on your mood, and you know yeah so it’s for me a way of creating yourself you know and what you feel comfortable with and also like creating your style.”

Despite participants mostly referring to self-expression when asked why clothes are important, the picture with the model is an influential product attribute for choosing a garment. Participants therefore feel it is important that the model reflects the ideal self, which according to Banister and Hogg (2007) refers to the qualities that an individual would like to possess, but doesn’t.

“Yes online you have to go more for the pictures and trust them. And they have to be attractive the pictures, because if they are not, like for me I am a younger person so I want a younger model and some of them were more for older and I immediately took them away, because for me it was like 40+ style and even if I am 40 I don’t want to know that style. So like, ok that was not for me, that was not an inspiring model, and the way they posed and everything so I took the ones that were more for like a younger target audience for what I see.”

“And the style. I think of my personal style, of what I like to wear. And when I see a model I can’t identify myself with I think why should I buy that.”

When choosing garments online, participants moreover take into account their ideal self by using the garment on the model as reference in order to evaluate on a garment. Within the offline channel however, the participants moreover take into account the actual or current self, which is how a they perceive themselves in order to evaluate on a garment.

“When I saw the draped one in real life I thought I would never wear that. When I saw it I thought it’s not my style, it’s her style.”

4.4.3 Extrinsic connotative attributes
The product attributes spring/summer and simple are grouped into the connotative cluster, which includes product attributes referring to extrinsic properties (O’Neil 1990). The product attribute spring/summer was applied 10 times and simple was applied 5 times.

Table 6 Connotative attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product attributes</th>
<th>No. of times mentioned</th>
<th>Offline or Online specific</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extrinsic Spring/summer (Replies connecting)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The product attribute *spring/summer* is a more abstract parameter to evaluate alternatives, which is in place when the information processing is emotional, according to Erasmus et al. (2001) which applies to fashion products as they are being used for their emotional value (Sheth and Mittal, 2004). This product attribute on its own is open for interpretation. So in order to give meaning to the product attribute *spring/summer*, participants often linked it to intrinsic product attributes.

For example, participants mentioned spring/summer in combination with product attributes such as color, print and fit.

```
“I like lace its very spring and summery, and its spring now so it felt fresh.”
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“I really like the color and its start to be spring now so I thought the color was nice.”
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“It felt loose, summery, relaxed and soft. A relaxed shirt to wear with pretty much everything.”
```

This implies that the product attribute *spring/summer* is given meaning by making use of intrinsic product attributes and can moreover have different meanings, as it was used to refer to color by one participant for example, but fit by another participant.

Participants furthermore mentioned the product attribute *simple* that was not specifically linked to intrinsic product attributes but moreover referred to as a simple product being good and basic.

```
“You know it’s always good, it’s simple.”
```

```
“I chose this one instead of the draped one because it’s a simple shirt, t-shirt, basic.”
```

### 4.4.4 Extrinsic performance attributes

The product attributes *match with specific garment, wear on specific moment* and *something to have in wardrobe* are grouped into the performance cluster, which includes product attributes referring to use (O’Neil 1990).

The product attribute *match with specific garment* and *wear on specific moment* were both applied 7 times and *something to have in wardrobe* was applied 5 times.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7 Performance attributes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extrinsic</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Match with specific garment /</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Replies matching the garment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with a garment in mind; shorts,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of times mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offline or Online specific</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The product attribute *match with specific garment* was mentioned where the participants referred to a garment that they imagined matching the chosen item with.

“That also it’s like basic things that you can have in your wardrobe that’s what I thought. I thought the black one would be nice to wear over a bikini.”

“But the white with black print should not be any problem to buy. I have the picture, white or black linen underneath and some blue jeans and it’s done.”

The participants also referred to wearing the item on a specific moment as product attribute *wear on specific moment*.

“You can have in the evening not so much casual also a little more fancy.”

“This one is also nice loose wide, and it’s also in between everything, and you can also have it as party.”

The participants thus linked the product attributes to the consequences that buying or consuming the products could bring them, which is in line with the findings of Akpoyomare et al. (2012).

Also, participants mentioned to pick the garment by making use of the product attribute *something to have in wardrobe* which means that they apply previously stored information when evaluating a garment.

“I did pick other colors, probably because I did not like the styles but also because I thought it would be hard to match with my wardrobe. I was trying to think it through what do I have at home in my wardrobe and would this go well with it.”

“I realized I picked three classic t shirt looks instead of the ones with draping and stuff, because I think it works well with my wardrobe in general and it’s easy to match.”

These findings are in line with the findings of Backwell et al. (2006), Baron et al. (2006), Cant et al. (2006), Hoyer and Maclnnis (2007) and Solomon and Rabolt (2004) that found that by applying internal search, consumers use their memory and the information that they have stored through previous experiences. And internal search is found to be applied often when the quality of products is derived from extrinsic product attributes (Hoyer and Maclnnis, 2007) which in this case are *match with specific garment, wear on specific moment* and *something to have in wardrobe*.
4.5 Online channel choice

4.5.1 Convenience

When asked to their online channel choice motivations, the participants’ answers were mostly linked to convenience. This finding is in line with the theory of Kim and Forsythe (2007) that found that consumers that shop in an online channel have more functional motivations to do so.

“If I know what I want I shop online.”

“Often I have a special thought about what I am searching for.”

Furthermore Kim and Forsythe (2007) found that consumers choosing an online channel are more concerned with buying in an efficient and timely way in order to achieve their goals with a least amount of effort, which is also found in this research.

“It is very time consuming and I don’t have the time to walk around in stores. Which is why I bought online recently because I need clothes but I don’t have the time to walk around in stores.”

“It’s more efficient in my daily life, I get what I need and with the least amount of effort from my part compared to spending a lot of effort maybe not getting any results in a store.”

Convenience was mentioned in the form of accessibility, backed up by Alba et al. (1997) and Hoffman and Novak (1996) that found the 24 hour availability and accessibility through more than one location as benefit of the internet. Accessibility was also found by Kolsaker and Galbraith (2000), Kunz (1997) and Taylor and Cosenza (2000).

“I can shop whenever. And I can shop at night or on Saturday.”

“Today they send it to you so fast, it gets delivered in two days and you can buy anything from all around the world. And I can sit at home after school and just go in and see oh what I want to do today.”

“It’s convenient. I can shop in front of the TV or when I sit at home relaxing with a cup of coffee or tea.”

The online channel bringing shopping efficiency found by Alba et al. (1997) and increasing search benefits, found by Bakos (1991) is confirmed in the findings. Information possibilities was also called as channel attribute by Heineman and Schwarzl (2010) in which the online channel differs from the offline channel.

“It’s easy to shop online. It’s easy to click around. If you are searching for something, extremely searching just right now I am looking for a sandal, and then I can go into pretty much all the websites and search for a sandal. It’s really convenient.”
“Sometimes I think it’s easier to shop online because I can sort, I don’t have to
look, just search through the pages but it’s also easier for me to not make the
wrong decisions, because through that I can say ok I need a pink shirt, they don’t
have any pink ok then I won’t even look at the other things. So for convenience, I
like online stores.”

Furthermore, it was mentioned by the participants that the online channel provides
an advantage in form of eliminating the travel to and from a shop, also found by
Childers et al. (2001).

“It’s easy and it will come home.”

However, the online channel choice was negatively connected to travel to and from a
shop in order to return the items that were bought online. This confirms the findings
mention ease of movement as offline channel attribute.

“Usually there is more hassle with buying online if you need to return them.”

“But if it doesn’t fit I have to send it back so that’s the bad thing.”

“I don’t like the part of sending it back. For me it’s easier to just go to a store
even though I might return it. Offline returning is much easier.”

4.5.2 Product alternatives

With regards to the product choice online, there was no doubt among the
participants in that the internet provides availability of a broader amount of product
alternatives, found by Bakos (1991). Some participants however mentioned
availability of a broader amount of alternatives as an advantage and some
mentioned it to be a disadvantage.

“It’s very easy; in the web shop you have more choice then when you go to the
shop.”

“Nowadays in many web shops it’s too much so I get a headache from them, so I
don’t want to enter them so then I rather go to small web shops. It’s an
overload.”

Participants thus carry different opinions about whether a broader amount of
alternatives is an advantage, or disadvantage.

4.5.3 Visual Merchandising

At last, participants also motivated their online channel choice by mentioning Visual
Merchandising benefits. This confirms the findings of Alba et al. (1997) that found
that the internet improves the availability of product information, making
comparison of product attributes possible and increasing shopping efficiency.
Variety was also found by Lee and Lee (2007) as online channel attribute.
“In a way I prefer shopping online because I like the way it is displayed. It’s organized its very simple that way.”

“Online the simplicity and the categories I always check immediately what the categories are like and I always use women so you can easily choose what you like.”

“Most of the time it is something I am looking for when I go website shopping as opposed shop shopping. When I go to a web shop I am looking for something. It is important that you are able to seek... like I was shopping for jogging shoes, I want to be so precise on the web shop that I can see only that product I don’t want to see all sneakers, and make that as narrow as possible. I don’t want to see all sneakers only what I look for.”

4.6 Offline channel choice

4.6.1 Experience
The motivations for offline channel choice were mostly connected to experience by the participants. This is in line with the findings of Alba et al. (1997) mentioning that the internet mainly differs from a physical shopping channel in the absence of the store experience. Also the findings of Kim and Forsythe (2007) are backed up that found that consumers that have hedonic motivations are concerned with entertainment and enjoyment of shopping.

“It’s a type of leisure to walk around town go for a coffee, enjoyment.”

“I think I prefer to shop in a store that’s more of an adventure. I almost never return, if I buy in the store I get it and it works. It’s the whole concept of shopping in stores, walking around, being with friends, drinking coffee, carrying a nice little bag with silk laces, paper bags and it’s the whole sense of doing that I think. Online I have to go to the super boring place where you can find tobacco and stamps and take it out in some ugly yellow bag.”

4.6.2 Store personnel
As another motivation for offline channel choice, store personnel was also mentioned. This finding is in line with the finding of Heinemann and Schwarzl (2010) mentioning social interaction as channel attribute in which the online and offline channels differ.

“I really appreciate a nice salesperson, when they say hello and I feel welcomed in a nice way not too offensive.”

“I think the salesperson can do pretty much everything for me to get satisfied.”

“To try it on and see it and get help from people in the store to find other sizes.”

4.6.3 Visual Merchandising
At last, also the Offline channel choice was connected to Visual Merchandising benefits.
“I do like, when you go to stores you always get a lot of inspirations which maybe you don’t get as much from online. In a store probably the mannequins and stuff like that.”

“Store maybe how they separate the colors, so you look immediately for one color, jeans in one department and shirts in another one.”

### 4.7 Product attributes across channels

Consumers use product attributes across channels. They try to find whether the product attributes they applied in one channel correspond to those in the other channel.

“I looked at the tops more closely because I already had a photo in mind of what it would look like and the feeling of it.”

Some respondents mention the need to physically examining a product prior to purchase, either before or after encountering the garment online. The theory of Verhoef et al (2007) that found that consumers perform research shopping, where they do research online and buy in a physical store is confirmed. The internet has an advantage over a store for the search stage, but the store has an advantage over the internet for purchase.

“I think all of them on the rack it was easy to see oh ok the color was actually like this. I saw it on the webpage and I wasn’t sure but now I see it was exactly how I thought it was. Or I could see slight differences because I had already seen it once. I would say in general if I use the web shops online to have a look and then I normally go to the store and then I’ll try to see if I can find the garment I saw on the internet to compare to see if it’s the same.”

“I think I actually prefer going to a store. I have been looking for a new bikini this semester, like this spring, and I feel I need to go to the store to see what it actually looks like”

Furthermore, the theory of Alba (1997) that found that it is critical for consumers to be able to physically examine a product is once again backed up. Participants mentioned that they might have made different choices if they had shopped online first, meaning that they might have made different decisions if they hadn’t physically examined the garment first.

“Not sure whether I would have made the same choices offline if I had shopped online first. Knowing what the garments look like offline influenced me to choose them online as well. Especially the lace top, because it doesn’t look so good on the online shop but in real life it looks much better.”

“I chose the same, but hadn’t I seen some of these in real life, I wouldn’t have chosen them. I was affected online by seeing them in the rack. I would not have chosen the same if I shopped online first.”
5. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research was to explore what product attributes Swedish consumers apply to evaluate garments within and across online and offline shopping channels. This purpose was found relevant since it is important to know whether the garments that fashion companies offer, characterized by proffered product attributes such as color, style and material, represent the product attributes that are important to the consumer. Since consumers are able to evaluate products in terms of their product attributes in both online and offline channels, this study aimed to respect the characteristics of each channel in the study to find product attributes.

The main question therefore was: How do Swedish consumers evaluate garments in terms of product attributes within and across online and offline shopping channels?

In order to find the answer to this main question, four subareas are investigated, those are:

- What product attributes do consumers use to evaluate garments online and offline?
- Do consumers choose the same garments in an online and offline channel?
- What are consumers’ online and offline channel choice motivations?
- How do consumers use product attributes when shopping across online and offline channels?

5.1 Product attributes online and offline

In order to evaluate garments within online and offline channels, both intrinsic and extrinsic product attributes are used. In total, 67 product attributes were mentioned by the participants.

The mostly applied intrinsic product attributes are; print, color, material, natural fibers and fit. These product attributes were previously also found by Eckman et al. (1990), Martin (1971) and Zhang et al. (2002). These product attributes are not channel specific, meaning that they were called within both an online and offline channel. However, even though identical product attributes were used in the online and offline channels, the applied product attributes were not perceived identical. They instead existed in an online and offline form where, for example, the product attribute *material* was applied online as product attribute to choose for a specific garment, while offline it was applied to not pick the same garment.

Intrinsic product attributes are mostly found to deliver on comfort and camouflage as functions of clothing. It is therefore found desirable that intrinsic product attributes can be perceived identically in both online and offline channels. However, the characteristics of the online channel do not make physical examination possible, which results into intrinsic product attributes, such as *fit*, *material* and *natural*...
fibers, not to be fully evaluated online. In order to fully evaluate on intrinsic product attributes, physical examination of a garment is needed.

The mostly applied extrinsic product attributes are; spring/summer, simple, match with specific garment, wear on specific moment, something to have in wardrobe and the picture with model. The product attributes simple, match with specific garment, wear on specific moment and something to have in wardrobe were previously also found by Eckman et al. (1990) and Zhang et al. (2002). The product attributes spring/summer and picture with model are emerging extrinsic product attributes found in this study.

Except for picture with model these product attributes are not channel specific, meaning that they were called within both an online and offline channel. The product attribute picture with model is online specific, meaning that within the offline channel this product attribute is not called. It may therefore be concluded that picture with model is a product attribute applied specifically online in evaluating garments.

Clothes are found important in order for consumers to achieve self-expression, where the clothes worn express who a person is. Therefore, when applying the product attribute picture with model it is found important that the model reflects the ideal self, referring to the qualities that a person would like to posses. Offline, where the product attribute picture with model doesn't occur, the current self, referring to how a person perceives him/herself, is moreover applied to evaluate on a garment. When evaluating clothes with self-expression as goal, consumers moreover apply extrinsic product attributes.

The product attribute spring/summer is an emerging product attribute in these studies. This product attribute is not used on its own but instead is linked to intrinsic product attributes, such as color and fit.

By applying product attributes such as match with specific garment and something to have in wardrobe, internal search is applied, where consumers use their memory and information stored through previous experiences. The product attribute wear on specific moment shows that garments are being chosen for their symbolic and hedonistic value.

5.2 Choice of garments online and offline

Whether consumers choose identical garments online and offline is found to be dependent on the person and product in question and it can thus not be concluded that consumers either do, or do not choose identical garments online and offline. However, the participants that shopped online first and then offline were found to choose slightly more identical garments on average. Even though the difference is not apparent, consumers’ motivations refer to the presentation of a garment on a model which is believed to give a good visualization of the product and of how the
garment would look on the participant, opposed to it hanging in the rack. The online channel therefore can improve the availability of product information to the consumer.

5.3 Online and offline channel choice motivations
The motivations for choosing to shop in an online channel were mostly linked to convenience. It was found that consumers choosing for an online channel are moreover driven by functional motivations. Their motivations moreover refer to buying in an efficient and timely way, achieving their goals with least amount of effort. Also, convenience as motivation is linked to the 24 hour availability of the channel, accessibility through more than one location and increasing search benefits. Another called motivation to shop within an online channel was linked to Visual Merchandising techniques, where it was mentioned that shopping online provides convenient display methods and search functions.

The motivations for choosing to shop in an offline shop were mostly linked to experience. It was found that consumers choosing for an offline channel are more driven by hedonic motivations and look for entertainment and enjoyment of shopping. Shopping within an offline channel was mentioned to be carried out with others and combined with other forms of leisure, such as drinking coffee and meeting up with friends. In addition, store personnel was mentioned as offline channel choice motivation referring to the interaction with store personnel and receiving help. Also the motivation to shop within an offline channel was linked to Visual Merchandising techniques, where it was mentioned that shopping offline provides inspiration and comfortable store lay-outs.

5.4 Usage of product attributes across online and offline channels
When shopping in and across online and offline channels, consumers try to find whether the product attributes they applied in one channel correspond to those in the other channel. The information acquired in one channel is applied in the other channel, where the applied product attributes of the first channel form a benchmark to evaluate the product attributes in the latter channel.

Furthermore, consumers perform so called research shopping, where the online channel is used to perform research, and the offline channel is used for purchase. Here, the internet has an advantage over a store for the search stage, but the store has an advantage over the internet for purchase as it was found desirable to perform physical examination of a garment prior to deciding on a purchase. This shows it being crucial for consumers to be able to physically examine a product before deciding on a purchase.
5.5 Contribution
In this research, an inductive approach is applied to using theory, meaning that it aimed to generate theory from the findings and therefore provides theoretical contribution.

It is important for companies to deliver garments that are characterized by product attributes, such as color, style and material that are desired by consumers, rather than being pre-offered by the company. Previous research is conducted on this topic and found several product attributes that consumers apply when evaluating garments. The emergence of the online channel, in addition to the offline channel however, has changed the way consumers shop. They can perform the decision making process in both online and offline channels and across these channels. And the search and evaluation stages in particular do not have to be performed within one channel.

Since the online and offline channels are different in nature, in this study product attributes are investigated in each channel respectively. This research found that while consumers moreover do not use different product attributes to evaluate garments in online and offline channels, the product attributes are not perceived identical in both channels. Also, it was found that consumers use product attributes across channels, where the product attributes found in the first channel form a benchmark to evaluate on product attributes in the latter channel.

The extrinsic product attribute *pictures with model* and *spring/summer* are two emerging attributes in these studies. The latter is an online specific product attribute, and might thus not be found without investigating product attributes across channels.

5.6 Assessment of the methodology
This research seeks depth over breath and attempts to find nuances in life instead of collecting evidence (Ambert et al., 1995). It is therefore considered contextual and subjective instead of objective and generalizable. Reliability (the stability of findings) and validity (the truthfulness of findings) (Altheide and Johnson, 1994) being quantitative perspectives are found inappropriate for qualitative research (Hammersly, 1992). Lincoln and Guba (1985) therefore translated internal validity to credibility, external validity to transferability, reliability to dependability and objectivity to conformability. The assessment of the applied method in this research is therefore done by elaborating on the credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability of these studies.

5.6.1 Credibility
Internal validity seeks to ensure that the study measures what is intended to be measured (Shenton, 2004). Credibility as the qualitative concept of internal validity is about how compatible the findings are with reality (Merriam, 1998).
The usage of different methods compensates the individual limitations and exploits the benefits of each approach (Brewer and Hunter, 1989; Guba 1981). In this research, an experiment is combined with in-depth interviews. The experiment was applied to provide the participants with physical products as stimuli, since it was found that accuracy of a research suffers when participants have to imagine garments and in order to realistically evaluate garments, participants must touch them (Eckman et al., 1990). After the experiment, in-depth interviews were conducted to find about the participants motivations that they used during the experiment.

As the testing was conducted in English, which is not the native language of the participants, a pilot study was conducted where the vocabulary found to be complex was replaced by other vocabulary to limit possible misinterpretations due to a language barrier.

In order to ensure honest responses, the participants were able to sign up voluntarily to take part in the test. Those that were approached had voluntarily signed up earlier to be part of the SHIR test group, to be contacted for tests taking place in the retail laboratory. Each person approached should be able to refuse taking part in the test to make sure that in the data collection only those participants are involved that are genuinely willing to participate and offer data (Shenton, 2004). Therefore, after they had signed up, each participant was send an invitation through e-mail, stating the dates and times of which she could choose and only if a time and date was picked, a confirmation was send through e-mail (appendices A and B).

This research found several intrinsic product attributes (print, color, material, natural fibers and fit) that were also found in previous researches by Eckman et al. (1990) and Zhang et al. (2002). The extrinsic product attributes found in this research (match with specific garment, wear on specific moment, something to have in wardrobe and simple) were also found in previous researches by Eckman et al. (1990) and Zhang et al. (2002). The findings on online channel choice connected to convenience are confirmed by previous findings by Alba et al. (1997), Hoffman and Novak (1996), Kim and Forsythe (2007), Kolsaker and Galbraith (2000), Kunz (1997) and Taylor and Cosenza (2000). The findings of online channel choice being connected to efficiency and information and search benefits was previously also found by Alba et al. (1997), Bakos (1991) and Heineman and Schwarzl (2010). Furthermore, travel that was found as online channel choice motivation was previously also found by Childers et al. (2001). The findings on online channel choice connected to product alternatives were previously also found by Bakos (1991). The findings of the online channel choice connected to visual merchandising were previously also found by Alba et al. (1997) and Lee and Lee (2007). Experience being linked to offline channel choice was previously found by Alba et al. (1991) and Kim and Forsythe (2007). Furthermore the findings of store personnel as offline channel choice motivation were earlier also found by Heineman and Schwarzl
At last, the findings on the evaluation of alternatives across channels are in line with the findings of Verhoef et al (2007).

5.6.2 Transferability

External validity refers to the extent to which the findings of a research can be applied to other situations (Merriam, 1998). However, since the findings of qualitative research are specific to a number of small environments and participants, demonstrating whether findings and conclusions are applicable in other situations and populations is impossible (Shenton, 2004). However, providing contextual information about the study enables the reader to be able to determine how confident they can be in transferring the findings to other situations (Shenton, 2004). According to Cole and Gardner (1979), Marchionini and Teague (1987) and Pitts (1994) the boundaries of the research should be communicated in order for attempts of transference to be made. These are demonstrated below:

- The study took part in collaboration with Ellos Group, situated in Borås, Sweden and SiIR, the research and development program of the University of Borås, situated in Borås, Sweden.
- Those who participated in the test are Swedish females between the age of 16 and 54.
- In total, 13 participants were found available to participate in the test.
- As data collection method, an experiment was conducted combined with in-depth interviews.
- Each data collection session took place with one participant at the time during the maximum time span of an hour of which the in-depth interview accounted for approximately 20 minutes.
- The data collection took place over 3 days, namely the 25th, 26th and 27th of March, 2014.

More elaborate information of the method is to be found in Chapter 3.

5.6.3 Dependability

Reliability refers to showing that similar results would be obtained if the work were to be repeated in the same context, with the same methods and participants (Shenton, 2004). Within the context of qualitative research, reliability is compatible with dependability, to be achieved by using overlapping methods (Lincoln and Guba 1985), which in this research is achieved by combining experiments with in-depth interviews. To demonstrate the dependability more thoroughly, and enable a future researcher to repeat the research, the research design and implementation and details of data gathering is be provided in detail (Shenton, 2004):

In this report, an experiment is conducted by making use of a simulation technique, in which 13 participants were asked to choose 3 garments in the retail laboratory in the University of Borås, functioning as physical store environment, and in the online shop www.ellos.se that they accessed through a computer in the retail laboratory.
The garments from which the participants could choose were identical in both environments, but present physically in the retail laboratory and virtually in the online shop. As test products, 19 tops are used from the Swedish retailer Ellos Group (demonstrated in appendix C). After the experiment, an in-depth interview was conducted with each of the participants by making use of a semi-structured questionnaire. Prior to the testing a pre-test was conducted. More elaborate information is to be found in chapter 3.

5.6.4 Conformability

Conformability refers to the concern of the objectivity of the qualitative investigator and it should be ensured that the findings are a result of the experiences of the participants rather than the characteristics of the researcher (Shenton, 2004).

Within this research, a qualitative research is conducted to be able to study phenomena in their natural settings and attempt to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings that people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Even though simulation is referred to as a quantitative form of an experimental method, this research uses simulation as qualitative research technique, since it tries to extract meaning from data in form of text and words, opposed to numbers retrieved in quantitative research (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). The experiment is combined with in-depth interviews as an experiment can be used in conjunction with other methods to gain exploratory data to generate theory (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011) which is desired in this research. Qualitative interviews are chosen as they bring knowledge that is contextual and linguistic (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009) opposed to standardized data obtained in quantitative interviews ((Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). In-depth interviews are found suitable since there is a specific topic to focus on and gain information about from the participants (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011).

As questionnaire design, a semi-structured questionnaire is applied, meaning that the interviews relied on questions to guide the conversation but allowing participants to talk about their interests and what they felt to be important in order to explore new topics (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). The usage of preselected criteria in the questions of the questionnaire was found to reflect the researchers’ judgment about what criteria are important to consumers (Webb et al., 1966) and predetermined criteria may increase the responses based on social desirability instead of consumers’ actually believe (Eckman et al., 1990). Therefore, the choice is made to ask questions allowing free response, so that the participants were able to identify their own criteria for evaluating garments.

The garments that the participants picked during the experiment were written down and the outcomes are demonstrated in table 1. The conducted in-depth interviews were filmed and the transcripts were then documented by translating oral to written language, regarded as the truth, where each transcript contains a one-to-one correspondence between what is said and printed (Hesse-Biber and
Leavy, 2011). The coding of the transcripts is done without using a predefined set of coding categories, but instead the text was analyzed inductively and read until theses and concepts became apparent in the data (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011).

5.7 Limitations and future research

The test garments that were used in the experiment may not reflect the personal taste of the participants. Even though the participants were asked to choose items that they would be most likely to choose when going out shopping, the choices of the participants in the test may not reflect the choices they would have made in real life. In order to find more trustworthy answers, participants could be given the opportunity to pick garments that they get to keep after the test. Or they could be provided the choice to choose garments from a brand of their liking where these garments are used as test-products.

Since the online shop of Ellos Group is used as online shopping channel, the visual merchandising techniques that apply in real life are used. Within the physical store environment, visual merchandising techniques were limited. Visual merchandising techniques as they could occur in a store, such as products categorized on color or style, displays, posters and so forth are not applied in these studies.

To strengthen the validity of the studies, a qualitative research could form the basis to find most apparent product attributes among participants that could then be tested on a larger sample within a quantitative research. This way, the predefined set of product attributes used within a quantitative context will be retrained from the responses of participants instead of those of previous researches or the researcher himself.

In future research, it could be interesting to find how consumers use intrinsic and extrinsic product attributes. These studies found that by applying for example spring/summer as product attribute, it was often linked to intrinsic product attributes. Extrinsic product attributes can be open for interpretation, and it might thus be interesting to find what consumers mean when talking about product attributes such as simple, or spring/summer.

Also it would be interesting to further investigate how consumers use product attributes across channels. It was found that the product attributes found in the first channel form a benchmark to evaluate the product attributes in the latter channel, but it could be investigated more thoroughly what implications this has on the decision on a purchase.

At last, these studies explored the product attributes applied when choosing tops in specific and it might therefore in future studies also be interesting to look for product attributes applied to choose on other garments, such as pants, and/or accessories.
REFERENCES


Oyatoye, E.O. (2011) Advanced quantitative research methods, Ph.D. Lecture Notes on Conjoint Analysis, Department of Business Administration, University of Lagos, Lagos.


Hej,

Du har anmält intresse för att vara med och testa i SIIRs Handelslabb, vilket vi är väldigt tacksamma för.

Vi har ett test som pågår 25, 26 och 27 mars på dag- och kvällstid. Testet tar ca 45 min att genomföra och sker i Handelslabbet (sal L207) i byggnaden Sandgärdet (samma byggnad som biblioteket). Denna gång genomförs testet på engelska.

Som tack för hjälpen för att du ställer upp som testperson får du ett presentkort på Ellos på 150kr.

För att du ska få en tid som passar dig, svara på detta mail med uppgift om vilka tider som du har möjlighet att vara med. Ange gärna fler alternativ.

När jag har fått ditt svar så återkommer jag med exakt vilken tid du har fått inom tidsintervallet samt information runt testet.

Välj på tidsintervallerna nedan.

**Tis 25 mars**
- 17:00-18:00
- 18:00-19:00
- 19:00-20:00

**Ons 26 mars**
- 16:00-17:00
- 17:00-18:00
- 18:00-19:00
- 19:00-20:00

**Tors 27 mars**
- 15:00-16:00
- 16:00-17:00
- 18:00-19:00
- 19:00-20:00

Tack för din medverkan.

Mvh

Camilla Carlsson

Koordinator
APPENDIX B: CONFIRMATION E-MAIL TO TEST PARTICIPANTS

Hej,

Du har anmält intresse för att vara med och testa i SIIRs Handelslabb, vilket vi är väldigt tacksamma för.

Du har fått testtiden **xx mars kl.xx**. Testet tar ca 45 min att genomföra och sker i Handelslabbet (sal L207) i byggnaden Sandgärdet (samma byggnad som biblioteket). Denna gång genomförs testet på engelska.

Som tack för hjälpen för att du ställer upp som testperson får du ett presentkort på Ellos på 150kr.

Tack för din medverkan.

Mvh
Camilla Carlsson
Koordinator
## APPENDIX C: THE PROFILES OF THE PARTICIPANTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Fashion experience from study/work</th>
<th>Previously bought clothing online</th>
<th>Frequency of buying clothing online per year in times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D: TEST-GARMENTS
APPENDIX E: IMAGES OF TEST SET-UP

Figure 1 Test set-up retail laboratory
APPENDIX F: QUESTIONNAIRE

Demographics:

1. How old are you?
2. Do you (or have you) either studied, worked or both within the fashion industry?
3. Have you ever bought clothing online?
4. How often do you buy clothing online?
5. Have you ever bought clothes from www.ellos.se?

Garments:

1. Why did you choose these garments?
2. Have you ever seen any of the items before? Do you own any of the items? Did that affect your choice?
3. Have you considered the prices of the garments?
4. Did you notice that the test garments in both the online shop and the rack are the exact same?
5. Are you aware that you chose X of the same garments?
6. Did you recognize the garments online on the rack and vice versa?
7. Did recognizing the garment from online – in the rack affect your decision to choose or not choose the garment online – in the rack? Why?
8. Would you have bought any of the items? If yes which ones, why? If not, why not?

General:

9. Are garments important to you and why?
10. Do you feel a garment brings you benefits, and if yes what benefits?
11. What is are most important when choosing a garment online and in a physical store?
12. Do you prefer to shop online or in a physical store? Why?
13. When do you prefer to shop online and when in a physical store?
14. Do you feel there is an (dis)advantage to shopping online? What?
15. Do you feel there is an (dis)advantage to shopping in a physical store? What?
# APPENDIX G: PRODUCT ATTRIBUTES

## Style attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intrinsic</th>
<th>Product attributes</th>
<th>No. of times mentioned</th>
<th>Offline or Online specific</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Print</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Color</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Open back</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Pattern</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Lace</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Leopard</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Style</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Cut</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Neckline</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Part you can tie</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Details</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Form</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Stripes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Flowers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Glitter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Dip dye</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Numbers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrinsic</td>
<td>Spring and/or summer</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Replies connecting the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>garment to the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>words spring, summer and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fresh)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Simple</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Fits my style</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Inspiring</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Seen a lot in community</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Nice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Daring</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Relaxed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Practical</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Fashionable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Interesting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Classic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>Sweet</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>Fancy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
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## Material attributes

<table>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Material</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Natural fibers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Transparent</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Soft</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Offline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Sustainable</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Airy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Attribute</td>
<td>No. of times mentioned</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Light</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Stiff</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Offline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Thick</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Offline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Silky</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Stretch</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Clingy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Offline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Feel</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Offline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Treatment/care (wash is also included in this attribute)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extrinsic</strong> 15.</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
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</table>

**Fit attributes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Fit</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Loose</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Flowy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Boxy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Wide</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extrinsic</strong></td>
<td>How it would probably fit me</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Comfortable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Offline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>How it falls on the body</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Performance attributes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Extrinsic</strong></th>
<th>Product attributes</th>
<th>No. of times mentioned</th>
<th>Offline or Online specific</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Match with specific garment / (Replies matching the garment with a garment in mind; shorts, bikini, jeans, scarf, trousers, jacket, skirt and high heels.)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Wear on specific moment (Replies referring to specific moments to wear the garment; every day, evening, party, Saturday, family dinner.)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Something to have in wardrobe</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Match with wardrobe (Replies mentioning the garment in relation to the rest of their wardrobes.)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Easy to match</td>
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<td>-</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Presentation attributes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Extrinsic</strong></th>
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<th>No. of times mentioned</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Picture with model</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Combination with rest of outfit (Replies linking the garment to)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the rest of the outfit displayed on the model.)

| Identification with model | 1 | Online |

*Connotative attributes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product attributes</th>
<th>No. of times mentioned</th>
<th>Offline or Online specific</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extrinsic</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Brand</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Price</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>