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School of Management

**MEANINGS REFLECTING THE BRAND RELATIONSHIPS  
BETWEEN FINNISH WOMEN AND WEARABLE SPORTS  
TECHNOLOGY**  
**Case Suunto**

Marketing  
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## ABSTRACT

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Recent technological advancements have enabled opening a new market for wearable technology products. Especially wearable sports technology products are now conquering the markets as they offer consumers obvious advantages such as support for sports tracking and health monitoring. As the concept of wearable technology is only emerging, marketers are facing challenges in understanding how consumers perceive this new phenomenon.

Regardless of the fact that the wearable sports technology market is fast becoming an established consumer product category, little research has examined wearable sports technology from the consumer perspective. Therefore, this thesis examines one real life example of a wearable sport technology brand and its customers. The purpose of this study is to describe and analyse the brand meanings Finnish female customers attach to Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire and examine how these meanings reflect the brand relationships between female customers and Suunto as a wearable sports technology brand. Gaining understanding of the meanings and respective brand relationships is essential for future product development and marketing strategies within the emerging field of wearable sports technology.

Due to lack of previous literature within the field of wearable sports technology, three domains of literature are combined in the theoretical framework to gain understanding of the phenomenon in this research: the field of sports brands, technology and fashion. In addition to the contextual introduction, the theoretical framework is built upon the contemporary literature on brand meanings and brand relationships. The three dimensional co-creative process of brand meaning development is introduced as well as literature on the qualifying facets of brand relationships.

Methodologically, this thesis incorporates the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique, a hybrid method that enables accessing the deeper metaphors behind consumer behaviour and thinking. The data was generated through conducting 10 ZMET interviews among Finnish women owners of Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire. Based on the interviews eight main brand meanings and their sub meanings were identified. The reflective brand relationships were analysed on the grounds of the brand meanings and five qualifying facets of this specific brand relationships were uncovered.

Out of the eight brand meanings, three were emphasized by the interview participants. Among the uncovered brand relationship quality facets, two specific facets were found to be characteristic particularly for wearable technology products. In addition to offering insights for Suunto, the meanings and reflective brand relationship facets can offer applicable understanding on the concept of wearable sports technology.

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Viimeaikainen teknologinen kehitys on edesauttanut uuden puettavan teknologian kuluttajamarkkinan syntymistä. Erityisesti puettava urheiluteknologia on valtaamassa kuluttajamarkkinoita, sillä sen tarjoamat edut, kuten urheilusuorituksiin liittyvän informaation mittaaminen sekä terveyteen liittyvän informaation monitorointi, tarjoavat ilmeisiä hyötyjä kuluttajille. Koska puettava teknologia on vielä verrattain uusi ilmiö, markkinoijien haasteena on kerryttää ymmärrystä siitä, miten kuluttajat kokevat tämän uuden ilmiön.

Huolimatta puettavan teknologian markkinan kasvusta ja vakiintumisesta, erityisesti kuluttajan näkökulmasta aihetta ei juurikaan ole vielä tutkittu. Sen tähden tämä tutkielma keskittyy tarkastelemaan puettavaa urheiluteknologiaa ja sen kuluttajia konkreettisen case tutkimuksen kautta. Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on kuvailla ja analysoida Suunto Oy:n suomalaisten naisasiakkaiden Suunto Ambit3 Sport Saphireen liittämiä brändimerkityksiä ja tarkastella kuinka nämä merkitykset heijastavat brändisuhteita naisasiakkaiden ja Suunnon välillä. Ymmärrys brändimerkityksistä ja niitä heijastelevista brändisuhteista on arvokasta erityisesti tuotekehityksen ja markkinointistrategioiden näkökulmasta, sillä puettava urheiluteknologiamarkkina on vasta kehittymässä.

Puettavaan urheiluteknologiaan liittyvän aikaisemman tutkimuksen puutteesta johtuen, kyseistä uutta kontekstia on valotettu yhdistelemällä kirjallisuutta kolmelta eri alueelta: urheilubrändeistä, teknologiasta ja muodista. Kontekstin esittelemisen lisäksi tämän tutkielman teoreettinen viitekehys rakentuu brändimerkitysten ja brändisuhteiden ympärille. Viitekehys esittelee brändimerkitysten kolmiulotteisen luomisprosessin ja tarkastelee erilaisia brändisuhteita määrittäviä ominaisuuksia.

Metodologisesti tämä tutkielma perustuu hybridiin ZMET -metodiin, jota hyödyntämällä voidaan paremmin ymmärtää kuluttajakäyttäytymisen takana piileviä motiiveja ja metaforia. Tutkimuksen aineisto luotiin toteuttamalla 10 ZMET-haastattelua Suunto Ambit3 Sport Saphiren omistavien suomalaisten naisten keskuudessa. Haastatteluista nousi esiin kahdeksan brändimerkitystä alamerkityksineen. Merkitysten pohjalta analysoitavia brändisuhteita määrittäviä ominaisuuksia löydettiin viisi kappaletta.

Löydetyistä brändisuhteista määrittävistä ominaisuuksista kaksi vaikuttivat tyypillisiltä erityisesti puettavan urheiluteknologian kontekstissa. Sen lisäksi että tutkielman tulokset tarjoavat hyödyllistä tietoa Suunnolle, voidaan tuloksia hyödyntää myös laajemmassa mittakaavassa.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 The call for consumer perspective within wearable sport technology

If one looks into what is being written about wearable technology, it seems like “Silicon Valley has a fashion problem” (Style.com 2014). The world of technology and the world of fashion have long been far apart from each other, but it is evident that there is an urge to combine these two as wearable technology has been recognized as the leading technology trend in the future (Ferguson, Rowlands, Olds & Maher 2015, 1). Regardless of the fact that wearable computing has existed for a few decades already, only recent advancements in computing power, data connectivity, bluetooth connections and the lowered costs of smart screens have allowed us to start thinking about adopting it (The Guardian 2012). According to Kim & Shin (2015, 535), it is apparent that consumer interest in smart watches has recently increased. Technology companies like Apple, Intel and Google have already reacted to this change: they have hired CEOs of luxury fashion houses like Burberry and Yves Saint Laurent, released fashion forward products like Intel’s MICA bracelets and collaborated with fashion houses to launch products like Google glasses by Diane von Furstenberg.

Wearable devices are developed for a wide range of purposes from business operations and medical environments to fitness, wellness and communication (Beecham Research 2014). There are several disciplines where the phenomena can have a positive effect and help develop new ways of solving problems or creating new means of exploiting data. For example, wearables are said to be able to make us healthier, happier and more productive at work (Deloitte 2014). At the moment, the largest field where wearable technology has been utilized is the field of healthcare and medicine as within that sector, wearables exhibit natural advantages (Chan, Esteve, Fourniols, Escriba & Cambo 2012 in Gao, Li & Luo 2015, 1704). However, in order to be widely spread, wearable technology has to overcome the challenge that every wearable product from clothes to sunglasses faces: to look good to gain acceptance in the eyes of consumer culture. According to Gao et al. (2015, 1705), along with developing wearable technologies, also attracting the users is an important issue for business managers. That is why the topic should be examined from the consumer research perspective.

At the moment, wearing technology might still appear unfamiliar or unappealing to the bigger audiences as sports and smartwatches are recognized as something that doesn't necessarily belong to a stylish wardrobe. Hence, the images of technology and wearable devices need to evolve in order to feel easily approachable to consumers. Technology analysts have estimated that the wearables market is currently on course to be worth of \$3 billion by 2018. However, it has also been estimated that a successful collaboration between the fashion and tech industries could accelerate the market's growth to \$9.3 billion by 2018 (The Institution of Engineering and Technology 2014). According to the latest Wearable Technology Report composed by IDTechEx, the wearable technology market will reach 70\$ billion by 2025 (IDTechEx 2015).

However, we are still in the early adoption stage of wearable technology products. According to a PwC research conducted in 2014, one of five American adults owned a wearable device, one of ten using them every day (PwC Health Research Institute 2014, 1). It seems the majority of current wearable technology owners are young males aged between 18- 34, but it has been suggested that the next wave of fitness band buyers would be older females, aged from 35 to 54 years (PwC Health Research Institute 2014, 4). When one looks at the history of adopting innovations, it can be suggested that new innovative products should be targeted to the early adopters segment, characterized by excitement towards new technologies and new ways of doing things (Tzou & Lu 2009, 313). These consumers are expected to start the diffusion process by spreading the innovations to other adopter segments. As wearable technology can be defined as something relatively innovative and new, this notion is valuable also in the wearables context.

From this perspective, the phenomenon of wearable technology also resembles the luxury phenomenon as the natural evolution of all concepts new, innovative and luxurious is to eventually move over from the few members of the elite to the bigger masses (Danziger, 2005, 14). What was once out of reach for everyone, becomes usual and even indispensable through the market system that is driven by the desires of consumer culture. The reason why luxury concepts so often spread effectively might lie in the human nature that is characterised by the urge to pursue and be attracted by everything we can't have (Danziger 2005, 16). Even though wearables are marketed also with varyingly affordable prices, the phenomenon has features from luxury. This is also acknowledged in the industry: Wearable technology was on the agenda of the New York Times International Luxury conference held in December 2014. Another



indication is that the famously fashionable technology brand, Apple, has recently taken over the number one spot on the list of luxury brands in China, defeating major luxury fashion houses like Luis Vuitton, Gucci and Chanel (International Business Times 2015).

It is visible that consumers are showing interest towards wearable technology, especially in the category of fitness bands and health information monitoring. The top three concerns that American consumers would like wearable technology to answer to are exercising smarter (77% of Americans), collecting and tracking medical information (75%) and eating better (67%) (PwC Health Research Institute 2014, 4). All these three address the increasing interest towards health related issues like sports and fitness, which is why this thesis concentrates on examining wearable technology products in the sports market.

In a study that examined the adoption of highly fashionable technology products, it was found that the brand was an important ingredient in the process of accepting new technological products (Tzou & Lu 2009, 319). Brands have been described as the essence of the company and as their most crucial asset (Salzer-Mörling & Strannegård 2004, 224). In the marketing literature, it is widely established that brands are important and powerful because they enable consumers to connect to the values and meanings the brands present and this way, express themselves. In contemporary consumer culture, consumption is considered a significant source from which consumers discursively construct their identities (Gurrieri & Cherrier 2011, 360). As brands can be symbols whose meanings are used to create and define consumers' self-concepts, it is important to understand the cultural meanings of products and brands (Escalas & Bettman 2005, 378). In the context of wearable technology and wearable technology brands, it is important to gain understanding of these meanings as the field is just now becoming visible among the larger audience.

## **1.2 Problem setting and research questions**

The subject phenomenon of this research, wearable technology, is a relatively new phenomenon especially from the commercial perspective and therefore, has not yet been extensively examined in the field of marketing research. However, as the phenomenon provably has several common-good advantages like exploiting personal data to support health and exercise related goals, it can be argued that there is a need to generate a better understanding of the phenomenon from the consumer point of view. In order to contribute to exploiting the advantages of wearable

technology, marketing research should acknowledge its role in the process of supporting consumer adaptation and start by concentrating on creating knowledge on how consumers perceive the phenomenon.

When it comes to examining how consumers perceive the phenomenon, it is useful to take a more realistic perspective in order to gain rich, relevant and dependable data, as opposed to examining hypothetical examples. This is why in this thesis, a case brand study perspective was applied in order to generate real life related insights about wearable sports technology. It is widely acknowledged in the marketing literature that consumers' relationships with brands are an integral part in explaining consumer behaviour. The notion that brands can be self-expressive and important for consumers' identity projects, social categorization, personal style and self-definition, is widely accepted among marketing researchers (Ahuvia 2005; Escalas & Bettmann 2005; Hemetsberger, Kittinger-Rosanelli & Friedmann 2009; Thomsom, MacInnis & Park 2005). That is why this thesis examines consumer's perceptions of wearable technology from the specific brand perspective.

In order to better understand how consumers perceive wearable technology products and brands, it is essential to gain further insight about how consumers see their relationship with technology related brands. Prior research has been investigating technology brands from the perspective of buyer behaviour and decision making (Hamann, Williams & Omar 2007), but little research has been conducted from the consumer identity perspective. This is the gap this thesis attempts to fill. According to Susan Fournier (1998, 345), a specific relationship requires a thorough understanding of the meanings the relationship provides to the consumer. Therefore, from the vast field of brand marketing research, this thesis concentrates on examining brand meanings of one selected wearable technology brand and one of its' specific models, namely Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire. Suunto Oy is a globally acknowledged Finnish company that manufactures and sells highly technological sports watches, a wearable technology category that well matches the objectives and requirements of this research. The Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire is a recently launched premium sports watch model targeted specifically for women. This fact also supports the ultimate research purpose agenda as it has been suggested that the next big wave of fitness related wearables adaptors would be women (PwC Health Research Institute 2014, 4).

The purpose of this study is to describe and analyse the brand meanings Finnish female customers attach to Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire and examine how these meanings reflect the brand relationships between customers and Suunto as a wearable sports technology brand. To achieve this purpose, this study has two research questions:

1. What meanings do female customers of Suunto attach to Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire?
2. How do these brand meanings reflect the relationships between female customers and Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire?

Due to the novelty of the wearable technology phenomenon as a marketing research topic, there is no specific previous theoretical framework to base the study on. Therefore the theoretical framework of this research creatively combines different elements from the field of consumer behaviour, mainly from the stream of research under Consumer Culture Theory (CCT). CCT is a family of theoretical perspectives that explore the heterogeneous distribution of meanings and the diversity of overlapping cultural groups in the dynamic space of consumer actions, the marketplace and cultural meanings (Arnould & Thompson 2005, 869).

Like any other research, also this study has its limitations regarding to the initial research setting. Firstly, the research data is generated only among Finnish Suunto customers, even though Suunto products are merchandised globally. Different cultural backgrounds might affect the meanings customers attach to the brand and therefore it is important to acknowledge this limitation. Secondly, the research data is generated from a specific age target group that reflects the typical Suunto customer. The age of the research participants ranges from 32 to 50 years, which leaves out the younger demographic segments. Thirdly, the research data is gained within customers who actually own and daily use the target product. Thus, this thesis concentrates on the perspective of people who already have adopted a wearable sports technology brand and leaves out the perspective of possible future customers.

## **2 BRAND MEANINGS REFLECTING BRAND RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CONTEXT OF WEARABLE SPORTS TECHNOLOGY**

### **2.1 The concept of wearable sports technology**

The context of this thesis, wearable technology, is still an emerging phenomenon, especially from the perspective of consumer research. Despite the hype about wearable technology, empirical research on consumers' perceptions and attitudes toward it has yet remained insufficient as relevant studies are still preliminary (Kim & Shin 2015, 527-528). Also, the context of health and sport related wearable technology has yet received limited attention within consumer researchers. According to Gao et al. (2015, 1705), an integrated framework of wearable technology within healthcare, a field that also incorporates sports and fitness tracking, is needed. Due to the lack of research on this phenomenon, also the concept of wearable technology remains indistinct from the consumer research perspective.

However, earlier research has acknowledged the complexity of the phenomenon. According to Geppert (2012, 46), wearable technology is complex, because it integrates characteristics of clothing related issues like aesthetics and comfort as well as characteristics of electronic devices, such as usability. The complexity of wearable technology is apparent also because it has to consider collaboration between several stakeholders, such as end-users, electronics, fashion designers and manufacturers (McCann & Bryson 2009, 28). In addition to combining technology and clothing related fields, wearable technology is in a close relation with the field of health and fitness (Gao et al. 2015). Given these notions, it appears that the context of wearable sports technology should be defined by three varying domains: *technology*, *fashion* and *sports brands* as illustrated in Figure 1.

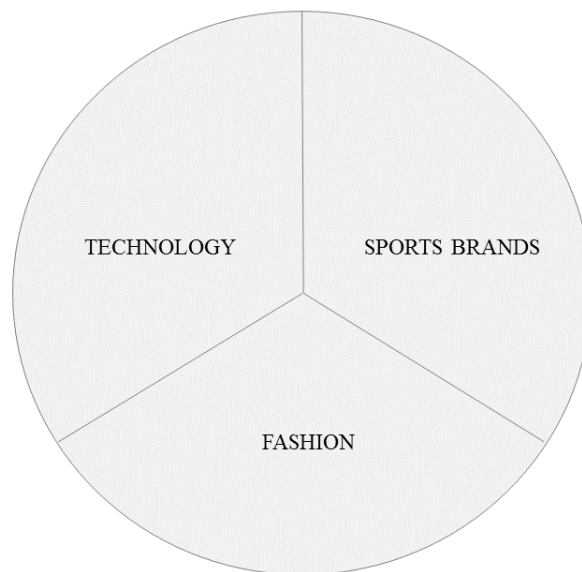


Figure 1. Domains determining the context of wearable sports technology

As there exists only limited research upon wearable sports technology, the required understanding of the phenomenon is generated by examining relevant aspects from these three domains. Next, each domain is discussed individually from the point of view that appears essential for wearable sport technology. This examination enables creation of brand meaning understanding within the context of wearable sports technology.

### **2.1.1 The context of sports brands**

Common ways consumers build and express identity are through brand choice, consumption practise and choice of leisure activities (Schwarzenberger & Hyde 2013, 41). Within the field of sports brands, all these three come together. Most sport brands have an ability to construct meanings through narratives (Bouchet, Hillarit & Bodet 2013, 2). Sport brands have been described as “a supplier of meaning and life principals” as their semiotic power seems to be very strong (Bouchet et al. 2013, 2-3). For example Nike is known for its symbolic values like self-achievement and transcendence. Wearing surf and snowboard brands on the other hand, sends a message of ideals like freedom, fun, escape and nature which are the roots of surfing and snowboarding cultures (Bouchet et al. 2013, 2).

Bouchet et al. (2013, 39) suggest sports brands to be divided into four dimensions: functional, sensorial, semantic and somatic. Most elements these four dimensions consist of can also be found from brand dimensions within other types of brands, such as luxury brands or technology brands. However, unlike other definitions of brand dimensions, the sports brand dimensions include the somatic, that is, the bodily dimension. In the case of sports brands it is worth considering also the physical aspect and what it can bring to the brand experience as bodily experiences are an important part of doing sports and consuming sport brands.

The *functional dimension* of a brand refers to the actual utilitarian value and material benefits and is thus closely tied to the product attributes, such as usability, reliability and durability (Wiedmann, Hennigs & Siebels 2007, 4). For example, the function of a sports watch might be letting the user see some data about his exercise in order to support his training or other goals by checking his wrist. Other basic things related to the functional value are signal recognition, choice practicality and guarantee of quality (Kapferer 2008, 22). By choosing a specific brand the consumer can trust to receive the expected quality no matter where or which product of the brand she / he purchases.

The *sensorial dimension* of sports brands refers to everything that can be experienced through consumers' senses: vision, hearing, smell, taste and touch (Bouchet et al. 2013, 39). While describing the sensorial dimension, Bouchet et al. (2013, 39) also talk about brands as experience producers. It has been suggested that the importance of experiences is highlighted in the area of leisure, entertainment and arts products (Hirschman & Holbrook 1982, 96), a domain to which sports brands belong to. According to Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello (2009, 53) a brand experience refers to "subjective internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings and cognitions) and behavioural responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications and environments". Thus, brand experience can be seen as a multidimensional construct. In addition to providing sensory experiences, the brand has an affective dimension (feelings and emotional bond that the brand arouses), an intellectual dimension (brands ability to engage consumers thinking) and a behavioural dimension (lifestyles, bodily experiences and interacting with the brand) (Zarantonello & Pauwels-Delassus (2016, 148).

The *semantic dimension* refers to the symbolic function of brands, that is, the ability to carry meaning and values (Bouchet 2013, 40). According to Oswald (2012, 51), brands are

multidimensional sign systems that can be analysed in terms of material, conventional, contextual and performative structures. In order to be analysed, sign systems need to be available for senses, thus have a material dimension. Secondly, in order to be understood, sign systems need to be codified by conventions that are shared by the members of social groups. Thirdly, sign systems create social discourses whose meanings are modified by the communication context. Finally, as the communication events engage both the speaker and receiver (marketer and consumer), it can be said that sign systems are performative. (Oswald 201, 51) This way, brands act as symbols or metaphors for specific constructs or meanings. The semantic or symbolic function of brands is actively developed and promoted by the marketers, but it's important to also note that sports themselves carry signs, meaning and associations (Bouchet et al. 2013, 40). These meanings can have an impact on sport brands if they are played in the marketing of the brand.

The *somatic dimension* refers to bodily practises expressed and manifested through buying and consuming brands (Bouchet et al. 2013, 40). This dimension is characteristic for sports brands, especially for those that promote exercise or some form of training. According to Bouchet et al. (2013, 40), sport behaviours typically rely on specific routines that incorporate an object and a related brand, e.g. doing crossfit might incorporate specific trainer shoes and the Reebok brand. Sport brands typically play on bodily actions like running or cycling in their promotional campaigns.

### **2.1.2 The context of technology**

As this thesis concentrates on describing and analysing the meanings and brand relationships of a technological product, it is important to gain insight about the variables influencing consumers' attitudes towards technological products. A major stream of study that concerns consumer behaviour towards technology products focuses on technology adoption. It discusses consumers' behavioural and cognitive motivations in the context of launching new technologies. How individuals adapt to and use new technologies is one of the most mature areas of information technology research (Venkatesh, Thong & Xu 2012, 157). It has been a prominent research stream for over two decades and much research has been developed on the fundamental assumption of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Hess, McNab & Basoglu 2007, 1). Technology adoption has been researched in order to predict and explain user behaviour as it has been acknowledged important for product design and development as well

as for marketing and sales (Vannoy & Palvia 2010, 151). As this thesis examines an innovative way of using technology in a wearable product and lacks a source of established literature on the context of wearable technology, the literature on technology adoption is used here as a reference to gain understanding on the field of technology.

There have been several suggestions on how technology acceptance should be modelled since the original TAM model. The most updated one, UTAUT2 (Unifying Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology) identifies seven motivational constructs that influence behavioural intention and usage of technology (Venkatesh et al. 2012, 157). These are *performance expectancy*, *effort expectancy*, *social influence*, *facilitating conditions*, *hedonic motivation*, *price value* and *habit* (Venkatesh et al. 2012, 159-162). The model contains an expectation that age, gender and experience might moderate behavioural intention through the main constructs (Venkatesh et al. 2012, 162).

However, recent research has found that the user has an increasingly important and interactive role when it comes to design, development and marketing (Vannoy & Palvia 2010, 151). From that perspective, mere acceptance of technology seems to be quite insufficient a perspective when it comes to understanding what motivates consumers to adopt new innovative technology. Therefore, the mere acceptance of technology has gained some criticism within the research field. For example, Baron, Patterson and Harris (2006, 128) found acceptance an inadequate descriptor for behaviour when it comes to text messaging and suggested that mere acceptance models are inadequate in the context of consumer community practices where consumers co-create the value.

The criticism has led to emergence of social influence models of technology adoption. The research of social influence in technology adoption has examined more closely the role of subject norm (Vannoy & Palvia 2010, 151) that was emphasized in the model that the original TAM stemmed from, the Theory of Reasoned Action by Fishbein and Ajzen in 1975 (Davis, Bagozzi & Warshaw 1989, 983). Subjective norm puts forward the idea of how ones social environment influences ones mental and behavioural actions (Venkatesh & Palvia 2010, 151). Consumers' technology adaption has also been researched in the context of highly technological fashion products. Watchravesringkan, Hodges and Kim (2010) extended TAM to include two intrinsic motivational constructs, *perceived innovativeness* and *perceived fashionability*. In their study 268 students answered questions about a highly technological



fashion product, i.e. LG Prada cell phone. According to the results of the study, perceived innovativeness and fashionability are important motivational dimensions that affect consumers' utilitarian and hedonic attitudes towards using an innovation (Watchravesringkan et al. 2010, 275). A study by Sun, Luo, London and Jiao (2014) suggested that adopters of more fashionable phones (i.e. iPhone or iPad) experience less regret and more satisfaction during the fashion wave caused by the launch of the phone. The study revealed that adopters of non-fashionable phones experienced higher levels of regret and lower levels of satisfaction during what the researchers called a fashion wave, while adopters of fashionable phones experienced less regret and higher levels of satisfaction (Sun, Luo, London & Jiao 2014).

It is suggested that consumer interest toward innovation adoption will already be limited if the consumer doesn't see a fit between his/her lifestyle, values, past experiences and the technological innovation (Sääksjärvi 2003, 91). Different consumer categories have been researched in terms of innovation adoption. Majority of the innovation diffusion literature relies on Rogers' (1962) classification of five adopter segments: *innovators*, *early adopters*, *early majority*, *late majority* and *laggards* (Tzou & Lu 2009, 313). It has been suggested that new products and services should be targeted to innovators, who then start the diffusion process by spreading the innovations to other adopter segments. However, this perspective has also been challenged by a suggestion that targeting the majority might be more fruitful than targeting innovators (Sääksjärvi 2003, 93). In industrial marketing studies it is common to use models of two-group (innovators and non-innovators) or three-group models (early adopter, majority adopters, late adopters) (Tzou & Lu 2009, 313). In a study that examined the adoption of highly fashionable technology products, it was found that across these segments, the brand was an important ingredient in the acceptance process (Tzou & Lu 2009, 319). Thus, even though this thesis doesn't concentrate on technology adoption but on the meanings consumers attach to wearable technology, this finding supports the research setting, as this thesis examines consumers' perspectives on a wearable sports technology brand.

### **2.1.3 The context of fashion**

When it comes to everyday wearable products, from clothes to smartwatches, the product development has to consider aesthetics and fashion appeal. Depending on the dynamics of the lifecycle of a specific product category, companies have to stay accurate by considering fashion and trend forecasting. Based on conducted fashion and trend forecasts, retailers and

manufacturers reinforce their marketing strategies even though ultimately it is the consumers who validate which forecasts become actual trends (Gaimster 2012, 169). A trend can be defined as the “direction in which something (and that something can be anything) tends to move and which has a consequential impact on the culture, society or business sector through which it moves” (Raymond 2010, 14). Large scale trends, macro trends, can be long lasting, global and may not be directly related to the product at hand – trends may relate to demographics, consumer behaviour, culture, attitudes and global economies (Gaimster 2012, 172).

Trends are especially important when it comes to wearable products. According to Auty & Elliott (1998, 109), clothing is particularly sensitive for differences in consumption stereotyping and the ability to decode a range of messages. Clothing has been said to be the primary means of communicating the social identity as it tends to symbolize the social identity and the values of the related social group (Auty & Elliott 1998, 109). However, the messages clothes or other wearable products and related brands communicate may not be consistently accepted. According to Swartz (1983), brand-users perceptions have been found to differ among almost identical brands within the same product category. Thus, consumers don't necessarily agree on all the messages and codes that are sent through consumption. According to McCracken and Roth (1989, 29), “the knowledge of a code may have more uneven distributions for products than it does for language”.

It has been stated that fashion would not exist without the need for belonging to a community and on the other hand, the need to differentiate oneself from others (Rickman & Cosenza 2007, 606). According to Han, Nunes & Dreze (2010, 16-17), consumers can manage this need by either favouring prominent or silent branding. In their study on different luxury consumers, they found that depending on the consumer's state of wealth and need for status, consumers would either favour prominent or more discrete visibility of the brand in the product in order to either connect or differentiate themselves from a specific consumer group. The idea of connecting and differentiating from others seems to be quite prominent especially among the luxury category. It also explains the dynamic character of the lifecycle of fashion. It has been found that after the masses start to adapt the brand that the elite used to consume, the elite rejects those brands and seeks something else (Berger 2010, 77). According to Danziger (2005, 14), the natural evolution of all luxury concepts is to eventually transfer from the elite to the masses. Now that information about the lifestyle of the elite is more accessible to the masses, this evolution is

becoming faster than before. The driver that makes the masses pursue the lifestyle of the elite seems to lie within human nature, as it sees that we are fascinated by everything that is unreachable (Danziger 2005, 16).

## **2.2 The definition and role of brand meaning**

The core nature of meaning has been noted by philosophers and psychologists for ages – *meaning is relation* (Aristotle, 1987; Baumeister, 1991; Freud, 1930/1991; Heidegger, 1953/1996; in Heine, Proulx & Vohs 2006, 89). Meaning is what links ideas, objects, places and people to one another in predictable ways: cold to snow, mothers to daughters, dawn to the sunrise (Heine, Proulx & Vohs 2006, 90). Meanings are formed from signs and symbols that are tied to their cultural space and time (Mick & Oswald 2006, 42). A sign is something that stands for something else (Berger 2010, 3). A sign arouses a thought or feeling that creates a specific experience, varying depending on the individual experiencing it (Fiske 1998, 63-64). Thus, no sign has meaning in itself (Lehtonen 1996, 72). Meanings are personal for each individual, however experienced meanings seem to be quite convergent among the members of the same culture (Fiske 1998, 69). Humans are “meaning makers”: the most important relations – meanings – people seek are those between the self and the external world (Heine et al. 2006, 90).

Meanings are at the heart of consumer behaviour (Batey 2008, xiii). In our daily lives we are surrounded by signs and their meanings: like traffic lights and guide signs in grocery stores, also the clothes and behaviour of people are signs that we must be able to interpret (Lehtonen 2000, 18-19). When it comes to marketing and consumer research, it is important to understand the cultural meaning of products and brands as brands can be symbols whose meanings are used to create and define consumers’ self-concepts (Escalas & Bettman 2005, 378). However, it is common that meanings might be taken for granted without actually being considered (Lehtonen 1996, 13). As there are meanings everywhere, we don’t pay attention to what symbols and meanings we see behind products but rather cope with the information subconsciously. Marketers need to be able to recognize these constructs of meanings.

Brands attach meaning to goods. This could be considered the most important function of branding as through meaning, marketers are able to differentiate otherwise similar products (Muniz 1997, 308). The importance of brand meanings is highlighted if one thinks how the role

of brands has evolved: From simply having been a marker that identifies the producer of the product, brands today have increasingly become the product that is actually consumed (Salzer-Mörling & Strannegård 2004, 224). Meaning is said to be the most powerful form of competitive advantage (McInnis, Whan Park & Priester 2014, xv). As the markets of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are highly competitive, brands have had to go beyond functionality to deliver also emotional and symbolic benefits via the embodiment of abstract brand meanings (Torelli & Stoner 2014, 194).

However, brand meaning is not yet clearly defined as it is still somewhat an emerging concept in the marketing literature (First 2009, 25). Different definitions of the term exist. Brand meaning has for example been linked to *brand attributes* (Davis 2007; Oakenfull, Blair, Gelb & Dacin 2000), *brand associations* (Henderson, Cote, Leong & Schmitt 2003) or *brand personality* (Escalas & Bettman 2005; McCracken 1986). In the fields of psychology and neuro-linguistic programming, the definition of meaning in general is linked to the intention or significance of a message or experience. Creating meaning is a result of usage of inner representations that are associated with external cues or events. (First 2009, 29) Thus, meaning is a “product of one’s values and beliefs” (Dilts & DeLozier 2000, 703). In this thesis, the definitions from marketing literature as well as from the field of psychology serve as guidelines for approaching the research topic.

### **2.2.1 The structure of brand meaning**

When considering the structure of brand meaning, it is useful to examine the differences between *tangible properties*, that can be perceived through senses and thus exists independently, and *intangible properties*, that exist only in the mind of an individual (Batey 2008). Tangible properties come from the object to the consumers mind through perceived senses, whereas intangible properties originate from the consumers mind and are projected onto the object (Batey 2008). Based on this remark, meaning of things, e.g. brands, are combinations of tangible and intangible properties.

According to Batey (2008), four levels of brand meaning can be defined, reflecting the evolution from tangible, more objective perception, towards intangible properties, that refer to more subjective perception. The way meanings are perceived by all people are usually objective and constructed upon the more tangible properties of the brand. As brand meaning is defined

by a smaller group of people, like a specific culture or a sub culture, the intangible properties become more relevant. On the level of the individual, brand meaning is subjectively defined as it emerges from highly personal experiences with an object, resulting in personal meaning that varies between individuals (Batey 2008).

The division of tangible and intangible properties of meanings mirror also the concept of primary and implicit brand meaning. Primary brand meaning or the core brand meaning refers to the primary associations and perceptions that would immediately come to the consumers mind about a brand (Chard 2013, 329). For example, Google commonly means search engine, LouisVuitton means luxury bags and Starbucks means coffee. However, all these examples also contain implicit, deeper meanings that contain a symbolical and thus intangible character. Implicit brand meaning refers to the psychic resonance that the brand offers for consumers (Batey 2008). For example, even though Google's primary meaning usually could be defined as "search engine", the more implicit and hidden meaning might be offering all information available for everyone in the world and thus promoting democratization and advancement for all. Implicit brand meaning tends to be more culturally influenced and less category dependent than primary brand meaning (Batey 2008). Implicit brand meaning therefore also connects to higher-level consumer values or archetypal patterns and is thus important to be clearly understood by the marketer as it reveals potential deeper motivations of consumers (Chard 2013, 330). In this thesis, more concentration is put to the implicit brand meanings, even though primary and implicit brand meanings together create the overall brand meaning.

### **2.2.2 Generation of brand meanings**

Anyone can produce a product. However, what is often needed to create commercial success seems to be artful creation of images and brands (Salzer-Mörling & Strannegård 2004, 224). Many times the real business lies within the branding – the business of "creating a corporate mythology powerful enough to infuse meaning into these raw objects just by signing in its name" (Klein 2000, 28). Creating a successful brand relationship with meaning requires appealing to the consumers' head and heart – that is, the brand has to offer both rational and emotional benefits (First 2009, 31). According to Gordon (2006, 9) there is no 'rational' versus 'emotional' - "sometimes rational appears to take the high ground, but 'emotional' is the underlying force". Nowadays the common notion is that feelings actually take the greater influence (Heath, Brandt, Nairn 2006, 412).

Traditionally, it has been thought that advertising agencies and brand managers are the creators of brand meaning. The role of the consumer was then seen mainly as the receiver and acceptor of that communicated meaning. Now, however, it has become clear that brand meaning is not solely constructed in advertising but rather in consumers' minds (First 2009, 30). Even though the traditional view is old fashioned, it indicates well the difference between brand identity and brand image. According to Kapferer (2008, 174), brand identity is created by the marketers as they decide on and thus form the company's perspective on brand identity and what it contains. Brand image, in turn, is the reflection of that specific brand identity, defined by how the consumer receives the messages by which the marketer aims to communicate the brand identity (Kapferer 2008, 174). The marketer's aim is that the brand image defined by the consumer would match the initially designed brand identity or that these two constructs would at least overlap considerably. In spite of the usefulness of the traditional two way view, the creation of meaning should not be thought to be something that only concerns the brand and the consumer. This perspective restricts the role of meaning makers, and leaves out the influence many other parties, institutions and publics may have in developing, sustaining and changing brand meaning (McInnis et al. 2014, xv).

According to Peter & Olson (2004, 382) brand meaning is created in three environments: physical, social and marketing environments. Physical environment refers to the surroundings, such as buildings, stores, time and temperature in which the consumer behaviour occurs. The social environment consists of elements like culture, social class, family, friends and other reference groups. The marketing environment contains elements like advertising and distribution of the brand. Brand meaning is created as a result of interaction of each of these environments.

A somewhat more sophisticated and multidimensional model is presented by Ligas & Cotte (1999, 611). They suggest that brand meaning is co-created through three environments: *the marketing environment*, *the individual environment* and *the social environment* as illustrated in Figure 2.

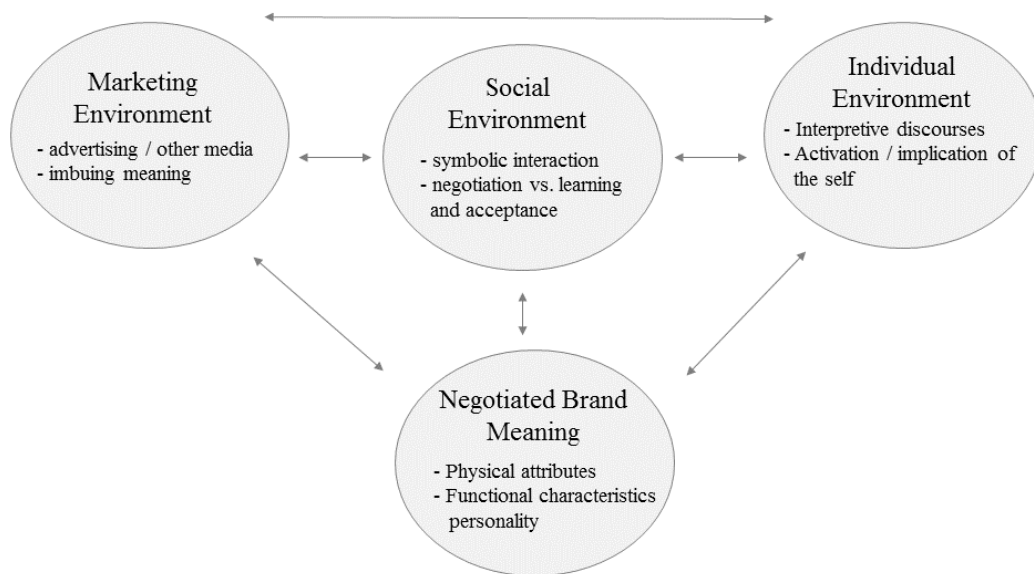


Figure 2. Theoretical model of co-creative brand meaning development (adapted from Ligas & Cotte 1999, 611).

Brand meanings are negotiated in an interplay of these environments: meanings that are developed in one environment may or may not impact the meanings created in another environment. Each environment contributes to the uniform way consumers identify and interact with a branded product (Ligas & Cotte 1999, 610). Next the three environments are individually discussed more thoroughly in order to gain understanding of the creation of brand meanings.

### 2.2.3 Environments of brand meaning negotiation

#### *Marketing as the initiator of brand meaning*

The initiation of brand meaning development most often begins from the actual brand development work conducted during the marketing and advertising of the product (Ligas & Cotte 1999, 610). For a long time, the general assumption was that meaning development was only something brand managers and advertising agencies could create, but now it has been acknowledged that they only propose what the brand reflects (First, 2009, 30). Through

communication campaigns and other visibility the consumers get information of the product attributes and benefits but also about the brand and the meanings associated with it. Thus, branding adds sign-value to goods (Lash & Urry 1994, 15). At the moment, branding has increased its importance in such a way that compared to the product or service, the brand building has become an activity of prime importance itself (Salzer-Mölning et al. 2004, 226).

Advertising tends to interject beliefs about the brand to the marketplace and thus plays a major role in creation of brand meaning (Ligas & Cotte 1999, 609). According to Mick & Buhl (1992, 336), the motivations and meanings of advertising reflect the motivations and meanings of life. Besides advertising and other traditional marketing communications, companies can create brand meaning also by other means, e.g. through their corporate social responsibility activities (McInnis et al. 2014, xwi).

Consumers seek congruence between their lifestyle and the symbolic meaning of the brands they choose (Hirschmann & Holbrook 1982, 92). Naturally, some brands fit these requirements better than others. It has been found that publicly consumed products as well as luxury products are better able to communicate symbolic meanings (Escalas & Bettman 2005, 380). Furthermore, self-congruence has been found to predict brand preference, consumer satisfaction and loyalty (Sirgy 1982 in Kressmann, Sirgy, Herrmann, Huber, Huber & Lee 2006, 955). Self-congruence refers to how well the brand image fits the consumer's idea of their self-concept.

Companies pursue creating strong emotional brand connections with consumers, because such connections have proved to lead to higher levels of customer loyalty and loyalty has proved to increase company financial performance (Malär, Krohmer & Hoyer, 2011, 35). Regardless of the fact that consumers interact with thousands of products and brands, a more intense emotional attachment is only developed with a smaller group of these objects (Thompson et al. 2005, 77). In addition to increased customer loyalty, strong self-brand connections have also other positive outcomes like increased resilience to negative information and brand advocacy (McInnis et al. 2014, xvii). Considering these notions, it could be expected that brands that successfully create strong self-brand connections will also offer consumer important meanings to base this connection to.



*Individual as the negotiator of brand meaning*

As brands are used to create and define consumers self-concepts (Escalas & Bettman 2005, 378), the way individuals contribute to the creation of brand meaning appears highly dependent on the concept of consumer identity. Identity projects are identified as key research agenda in the framework of consumer culture theory (Arnould & Thompson 2005, 871). In the consumer research literature, identity is considered as a constantly changing and emergent entity that comprises fragmented patterns of consumption (Gurrieri & Cherrier, 2011, 360). Kleine & Kleine (2000, 279) outlined five stages in identity projects: pre-socialization, discovery, construction, maintenance, latency and disposal. It is suggested that the stage in which the consumer is in will likely moderate the relationship between the consumer and the consumption stimuli (Kleine 2004, 3). It has also been stated that consumers don't only use consumption to support acquiring or maintaining an aspect of identity, but that consumption can also be used to temporarily or permanently lay aside an aspect of identity (Kleine & Kleine 2000, 279). This might happen very frequently as research from the consumer culture theory stream has shown that many consumers construct their lives around multiple realities and that these realities are experienced through consumption (Arnould & Thompson 2005, 875).

The idea that the self is not just one dimensional but that the self can rather be divided into situationally defined identities that are constructed and negotiated through social processes (Weigert, Teigte and Teigte 1986, 57) seems to be quite widely supported within consumer researches. Solomon (2004, 150) divided the construct of self into *public self*, that is presented through different roles interacting with the situational social environment, *private self*, that presents the more unconscious part of the self and saw *identities* in between these two constructs as more stable entities compared to contextual roles. According to Kleine, Kleine & Kernan (1993, 214) there is a role schema for each identity. The schemas represent the consumer's storage of identity-related information, a collection of "what-to-do" information when expressing an identity. All of the identities are hierarchically organised and some identities are more important than others within the individual's self-concept (Kleine & Kleine 2000, 279). The *role schema* refers to a culturally shared idea or a stereotype of a specific social role. This includes information about what kind of a person usually presents the role and what products symbolize the role (Kleine & Kleine 2000, 279). As role schemas are constructed by an outsiders' perspective, they may also reflect inaccurate information about the people holding the role (Kleine, Kleine & Brunswick, 2009, 56). *Identity schema* represents the understanding

one has about him or herself considering a specific role and includes representation about the identity-related products one owns that support this role. *Identity-ideal schema* represents how the individual would like to be with perspective to a specific role. The identity schema is guided by the identity-ideal schema and the role schema. The identity-ideal schema is also guided by the role schema. (Kleine & Kleine 2000, 279)

When a specific identity is adopted, individuals make sense of the world with help of an identity-consistent mind-set (Oyserman 2009, 250). This results in heightened sensitivity to identity-relevant stimuli (Mercurio & Forehand 2011, 563) and more positive evaluations of identity-consistent stimuli (White & Dahl 2007, 525). It also leads to acting in an identity-consistent way (Oyserman 2009, 252) and results in avoidance of objects and behaviours that are inconsistent with the salient identity (Escalas & Bettman 2005, 379).

Coleman & Williams (2013, 204) suggest that expressing an identity isn't only associated with attitudes, behaviors, beliefs and other "what-to-do" information, but that expressing an identity is also linked to emotional profiles offering "what-to-feel" information. For example, the social identity of athletes were linked to the emotion of anger and the social identity of volunteer was linked to being sad (Coleman & Williams 2013, 207). In their study it was found that consumers regulate their emotions in identity consistent ways. Consumers use consumption to strategically regulate their emotional experiences in order to strengthen identity-consistent emotions and dampen identity-inconsistent emotions. It was also found that these regulative behaviours enhance better identity consistent performance. (Coleman & Williams 2013, 204)

In order to create emotional connection with consumers, marketers use the concepts of both real and ideal-self in their advertising communications (Joji & Ashwin 2012, 77). As emotional attachment has proved to lead to higher levels of customer loyalty, marketers have tried accomplishing that by matching the brand personality with the consumers self. Whether the brand personality should match consumers real or ideal self has also been investigated. For example cosmetics companies are often known for targeting the ideal self, but nowadays there are many campaigns also highlighting authenticity and the real self. According to Malär et al. (2011, 44), matching the brand with the real self leads to higher levels of emotional brand attachment. Aspirational branding, that is connecting to the ideal self, was found to create emotional attachment mainly if the consumers involvement, self-esteem or public self-

consciousness was low (Malär et al. 2011, 44). Thus, both concepts can increase the level of emotional brand attachment, depending on the context (Joji & Ashwin 2012, 78).

*Social environment as the influential force of brand meaning*

People are often more interested in the social connections that come out of brand relationships rather than the brands that allow these linkages to form (McInnis et al. 2014, 6). This idea supports the statement that brands are social objects and are socially constructed (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001, 427). Thus, the process of brand meaning creation includes also a variety of social entities such as face-to-face groups, computer mediated groups, the media, retailers and commercial organizations, equity markets and government and nongovernmental institutions (McInnis et al. 2015, xv). Also cultural factors such as social settings, rituals, product symbolism, language, gender roles and ethnic traditions influence the process by influencing the experience of individual consumers (First, 2009, 36). Within the social environment, each social entity and individual brings an individual meaning to the brand meaning creation process. This means that possibly many interpretations of the brand meaning exists. However, usually the marketplace creates a somewhat unified picture of the brand meaning. (Ligas & Cotte 1999, 611)

The social environment is filled with an infinite amount of different interpretable symbols. Interactions with these symbols continually define and redefine the meaning of objects over time (Muniz 1997, 308). Therefore, it can be argued that brand meaning is not only developed and transferred, it is also negotiated and altered in the social environment.

As different social entities appear important in the creation of brand meaning, it is essential to understand how they are constructed and how they influence other entities or individuals. As an individual gains acceptance into a particular group, meaningful communication allows one to identify oneself as a member of the group (Ligas & Cotte 1999, 612). Thus, when using branded goods consumers must not only understand what image the marketing environment has entered to the market and what the consumer herself believes the good signifies but the consumer must also be aware of how the social group interprets the meaning of the good. The meaning an object conveys might or might not be accepted by others. (Ligas & Cotte 1999, 612). Different social groups might take varying stands on the meanings that the marketing environments attaches to brands.

Consumers use others, who share one's beliefs, to evaluate their own beliefs and as a source of information (Escalas & Bettman 2005, 379). These important others are also called reference groups. People tend to behave similarly to aspiration groups and make choices that are consistent with positive reference groups (English & Solomon 1995, 14). It has been found that there is a linkage between belonging to a reference group and usage of particular brands, thus reference groups and brands can create a value expressive entity (Escalas & Bettman 2005, 379). By choosing the same brand as other in-group-members, consumers can communicate desired social identities and fulfil the need for conformity, one of the oldest topics in psychology research (Chan, Berger & Van Boven 2012, 561).

Reference groups are closely linked to lifestyle groups. It has been acknowledged already a long time ago that for each lifestyle group or role type, a combination of cultural and group influences determine an activity pattern and a product cluster (Kernan & Sommers 1967, 114). Lifestyles that represent socially meaningful categories or reference groups, are interesting because they influence consumers' desires to adopt or reject specific products, services or activities (English & Solomon 1995, 14).

However, in addition to linking oneself into an aspirational reference group, consumers might also want to differentiate themselves from specific lifestyle groups. At the same time, consumers can use brands to both connect to and differentiate themselves from other people (Escalas & Bettman 2003, 340). For instance, in a study of luxury brands, it was found that luxury consumers preferred to use either a prominent or tacit brand, depending on whether they wanted to connect themselves or differentiate themselves from another group of luxury consumers (Han, Nunes & Dréze 2010, 15 -17). This finding is supported in another study that found that people who want to feel themselves unique prefer products and brands of scarcity (Chan et al. 2012, 562). According to Escalas & Bettman (2005, 388), self-brand connections are lower for brands that reflect an out-group-consistent image. Thus, it can be said that reference groups truly are a source of brand meaning (Escalas & Bettman 2005, 378).

### **2.3 Brand relationships and their qualifying facets**

Whether the recent research discusses brand attachment (Thomsom, MacInnis & Park 2005, 77) brand love (Ahuvia 2005, 171) or brand devotion (Pichler & Hemetsberger 2008, 439) it

seems to be inevitable that these brand relationships are important to consumers' identity projects, personal style, social categorization and self-definition (Hemetsberger et al. 2009, 430). Consumers affectively bond with specific brands and form brand relationships that have been argued to resemble interpersonal relationships (Hwang & Kandampully, 2012, 99). The justification for the existence of brand relationships relies within the notion that these relationships are characterised by emotional connection and communication (Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou 2011, 21).

The possibility of consumers creating strong emotional attachment to brands is interesting when one considers the attachment theory in psychology. The theory of attachment in psychology suggests that the level of attachment to an object predicts the way the individual interacts with the object (Thomson et al. 2005, 77). For example, individuals who are emotionally attached to a person usually are committed to, invest in and make sacrifices for that person. Thomson et al. (2005, 77) suggest this might apply to the relationship between consumers and brands, when strong emotional brand attachment supports consumers' willingness to make sacrifices for the relationship, e.g. pay a premium price for a brand. Another finding from the field of psychology suggests that we are "attracted to people whose values, attitudes, opinions and even physical features are similar to our own" (Hazan & Shaver 1994, 10). Even though it must be stated that the relationship between people compared to the relationship consumers create with possessions is somewhat different, marketers have knowingly applied these ideas from psychology to create powerful brand relationships.

The constitutive work that placed brand relationship theory to the limelight in the field of marketing research was the revolutionary article by Fournier (1998) that established a framework for brand relationship theory. One important idea from Fournier's research is that brand relationships, like other relationships, are purposive: "they add and structure meanings in a person's life" (Fournier 1998, 345). Therefore, the meanings consumers attach to brands serve an important role in determining the qualities of brand relationships. Brand relationships should be understood only by looking at the consumers' life from a broader perspective in order to see where the brand functions to serve specific goals and needs of the consumer (Fournier 1998 in McInnis et al. 2014, xii).

Brand relationships are complex and can take many forms. They might take positive, neutral or negative forms and be characterized as emotional, functional, deep, superficial or cooperative (Fournier 1998 in McInnis et al. 2014, xiii). Brand relationships have for example been described as “casual acquaintances”, “business partners”, “teammates”, “fling”, “best friends” and “marriage partners” (McInnis et al. 2014, 13). However, critical perspectives towards decoded archetypal relationship types have been introduced. For example Fournier et al. (2015, 378) propose that even skilfully decoded archetypes and types of brand relationships are not capable of generalizations but rather create a limited description of the relationship consumers create with brands.

Therefore, this thesis doesn't concentrate on categorizing brand relationships by different stereotypical types. On the contrary, here, brand relationships are viewed through varying dimensional qualities. Different categorizations of the topic exist: Fournier (1998, 363-365) mentions six facets that qualify brand relationships: love/passion, interdependence, intimacy, self-connection, partner quality and commitment. Also nostalgic attachment (Solomon, Russel-Bennet & Previte 2012, 14) has been examined as an important facet of brand relationship quality. These facets are illustrated in Figure 3. A specific brand relationship might incorporate one or more aspects of these facets. These facets also reflect more strength and depth in the brand relationships that are determined by these facets (Fournier 1998, 363).

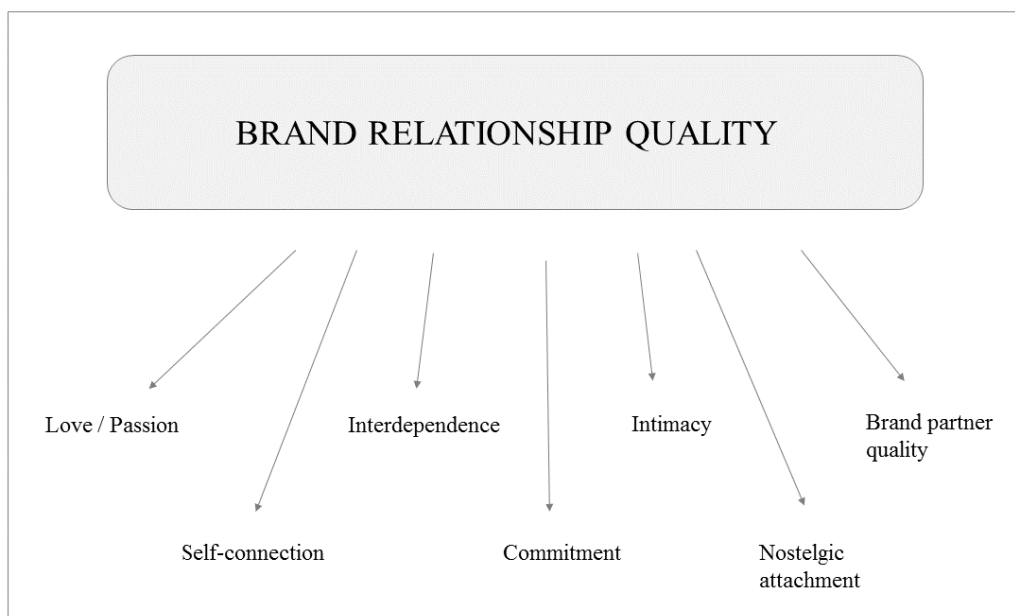


Figure 3. Facets of brand relationship qualities (adapted from Fournier 1998, 366 & Solomon et al. 2012, 14)

*Interdependence* refers to the level of how integral a part of life the brand is for the consumer (McInnis et al 2015, 10). Interdependence is characterised by frequent brand interactions, increased amount and diversity of brand-related activities and increased intensity of these occurring interaction events (Fournier 1998, 365). Thus, interdependence describes brand relationships that base on, to a large extent, a utilitarian need. In interdependent brand relationship, the fundamental quality is trust (Solomon et al. 2012, 14). There might not be a strong emotional aspect delineating these relationships, but the intensity of the brand relationship might however be strong.

*Self-connection* refers to the degree of involvement the consumer feels for the brand: does the brand fit with the consumer's life goals or problems, connect him/her to a shared community or make statements that are important to the consumer (McInnis et al. 2015, 10). It has been acknowledged in consumer behaviour literature that the people and things we love have a strong influence on our sense of who we are (Ahuvia 2005, 171). Consumption is considered a significant source from which consumers discursively construct their identities (Gurrieri & Cherrier 2011, 360). The term 'extended self' has for long been established in the marketing literature, referring to the idea that people and possessions can be considered as a reflection of one's identity (Belk, 1988, 139). Also the belief among anthropologists that one can describe what an individual is like purely based on the things they possess supports the notion that people tend to think products and brands have a symbolic ability to communicate an individual's identity (Belk 1988, 144). Therefore, it is very natural that self-connection is an important aspect when it comes to brand relationships. Self-connection reflects the degree of how well the brand is able to express an important aspect of the identity (Fournier 1998, 364).

*Love/Passion* refers to how the consumer feels he/she really loves the brand: is the consumer ready to make sacrifices to keep using the brand, does the idea of not accessing the brand disturb the consumer, does the consumer have unique feelings for the brand etc. (McInnis et al. 2015, 10). Even though there might be shades of involvement that determine the brand relationship quality of love/passion, involvement is not required: people can love things that they are not currently involved with, like books that they haven't read for years (Ahuvia 2005, 171). Brand love differs from mere brand preference in the affective endurance and depth of the relationship towards the brand (Fournier 1998, 363). The facet of love is somewhat connected to the facet

of self-connection in the sense that the objects of love tend to have a strong influence on individuals sense of self. In a study of interpersonal love it was found that love often results in the growth of an individual's self-concept to include the loved other (Aron et al 1991 in Ahuvia 2005, 171).

*Intimacy* refers to the degree of how close the consumer feels with the brand: does the consumer know the brand's history and what it stands for or does the branded company know much about the consumer and his/her needs (McInnis et al. 2015, 10). Strongly held brands and the knowledge that consumers develop about them create deeper meanings between the brand and the consumer, resulting in intimacy and more durable relationships (Reis & Shaver 1988 in Fournier 1998, 365). The more experiences, interactions and personal associations the consumer accumulates with the brand, the stronger and more stable the relationship becomes (Fournier 1998, 365).

*Partner quality* refers to how the consumer feels the brand takes him/ her in the relationship: whether the consumers feels the brand listens to them, makes up mistakes etc. (McInnis et al. 2015, 10). Fournier (1998, 365) suggests five central components of brand partner quality: (1) A positive orientation from the brand towards the consumer. This refers to the level of how well the brand makes the consumer feel wanted, respected, listened to and cared for. (2) How well the consumer can depend on the brand and how reliable and predictable the brand is. (3) How well the brand obeys the "rules" that determine the specific relationship. (4) How well the consumer can trust the brand delivers what s/he desires versus fears. (5) How comfortable the consumer feels about the brand's accountability for its actions. These components protect the relationship.

*Nostalgic attachment* means the product or brand offers the consumer a possibility to reconnect with a sense of a past self (Solomon et al. 2012, 15). The importance of this facet stems from the basic need of belonging and understanding one's identity. Through consuming nostalgic products, consumers can strengthen this emotion of belonging and reconnect to the past (Loveland, Smeesters & Mandel 2010, 393)

*Commitment* refers to the intention to behave supportively towards a long-lasting relationship (Fournier 1998, 365). Commitment can manifest in many forms depending e.g. whether it reflects monetary investment or personal dedication. When it comes to personal dedication,



commitment may have similar traits as the love/passion facet: it is characterised by being loyal to the brand and the willingness of making sacrifices to keep using the brand etc. (McInnis et al. 2015, 10). Commitment fosters stability in the relationship as well as promotes denial of browsing for other alternatives (Fournier 1998, 365).

## 2.4 Synthesis of theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study comprises of three domains, the context of wearable sports technology, brand meanings and brand relationships. The synthesis of the theoretical framework is based on the interaction between these constructs as illustrated in Figure 4.

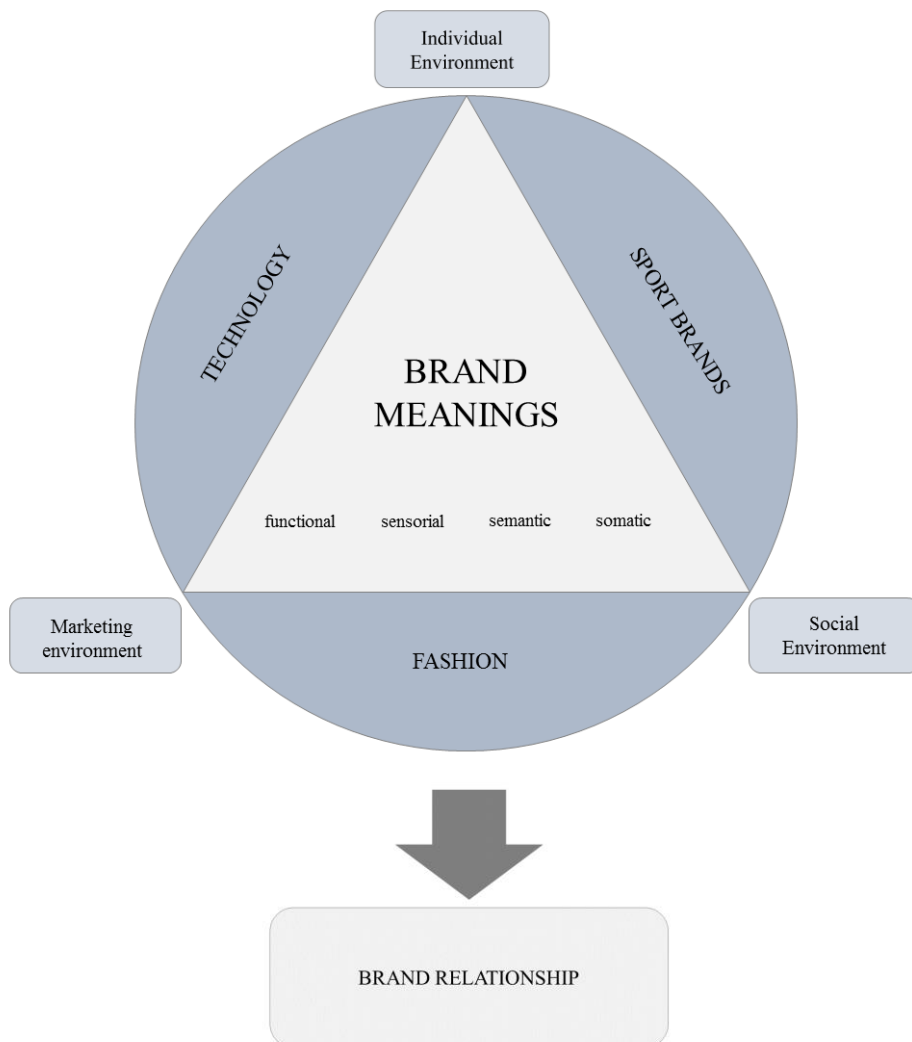


Figure 4. Synthesis of the theoretical framework

As the phenomenon under study here is relatively new especially from the consumer perspective, little previous literature was available to create understanding of the context of wearable sports technology. Therefore, theoretical perspectives from three suggestive fields were combined in order to gain a referential understanding of the context of wearable sports technology. The theoretical perspectives within each of the three fields were selected to the framework based on the relevance that the researcher saw they could offer from the viewpoint of wearable sports technology.

It has been acknowledged that consumption practises and leisure activities such as doing sports, is a common way for consumers to express and build identity (Schwarzenberger & Hyde 2013, 41). Similarly like other types of brands, also sports brands are an important instrument in this process. Bouchet et al. (2013, 39) suggest sports brands to be divided into four dimensions: *functional, sensorial, semantic and somatic dimension*. As the research subject here, Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire, is mainly considered as a sports brand, these four dimensions offer valuable tools during the analysis of the meanings consumers attach to the research subject.

In the field of technology, the process of adopting new innovative technology has been investigated as it appears to be important for product development and marketing (Vannoy & Palvia 2010, 151), topics that this study pursues offering insight for. This research has found several relevant constructs that affect consumer adaption of new technologies: *performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions* (Venkatesh, Morris & Davis 2003, 467) *hedonic motivation, price value, habit* (Venkatesh et al. 2012, 159-162) *perceived innovativeness and perceived fashionability* (Watchravesringkan et al. 2010, 275). Some of these might potentially give valuable insight for understanding what consumers value in technology products and brands and therefore, guide the analysis of the meanings of a wearable sports technology brand.

As wearable technology products are literally wearable, it is important to also consider the fashion aspect in case it offers valuable insight for the empirical phase of this study. Clothing might be the primarily means of communicating the social identity as it reflects the values of the related social group (Auty & Elliott 1998, 109). Other important aspects from the field of fashion are the influence of *trends* (Gaimster 2012) and *luxury* (Danziger 2005).

The main part of the theoretical framework builds on the literature on brand meanings that are interactively created in three environments, *the marketing environment*, *the individual environment* and *the social environment* (Ligas & Cotte 1999, 611). The marketing environment acts as the initiator of brand meaning, pursuing the creation of strong brand relationships (Malär, Krohmer & Hoyer, 2011). In the individual environment it is acknowledged that an important concept that influences the creation and determination of brand meanings are consumers' self-concepts, that can be understood e.g. by the role schema, the identity schema and the identity ideal schema (Kleine & Kleine 2000). In the social environment, brand meaning is actively and continuously created and altered between different social entities, of which reference groups appear to be very important from an individual's perspective (English & Solomon 1995).

As suggested by McInnis et al. (2015, x), the concepts of brand meaning and brand relationships are connected, as brand meanings partly determine the brand relationship. Brand relationships can be characterised by different qualifying facets, such as *love/passion*, *interdependence*, *intimacy*, *self-connection*, *partner quality*, *commitment* (Fournier 1998, 363-365) and *nostalgic attachment* (Solomon et al. 2012, 14).

To gain better understanding on the meanings and brand relationships consumers have towards wearable sports technology brands, a case example study perspective is applied. Through the case of Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire, relevant real life understanding is created in the empirical part of this study.

### **3 RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **3.1 Research philosophy**

This thesis is philosophically based on the social constructionist paradigm that sees reality and knowledge to be constructed and continually changed in social interaction (Costantino 2008, 116–119). Social constructionism argues that reality is something constructed and mentally perceived by individuals (Bengtsson 2002, 38). Thus, in order to create a more general perspective on the research phenomenon, one must start with the individual perspectives. For this purpose, qualitative techniques are applied, as they have been argued to produce holistic understanding and interpretation of socially constructed phenomena (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 12–17). Methodologically, this thesis adopts a semiotic tool called the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET), that helps reveal the metaphors consumers connect with the research target and what these metaphors might be hiding (Zaltmann 1997, 425). Through these starting points, this thesis is about to generate a rich understanding of what kind of meanings consumers attach to the wearable technology phenomenon on the sports field.

All research starts with the researcher's pre-understanding and the foundation of the paradigm that guides the study (Gummesson, 2005, 316). A paradigm is a set of philosophical assumptions that guides what falls within and outside the limits of legitimate inquiry. In the field of social sciences, ontology, epistemology and methodology are considered as key concepts of philosophy (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 12).

Ontology concerns the nature of reality, examining the existence and relationships between people, society and the world (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 13). This research is based on understanding of subjectively constructed observations and experiences that construct reality. According to a subjective ontological view, reality is individually constructed based on social and cognitive processes (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 14). In turn, epistemology considers the nature of knowledge and the ways how it can be produced and argued for (Burr 2003, 92). In this research, based on the ontological assumptions, knowledge is considered to be individually and socially constructed. The selected ontological and epistemological premises guide the choice of the methodological alternative (Aledin 2009, 48).

The philosophical premises in this research lean on *social constructionist* paradigm. Social constructionists see that knowledge is actively constructed through experiences and shared meanings (Denzin & Lincoln 2003, 305). The philosophical base of social constructionism can be found from hermeneutics and phenomenology, both having an influence on the ideas of reality and knowledge (Schawandt 2000, 197). Social constructionism is interested in how people as individuals or group members interpret and understand reality through meanings and social constructs like language (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 19-20). Social constructionism takes a critical point of view towards positivist and empirical science traditions, contrasting taken-for-granted views about the world. It should also be noted that knowledge is always historically and culturally relative, depending on the current social and economic arrangements in that culture (Burr 2003, 2). The researcher must adapt an active role of a participant rather than an outside observer in the research in order to form a profound understanding of the research subject (Arndt 1985, 16).

## **3.2 Research strategy**

### **3.2.1 Qualitative methodology**

The nature of the research phenomenon should define the most applicable method of inquiry (Silverman 2005, 6). This thesis applies qualitative research methods. For qualitative research it is typical to understand reality as socially, culturally and situationally constructed and interpreted (Denzin & Lincoln 2003, 13). Qualitative methodology aims to understand complex phenomena in a systematic way, rather than to establish unequivocal causal relationships between single variables (Gummesson 2005, 312). Qualitative methods are sensitive to the context of the phenomena and create a holistic understanding of the research topic (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 5). The objective of this study is to gain insight on how Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire users perceive the product and understand what meanings they attach to it. Questions like how social experience is created and given meaning to are essential to qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln 1994, 4). Therefore qualitative methods were chosen as most appropriate approach to reach the research objective.

In this study, theory and empiricism were created in a non-linear way, where theoretical knowledge and empirical findings took place simultaneously during the phases of data generation and analysis. This type of knowledge building process is known as hermeneutical

spiral or helix (Gummesson 2005, 314). Hermeneutics is a general approach to interpretation. As Gummesson (2005, 314) puts it: “It is rather a name for conscious search of meaning and understanding”. Hermeneutical helix refers to a research process, where the researchers moves back and forth from pre-understanding to a higher level of understanding, this way creating interaction between the already known and what was just learned. Through this process qualitative research is not just left to generate theory, but it also tests theory as it constantly improves its validity (Gummesson 2005, 315).

This way of creating knowledge and interpretation is also called abductive reasoning. Qualitative research is often divided into inductive reasoning and deductive reasoning: *Inductive* approach refers to making general claims from observed cases, while *deductive* approach refers to explaining specific phenomena by hypotheses and theory (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 21). Adopting an abductive approach means that these two approaches vary during the research process. According to Eriksson & Kovalainen (2008, 23), *abduction* refers to the process of moving from people’s everyday descriptions and meanings into categories and concepts that create basis for understanding of the phenomenon.

### **3.2.2 Case Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire**

The purpose of this thesis is to produce interpretation on the phenomenon of wearable sports technology from the consumers’ perspective. When seeking deeper understanding of a specific phenomenon, it’s recommendable to apply a case study method (Yin 2009, 18). A case study enables profound examination of the dynamics of a phenomenon (Eisenhardt 1989, 534). Case study is a holistic approach that aims at giving a rich description of the relationships and interactions between factors of a phenomenon (Gummesson 2005, 322). A case study method can also make difficult topics more approachable (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 116).

Wearable technology has been available for a while, but it has been welcomed by the general public only recently. As more and more people generate interest towards wearable technology products, the image of the phenomenon naturally evolves. The phenomenon of wearable technology is linked to the increasing interest towards health and wellbeing related issues and at the moment these two phenomenon together are expanding, creating new innovations and interest. Suunto Oy is a Finnish company that manufactures sports watches or wrist computers, dive computers and compasses. The company is known for premium quality technology

products that are sold in over 100 countries. The strategy of the company is to focus on developing devices for sports activities that can benefit from measurement technology, data processing, and specific algorithms (Kotro 2007, 156). Suunto sport watches are made for demanding outdoor sports. However, as a watch-size and watch-like instrument, they are also used as accessories representing a sporty and exciting lifestyle (Kotro 2007, 156). Suunto is an established sports technology brand and therefore was chosen as a suitable case study subject.

In order to gather rich and uniform insight from the customers of Suunto, one sport watch model and its users were selected to the study. One interest of this thesis is to gain insight on the lifestyle and consumer identity perspective of wearable technology rather than only from the perspective of sports tracking. Therefore a premium watch model was chosen, as the model is visually designed to be used also outside sports. Suunto Ambit3 Sports Sapphire is the first womens premium model sports watch by Suunto that was launched during fall 2014. Ambit3 Sport Sapphire is an eye-catching multisport GPS watch crafted from premium materials with mobile connection and Ambit3 sport software. It's features include speed, pace & distance measurement, GPS, route navigation, compass, heart rate tracking also during swimming, workout planners, Movescount training programs and recovery tests among other features.

### **3.2.3 The Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique**

Most of today's marketing research techniques rely on verbal communication as a method of data collection. However, cognitive scientists, sociolinguists and communication specialists have a mutual consensus about the fact that most of human communication - even 80% - is nonverbal (Catchings-Castello, 2000, 7). This should be considered when it comes to consumer research. While researchers are looking for a deeper understanding of consumers' thoughts and feelings, including nonverbal research techniques can help to uncover a more precise picture of consumer thinking. To achieve this, marketers need to understand the cognitive structures or mental models that affect consumers' feelings and behaviour regarding a specific brand or a product (Christensen & Olson, 2002, 477).

The first step towards a better understanding of the consumers' mental models is to understand the process of thinking and communication. Among neuroscientists it is known that thoughts typically emerge as images even though they are expressed verbally (Zaltman & Coulter 1995, 37). An image is an internal representation used in information processing that is experienced

as a conscious thought (Zaltman 1997, 424). Conceptual capabilities developed in evolution well before speech (Edelmann 1992, 108). Even though verbal language plays an important role in the communication of thoughts, it is not the same as thought (Zaltman 1997, 425). Thus, thinking is image based. That is why it is important to enable consumers to represent their images also in nonverbal terms. This way researchers can get closer to the state in which consumers' thoughts occur and thus be able to learn more about consumer thinking (Zaltman & Coulter 1995, 37).

According to Zaltman & Coulter (1995, 37), "metaphors are the key window/mechanisms for viewing consumer thought and feelings and for understanding behaviour". Metaphors can be used to represent thoughts that are tacit, implicit or unspoken (Castings-Castello, 2000, 10). Metaphors both hide and reveal thoughts and feelings. It has been said that metaphors help us to understand and experience things in terms of other things (Zaltman & Coulter 1995, 38). In the field of psychotherapy it has been found that use of metaphors helped make unconscious experiences more conscious and communicable (Zaltmann 1997, 425). Thus, metaphors are central to thought.

One important aspect that needs to be addressed here is that consumers' mental structures and content are mostly unconscious (Christensen & Olson 2002, 481). Tacit, below the surface-level thinking affects consumer behaviour beyond conscious awareness. Actually, most of our emotions and cognitive functions that guide behaviour occur without awareness (Zaltman 1997, 426). This unconscious thinking is more difficult to access directly. Metaphors are a useful tool for eliciting this kind of tacit knowledge and accessing deeper meanings (Christensen & Olson 2002, 481). Many metaphors are mental images. Individuals can communicate their metaphors through pictures: photographs, drawings or pictures from magazines (Zaltman & Coulter 1995, 38). When it comes to consumer research, the research questioning must be able to reveal what a metaphor might be hiding (Zaltmann 1997, 425).

The Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique, ZMET, was developed to better understand consumers by eliciting metaphors that reveal important aspects of their underlying mental models (Peterson & Merino 2002, 480). Gerald Zaltman, a professor of business administration at Harvard University, developed the technique in the early 1990's (Christensen & Olson 2002, 480). ZMET is based on several different fields of research, such as cognitive neuroscience, neurobiology, art critique, visual anthropology, semiotics and psycholinguistics (Catchings-



Castello 2000, 8). The technique integrates the visual projection technique, in-depth personal interviews and qualitative data processing techniques, such as categorisation, abstraction of categories, comparison of instances within the data and dimensionalisation of the data (Lee, McGoldrig, Keeling & Doherty 2003, 342). ZMET has gained recognition among both academic and business research as an effective qualitative technique (Sugai 2005, 644). The technique is patented by U.S. patent no. 5,436,830, where it's described as "a technique for eliciting interconnected constructs that influence thought and behaviour" (Catchings-Castello 2000, 7).

Key concepts of ZMET include photoanalysis and narrating. *Photoanalysis* has been used as a research tool for more than 60 years to present human thought (Catchings-Castello 2000, 10). ZMET allows the participants to collect their own pictures based on a specific guidance from the researcher. Having the participants collect their own pictures increases the likelihood that important but previously unconsidered issues will arise from the research (Zaltman 1997, 428). The *narrative* approach has been successfully used i.e. in the fields of sociology and anthropology (Catchings-Castello 2000, 11). The premise of narrating is that people relate to other by narrating, telling stories. Narrating provides the framework for the ZMET process, as participants come prepared to tell their stories in the interview. These stories are then compiled into one in the analysis process of the data (Catchings-Castello 2000, 11).

ZMET also uses both the Kelly Repertory Grid technique and laddering techniques (Lee & al. 2003, 342). The Kelly Repertory Grid is a technique that identifies how two of three stimuli are similar but different from the third stimuli (Catchings-Castello 2000, 9). Laddering is a technique that creates hierarchical value maps from personal interviews. These value maps consist of means- end chains that might link product attributes to personal values like achievement (Christensen & Olsen 2002, 480).

Applying ZMET consists of four phases: pre-interview, interviews, transcription and coding & developing aggregate mental maps (Sugai 2005, 646). In the first phase the participants are given precise description of the research topic and asked to collect typically 8-10 pictures to bring to the interview that usually takes place one to three weeks later. Participants collect the pictures based on a question the researcher poses. For example, in a study about mobile consumers the posed question was "When you think about the mobile internet, what images come to your mind?" (Sugai 2005, 646).

The actual interviews consist of eight steps (Zaltman 1997, 428-430). According to Catchings-Castello (2000, 11), the steps must however be modified to support the objectives of the specific research project when necessary. The first step, *storytelling*, asks the participant to describe the content of each picture collected. In the second step, *missed images*, the participants describe if there was anything that the participant wanted to include in the pictures but wasn't able to find a picture of. Participants are also asked what's the relevance of these possibly missing images. In the third step, *sorting*, the participant sorts all his or her pictures into meaningful sets and removes possible duplicates. The fourth step, construct elicitation, is the phase where the researcher uses modified versions of the Kelly Repertory Grid and laddering in order to refine basic constructs and their relationships. Thus, the researcher randomly selects three pictures of which the participant is asked to combine two and describe why these two are similar and also different compared to the third picture. This process is continued until no new constructs emerge.

### **3.3 Data generation**

Before starting the actual data generation, a pilot interview was carried out in order to ensure the given directions for preparing for the interview were helpful for the research participants in terms of collecting appropriate and insightful pictures as well as in terms of practical arrangements. The requirements for the pilot interviewee recruitment differed slightly from the actual study recruitment standards, as the pilot interviewee was recruited inside Suunto Oy. To keep the data relevant, the actual research participants could not be Suunto employees but actual customers. However, for the purposes of the pilot interview, an employee from Suunto was selected as it was expected that an inside interviewee would be very helpful with commenting on the possible imperfections of the study guidelines and the actual interview.

The actual research participants were recruited either through (1) the official Facebook advertisement by Suunto (5 participants) or by (2) using the *snowball sampling* (5 participants), which means using the researchers network at Suunto Oy and the contacts of other interviewees. In the official recruitment advertisement and the personal messages sent to contacts it was mentioned that participants would receive a 50% discount voucher to the Amer Sports Brand store in Helsinki that merchandises also Suunto products. The Facebook recruitment advertisement was considered as a suitable recruitment method since the participants

volunteered there themselves to participate in the research. Thus, it was expected that these participants would be willing to offer rich and high quality data for the research purposes. However, as this method didn't produce enough volunteered participants, the snowball sampling method was used. The participants that were recruited through the Suunto employees network were either directly asked or had noticed an announcements in Suunto contacts' personal facebook feed. This way, all participants could be expected to have a volunteer mindset towards the study.

Table 1. Participant information

Participant	Age	Occupaton	Hobbies	Recruited from	Interview location	Interview duration
1	50	Product Range Manager	mountain biking, running, downhill skiing, etc.	facebook	participant's home, Hyvinkää	60 min
2	37	Doctor	skiing, running, gym, spinning	facebook	participant's home, Helsinki	39 min
3	35	Doctor	running, yoga, gym	facebook	cafeteria, Helsinki	73 min
4	32	Layer	gym, horseriding, volleyball, runnig	through contact	cafeteria, Helsinki	26 min
5	32	Entrepreneur	sailing, tennis, hiking, gym, canoeing	facebook	cafeteria, Helsinki	46 min
6	46	Restaurant Manager	decorating, outdoor activities	through contact	Suunto Headquarters, Vantaa	51 min
7	35	Data traffic planner	dogs, running, gym, downhill skiing	through contact	Participant's home, Tampere	34 min
8	32	Nurse	running, horse riding, gym	facebook	cafeteria, Hämeenlinna	51 min
9	40	Enterprice Architect	sailing, downhill skiing, kite surfing, climbing	through contact	Suunto Headquarters, Vantaa	67 min
10	35	Sourcing Manager	cycling, handcrafts, running, swimming	through contact	cafeteria, Vantaa	52 min

Altogether, 10 female owners of the Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire watch were interviewed. The interviewees were all female since the product under consideration was targeted especially for women. All participants were Finnish and the interviews were held either in the Helsinki metropolitan area, Hyvinkää, Hämeenlinna or Tampere, thus in Southern Finland. The age of the participants ranged between 32 and 50, the majority being between 32 and 40, which matches the average Suunto customer. More information about each participant can be seen in Table 1.

The first advertisement to recruit interviewees in the Facebook page of Suunto was launched in May 28<sup>th</sup> 2015 (Appendix 1). The interviews were executed between June 12<sup>th</sup> 2015 and July 30<sup>th</sup> 2015. The research participants received specific guidelines after volunteering to take part in the research and were given at least a week to collect 8-10 pictures. Some of the participants had collected up to 12 pictures. The interviews were held either (1) in the interviewees' home (3 participants), (2) in coffee shops (5 participants) or (3) at Suunto Headquarters premises (2 participants), depending on what was the most convenient location for the interviewee. The duration of the interviews varied between 26 – 73 minutes. The interviews were recorded either by iPhone 4 or iPhone 6 and the records were later transcribed. The names of the interviewees are replaced by numbers in order to ensure participants privacy.

### **3.4 Data analysis**

The objective in qualitative data analysis is to summarize the dispersed data into a meaningful and clear entity that doesn't however lose any of the important information (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 138). In qualitative research the processes of data generation, analysis and interpretation are often performed simultaneously (Gummesson 2005, 312). In this study the preliminary analysis started already during the data generation. The researcher begins to analyse the research topic already in the interview phase by making observations and connections about frequently emerging themes (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2004, 136). After all data was generated and transcribed, the more formal analysis started. As ZMET is a research method that aims to reveal hidden meanings about the research topic, semiotics is a suitable approach to data analysis. Semiotics could be described as a method of "identifying and deciphering cultural signs in advertising, fashion, music, literature, politics, movies etc., and the hidden messages they emit"

(Whalen 1983 in Catchings-Castello 2000, 9). Semiotics is considered mostly an intuitive process (Catchings-Castello 2000, 9).

Once all the interviews were completed, the researcher reviewed all the interview transcripts, tapes and images to identify key themes or constructs and construct pairs. A construct itself has little innate meaning, but meanings are acquired through causal associations with other constructs (Edelmann 1992 in Zaltmann 1997, 430). In order to find the important constructs that consumers attach to Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire watch, the analysis was done in two phases. First individual mental maps are formed and then combined into an aggregated consensus map to represent the collective mental model of the respondents (Christensen & Olson 2002, 484).

Each interview transcript was coded to represent the thought and themes that rose during the interview. According to Zaltman & Coulter (1995, 44), a list of key themes or constructs derived from the examination of interview transcripts should serve as a starting point for the coding process. Once previously unidentified constructs were found during the coding, the construct list was supplemented. In order to verify that each coding interpretation was grounded in the actual verbal statements of the respondents, the “*constant comparative method of analysis*” by Glaser & Strauss (1967, 101) was applied. This meant that the researcher had to go back to the transcripts again and again, making the coding process yield well-grounded interpretations.

After no more constructs were found, the researcher started to construct the collective consensus map in order to understand which constructs were the most important ones for the participants. At first, the consensus map represents a mass of constructs and links (Christensen & Olson 2002, 484). Specific constructs or themes should be selected to the consensus map based on the number of participants who mentioned the theme (Zaltman & Coulter 1995, 44). It is not reasonable to include every construct nor exclude too many constructs either, which means that the researcher has to find the right cutoff level (Christensen & Olson 2002, 484). According to Zaltman (1997, 430), a construct must be mentioned at least by half of the interviewees in order to be included in the consensus map and that the constructs selected to the consensus map should represent 85% of the constructs mentioned by any interviewee.

## 4 BRAND MEANINGS & BRAND RELATIONSHIPS OF SUUNTO AMBIT3 SPORT SAPHIRE

### 4.1. The Consensus map of brand meanings

This chapter reveals the empirical data analysis from the ZMET interviews and presents the found meanings the informants connected with Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire watch. Each meaning in the consensus map is examined and each revealed meaning as well as their sub meanings are discussed in detail. The consensus map is illustrated in Figure 5.

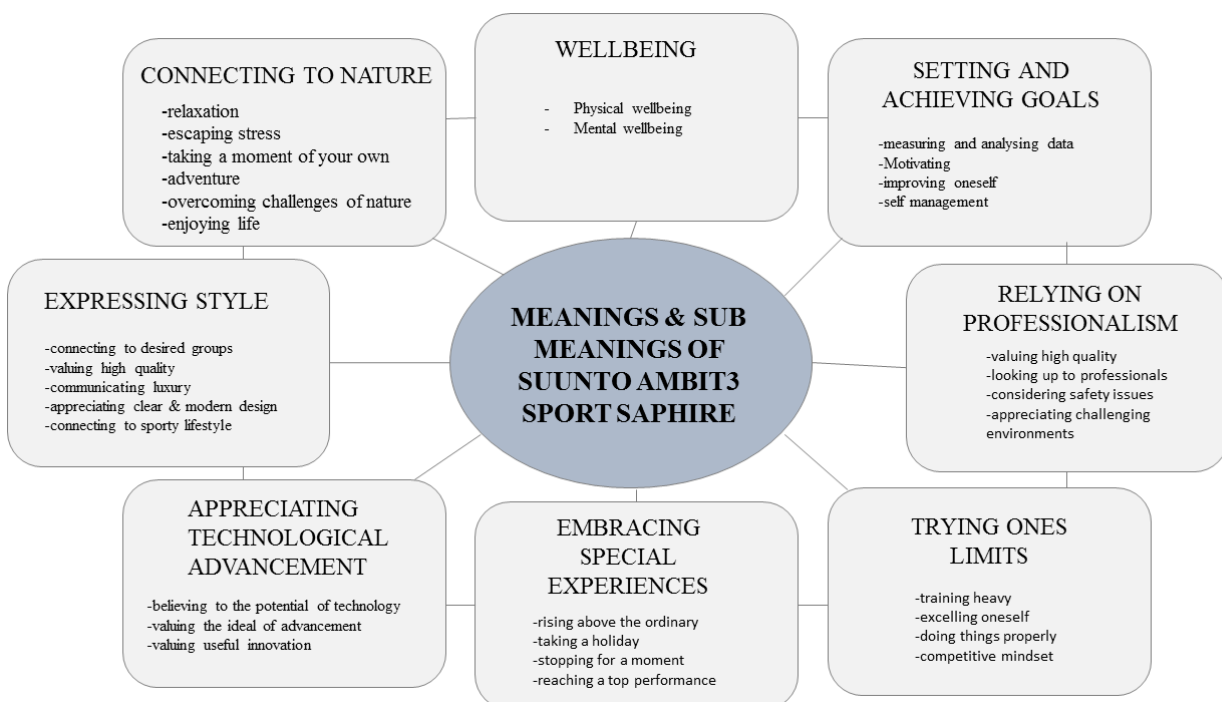


Figure 5. Consensus map of the interconnected meanings & sub meanings of Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire

Altogether eight main brand meanings were identified: *wellbeing*, *connecting to nature*, *expressing style*, *appreciating technological advancement*, *setting and achieving goals*, *relying on professionalism*, *trying ones limits* and *embracing special experiences*. All these eight meanings had several sub meanings as illustrated above. All meanings were interconnected but some, like *embracing special experiences* and *connecting to nature* were more highly interconnected than others.

### 4.1.1 Well-being

One of the usual corporate social responsibility aspects of sport brands is to promote health related initiatives (Bouchet et al. 2013, 119). The wellness phenomenon has recently gained a growing interest among several research fields, including marketing and consumer research (Moorman & Matulich 1993, 208) Whether it was expressed more or less prominently, each interviewee brought up the theme of well-being during the interview. This reflects that each of them shared the tendency of valuing a healthy way of living.

*Then it's like I feel like this watch is also about a healthier life. It's like it makes you exercise more and also makes you think about what you eat a bit more closely... The fact that you'd eat right and sleep enough. Rest, nutrition and exercise all balanced with your work, you know, so you have energy to keep up. - Participant 6*

What was meant by healthy living varied slightly among participants. Two main constructs within the concept of wellbeing could be recognized: physical and mental wellbeing. This finding complies with the notion that wellness is a lifestyle that aims at holistically improving quality of health and life by maximizing both physical and mental well-being (Kraft & Goodell, 1993, 21). Some respondents emphasized the role of physical well-being: exercise, staying in shape, nutrition and sleep. The importance of exercise could be seen from the versatile repertoire of different sports and recreational hobbies that the respondents reported: running, cycling, sailing, gym, downhill skiing, skiing, hiking, climbing et cetera. Most respondents mentioned several different sports and hobbies that they enjoyed doing. It could be seen that these hobbies contained different kinds of goals. One of the main goals seemed to be staying in shape. It was prominent through all the gathered data and seemed to be one of the main goals that the respondents connected with the product. The concept of good shape seemed to vary among respondents: some were more enthusiastic about heavy exercise than others. However, staying in shape in a way that supported a healthy and balanced life seemed to dominate the viewpoints to the issue of physical well-being.

Other respondents emphasized the mental aspect of wellbeing: relaxing and taking a moment of your own. The majority saw these themes coming together: physical well-being resulting in mental well-being. However, it could be seen that some participants emphasized the mental part more than others. These respondents seemed to value mental well-being more than physical performance. Actually the majority of respondents seemed to think mental wellbeing was more

or less the destination of a healthy life, even though some stressed the physical part of the journey. Despite the different aspects of wellbeing, the respondents seemed to feel that different aspects complemented each other, building up the state of wellbeing together.

*Well, sportiness, it of course relates to this watch. It connects to this healthy way of living and like so you stay in shape. You'll notice if you haven't gotten exercise that you're more snappy and stressed. - Participant 4*

*Maybe it's more the feeling you get out of it, being outdoors. I'm not motivated to lose weight or get specific sort of muscle, it's more the kind of mental and physical wellbeing you get after you've been training. - Participant 5*

Many of these interviewees also linked the experiences of well-being on to being and moving in nature. Several participants for example described how joyful, relaxing and mentally important a morning run in the forest could be. It could be clearly seen that moving in nature supported especially the mental part of wellbeing. Nature was brought up in all of the interviews and is discussed as its' own meaning later. However, it's important to note that the meanings of wellbeing and connecting to nature were closely linked.

*There's nothing better than a morning run, on a beautiful morning somewhere in the nature, it's just the thing. - Participant 8*

*A morning run in the outdoors is the best thing, you know, rise and shine. It's like a new beginning, when you just are there, enjoying the moment, the nature, the tranquillity, the lightness and the energy. - Participant 3*

*Moving in the nature gives you peace of mind. Hiking, relaxing and running outdoors, all these are sort of a respite for me. Being outdoors, the nature, gym and training, you know for your wellbeing, both mental and physical. - Participant 8*

*There are two sides, on the other hand it's the exercise but here it's like more about relaxing outdoors and enjoying the nature and also silence. This is like the counterbalance, not everything needs to be performed with heavy pulse. This is perhaps more like just chilling and enjoying. - Participant 1*

Table 2. Priori themes connected to Wellbeing



Wellbeing	
Physical wellbeing	Mental wellbeing

As illustrated in Table 2, the meaning of wellbeing comprised of two sub meanings, physical wellbeing and mental wellbeing. Both these sub meanings are highly constructed on bodily experiences and behaviors, such as physical exercise or the bodily experience of endorphins and wellbeing as described by some participants. Thus, as previous research suggested, the dimension that is typical specifically for sports brands, the somatic dimension (Bouchet et al. 2013, 40), was also identified in this study.

#### **4.1.2 Connecting to nature**

The theme of nature was very prominent in the meanings the participants connected to Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire. Every participant mentioned nature and several had selected majority of their pictures to depict a scenery of nature or doing sports outdoors.

*Jogging in the nature, hiking wise, relaxed jogging, enjoying the outdoors, that's what comes to my mind. - Participant 8*

Previous marketing research has described connecting to nature as a romantic idea, helping consumers escape the modern and hectic life (Arnould 2007, 108). Also romantic writers and artists have embraced nature as an organic, fertile and mystical force where people can seek healing from stress (Thompson 2004, 164). These notions could also be found from the empirical data of this thesis. Nature seemed to play an integral part in the hobbies the participants were active in. Many of the participants mentioned hiking in the nature as something they had done or something they had not yet done, but wanted to experience in the future. Several participants also mentioned sports like downhill skiing, cycling or climbing that are closely linked to the element of nature.

While discussing hiking or other kinds of activities like jogging or cycling in the nature the participants mentioned also relaxing and experiencing. For example, participants brought up the topic while describing a holiday. Thus, the meaning of connecting to nature was very closely

linked to the meaning of well-being and the meaning of embracing experiencing. Being in the nature seemed to bring the participants a feeling of relaxation, balance and freedom. These feelings can be connected with the search for mysticism and escape from the ordinary day or stress of modern life. Previous research has showed that the success of commercial nature related experiences is closely bound to the consumers' search of connecting with nature. For example, in a study that examined the commercial river rafting trips, it was discovered that the power of river rafting originates from the cultural scripts that enable consumers connect and live in harmony with the nature as well as manifest personal growth and renewal (Arnould & Price 1993, 41).

*The sea is relaxing, balancing. I always feel like if I go out doors that it's always different if I go by the sea. It's so balancing. - Participant 6*

*For me, freedom is very important, when you're feeling free it's even easier to breathe – it's like a physical great feeling. You don't have to think about work and all the stress... It's somehow quite a physical feeling. And it definitely relates to exercise in the nature. - Participant 1*

While the majority of participants described connecting to nature from the perspective of wellbeing and embracing experiences, some also brought up the challenging aspect of nature. Several participants mentioned sports and hobbies like climbing or diving that could be qualified as more extreme sports in terms of the challenging and even dangerous environments. The participants seemed to be fascinated and inspired by these extreme surroundings and concerned them with respect. In the marketing literature, the challenging perspective of nature can be discussed through Gnostic ideology (Thompson 2004). The Gnostic perspective refers to overcoming and dominating nature with technology and science (Thompson 2004, 165). Surviving nature with the help of technology empowers the consumer to take control over one's environment. The empirical data of this thesis seemed to also reflect this mythological image, which could be expected as it is generally known that mythologies, mythic archetypes and plotlines permeate advertising and consumer culture (Thompson 2004, 162).

The challenging environments were also linked to the meanings of relying on professionalism and trying one's limits, meanings that are discussed in further detail later in this chapter. It appeared that all these three meanings, professionalism, trying one's limits and the challenging aspect of extreme surroundings, could be seen as metaphors of achievement and respect. It was also apparent that participants connected the extreme environments and the challenges they

brought as something fascinating in itself, something infinite and almost mysterious. Exploring untouched natural environments seemed to resonate the deeper metaphor of adventure and discovery. This goes with the tenet that mythic archetypes and storylines (e.g. heroic journeys) are grounded in fundamental concerns of human experiences such as humanity's relationship with the natural world (Thompson 2004, 162). Through participating activities that were fundamentally constructed around challenging surroundings of the nature, the participants could construct their sense of self upon these deeper metaphors of achievement, respect and adventure.

*Mountain climbing, I myself definitely have no experience of it but I feel that the people who do physically challenging things in extremely challenging environments, and then when this watch is like a smart watch, then I can imagine that this watch goes well with that kind of challenging surroundings like mountain climbing or off-point-skiing. I myself, I'm not looking for recklessness but challenges I do look for. - Participant 2*

*This mountain is one waypoint on Tour de France and it's so inspiring. It's the amazing view, the infinity, the physical achievement, taking the challenge and excelling yourself. It's also the feeling that you are on a journey, on the way somewhere. - Participant 3*

Nature was also brought up while participants discussed more unique experiences. These experiences often related to a holiday or activities that weren't a part of the participants everyday life, like a climbing or hiking trip. The participants seemed to view these unique experiences as a luxury, a treat that made them enjoy life. The elements of nature were always mentioned if a participant brought these kinds of experiences up.

*The watch has the sunrise and sunset in it, so when you're in the mountains... You see I have lived four winters in Saint Antoinio, Austria, I'm a bit of a skiing boom kind of girl. So when the sun starts to set there it gets dark so soon that you have to get into a cabin or something to be safe. So it's important to know when it gets dark and it's good to know the distances so you'll know how long it is back... The nature and the challenge, safety. I feel those are a part of the day's activity. And the watch goes with that package so to say. - Participant 5*

*One thing in common is that you are doing with the elements of nature. You have to read your surroundings – this goes well with the product as it's reading the environment – ice, snow, the sun, the risks in climbing, in gliding and everything. ... There's no noise, it's just you and the nature. It's really great. And in climbing, it's probably that you kind of become one with the mountains. - Participant 9*

In the marketing literature, these kinds of unique experiences have been researched under the topic of extraordinary experiences, such as river rafting (Arnould & Price 1993) or commercialized climbing expeditions (Tumbat & Belk 2010). According to Arnould & Price (1993, 41), extraordinary experiences are manifested in themes of harmony with nature, community and experiencing personal growth and renewal. Unique nature related experiences seemed to be memorable and important to the participants, connecting the meaning of connecting to nature with a meaning later discussed in this chapter, embracing special experiences.

Table 3. Priori themes connected to Connecting to nature

Connecting to nature					
relaxation	escaping stress	taking a moment of your own	adventure	overcoming challenges of nature	enjoying life

The meaning of connecting to nature comprised of several sub meanings as illustrated in Table 3. The sub meanings of relaxation, escaping stress and taking a moment of your own represent the traditional romantic relationship towards the nature where nature is seen to have healing power and help individuals to reconnect with themselves. On the other hand, the sub meanings of adventure, overcoming challenges of nature and enjoying life are more dynamic, representing the yearn for excitement and action.

#### **4.1.3 Setting and achieving goals**

The very feature that makes the watch a piece of wearable technology, the ability to measure sports related data, was brought up throughout the data and linked together with several sub meanings, such as analysing the data, motivating through data, improving oneself and setting and achieving goals. For several participants, measuring data seemed to have instrumental value in supporting their motivation and goals, but to some participants the data itself also seemed to

be valuable. Whether measuring data was seen as a valuable meaning in itself or as an instrumental meaning, it was perceived as a very important meaning related to doing sports.

*I have noticed that if I'm starting a workout and then notice the heart rate belt is somewhere and I won't have time to find it it's very irritating because it kind of really makes it interesting during the workout to see the heart rate and also after the workout, the analysis. If it's been a really high heart rate workout it's interesting to analyse afterwards and if I don't get the analysis I'm very disappointed. - Participant 3*

*I thought that it's not just a running watch or an orienteering watch or a diving watch but that it's like allround, for every sport. You can measure altitude or depth or heart rate or direction in any sport. - Participant 7*

*I'm an engineer so I like all kinds of excel files and charts. It's like I can see that last week I made a record at how fast I can cycle to work, cool. But then I feel that the data is interesting, but that it doesn't necessarily motivate me to exercise. I think it's like interesting to see but I don't think it makes me exercise, maybe it's just that you can compare it and see the improvement but if that was the only feature it would have, I would maybe have an interest for like two weeks but I don't think it would motivate me to do anything in the long run. - Participant 10*

The theme of motivation and improvement was brought to discussion by the participants in every interview. It is suggested that brands can be seen as symbols of personal accomplishment and thus help consumers build their self-esteem (Escalas & Bettman 2005, 379). As was expected, the participants associated the Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire with multiple sports activities. The fact that the watch and its features support several different activities like cycling, running and swimming was appreciated in many interviews. Regardless of the activity that was discussed, the participants saw that the watch supported setting exercise related goals and motivated them to achieve these goals.

The empirical data showed that participants associated the watch with two slightly different kinds of motivational resources. On one hand, the watch itself motivated the participants to *(I) get excited about doing sports and setting sports related goals*. Thus, the idea of the watch itself symbolised something that made the participants reach for their ideal, sporty self.

*It makes me pursue a specific direction. It's like excelling yourself, I got more excited about training when I got the watch and then at the gym we compared our results with my boyfriend. - Participant 4*

*It is unfortunately true that as a consumer you motivate yourself through acquiring stuff. Maybe this watch was also about like `when I'll get the Ambit I'll also go running more often or train better` or something. - Participant 9*

On the other hand, the data showed that the watch contains a motivational resource that (2) *encouraged participants to achieve these goals*. This finding was directly connected to the data measuring and communicating features the watch contains. For example, a few participants mentioned they are motivated to work out more due to the data they receive.

*It's amazing when you get to improve yourself, get the weakness in you overpowered. The same goes with going jogging, when the watch reports minor exercise you just get the feeling that well let's do something then. - Participant 8*

*It also motivates you to go jogging like if the watch says minor exercise in the evening then you feel like doing more the next day. - Participant 6*

*My goal is to improve my condition, I don't have actual goals like running 30 kilometers or anything, just to maintain a good condition and get it to improve a bit. I didn't have a sports watch before and I have noticed that it motivates me. Like while at the gym it shows you how many calories you have consumed or the heartbeat, like which movements are really effective. - Participant 4*

In addition to motivating the participants to exercise more, the data had an important role in motivating to improving one's performance. The data seemed to motivate the participants to try their best, to improve themselves and to achieve the goals they had set. Several participants discussed the importance of getting the experience of excelling oneself.

*You wouldn't always go for a run or continue your workout otherwise, you'd give up more easily. But with this you can see like come on, you just have a few kilometres left, don't give up now. So that way, achieving goals and trying to do your best. - Participant 8*

*Somehow it's the measuring that brings some kind of meaning to training. I know men who won't even go for a run if their measuring equipment doesn't work, I don't have that problem but it's more like for example now that I have been running this same trail for a while, so like speed and everything, it's interesting to see if I've improved myself. Like if the training doesn't feel super great, do the results still get better and well, they do. - Participant 1*

*I need the goals, like if I can run this pace, after a few weeks I can run this pace or if I can lift this many reps with these weights that can I do it better next month. It's about motivation. Improving yourself and excelling yourself is important. - Participant 2*

Table 4. Priori themes connected to Setting &amp; achieving goals

Setting & achieving goals			
measuring & analysing data	motivating	improving one self	self-management

The meaning of setting & achieving goals consisted of four highly interconnected sub meanings as illustrated in Table 4. The meaning of setting and achieving goals builds on the tangible benefit of the product, namely data measuring and analysis tools. Thus it could be argued that setting and achieving goals is rooted on the functional dimension (Bouhet et al. 2013, 39) of Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire. Several participants also mentioned the Suunto MoveScout, the application that enables easy analysis of the measured data from different activities. Through the measurement features of the watch itself and the possibilities Movescount offers the participants felt empowered over their own training. Thus, the functional benefits of the product helped the participants to be their own coaches, to motivate themselves and to set and reach exercise related goals. It could be said that the functional features of the watch served as a mental coach that represents the deeper metaphor of achievement through work and improving oneself.

#### 4.1.4 Expressing style

Possessions can be used to satisfy one's psychological needs, such as creating one's self concept, expressing self-identity and allowing one to differentiate themselves from others (Escalas & Bettman 2005, 378). Possessions can also serve a social purpose, reflecting one's ties to e.g. cultural groups and communities, which can include brand communities and thus also leisure related communities (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001, 428). The participants confirmed that through using Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire they could express their style and thereby create and communicate their self-concept, also connecting them to others of similar style and interests. Several participants had collected pictures representing style and accessories. Also, 9 out of 10 participants reported they used Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire every day, also outside

the gym and sports activities. Thus, it was apparent that in addition to benefitting from the technology embedded in the watch, it was seen as a style piece that communicated specific messages about the wearer.

*I think this watch is designed specifically for women who care about their appearance. And it's really big so they have tried to make it look a bit more like jewellery, maybe a person who wears these jewellery in the picture likes to go sailing or golfing or something and would put this on for those activities. Because it would look good and it also has the features. - Participant 5*

*I've discussed this with some of my colleagues that it has become some kind of a fashion phenomenon that business leaders can't anymore prove that they are these tough guys just by having a Rolex but that now they are buying different kinds of sports watches even though they wouldn't be actually used that much. That's the way of telling you are the tough guy. At least it's a healthier way than traditional ways, now when your middle aged you don't buy a convertible car but a bike and compete in street races or triathlons. - Participant 9*

A few participants had collected pictures that presented luxury. They felt the watch stands out from the crowd and looks stylish and classy. In addition to the jewellery like appearance, the meaning of luxury was closely linked to the fact that participants perceived the watch to be of high quality, a component that is considered as one major important aspect concerning luxury brands (Wiedmann et al. 2007, 6). Many participants mentioned the metal clock face and the sapphire glass as something that made the watch high quality, material wise. Also the high technology of the watch was linked with the image of luxury as the quality of the technology was also considered very high. Aspects of high quality were also linked to the price of the watch.

*This represents luxury, I feel like this is a luxury product. -- I use it every day and like, it's good looking. I don't think about it actively but I guess that unconsciously by using it I'm kind of communicating that it's my choice. It's hard to explain, I don't think about it like I have this explicit watch but well, it is explicit and people have noticed it like hey what's that and of course it feels good. - Participant 2*

*I thought that I want this watch, it's so classy and stylish. It's like really good looking, not only for doing sports. -- It's also valuable and it looks like it, so maybe it's the style and the worth that go hand in hand. It's also luxurious. And high quality also. -- Other options are like plastic. This is classy and the materials, this metal edge, it's not like just basic. - Participant 8*



However, not everyone felt the watch was necessarily a luxury piece, some participants saw it as just a stylish watch. The varying images of whether the watch was seen as luxury or not might stem from the varying definitions of luxury. According to Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie (2006, 321), the traditional masculine and status-seeking image of luxury is changing towards a more experiential direction, making defining luxury more challenging as its' meaning is broadening.

However, one participant even felt that the watch was a bit too much of a luxury product for her taste. She explained that she liked the size and sporty style of it but she felt it to be a little too conspicuous and jewellery like for her taste. This participant used the watch also outside sports activities but wished for a simpler design. Also a few other participants mentioned that they thought the design could have been more simple and practical. A few felt the size of the watch was too big. They would have liked the watch to be a bit less prominent to fit more easily to everyday style.

*For me it was difficult to find a nice watch, you see I think this is too big. – It should be inconspicuous enough for everyday use. - Participant 10*

When participants talked about style they also mentioned sportiness. Appearing sporty seemed to be desirable since it communicated the lifestyle of the wearer to others. To some participants, the sportiness seemed to reflect being trendy, while to others the sportiness seemed to be valuable mainly because it reflected an active lifestyle that involves specific sports.

*I like a person to look sporty and would like to look sporty myself – maybe some muscle and good posture. And then I think this is a good looking watch, this goes as an accessory. - Participant 4*

*The sportiness and activity, so if you wear this watch, other people like you will notice that you're probably doing the same kind of sports. - Participant 9*

Two participants had picked pictures of architecture to represent how they saw the style of the watch. These pictures depicted modern buildings and interior, with clear Scandinavian style lines and simple design. These participants felt the watch also represents a clear modern design, a style that clearly appealed to their tastes. Several other participants also brought up the matter of style during interviews, stating that the clear modern design of the watch suited their own style. The fact that the wristband of Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sahipre is white was also mentioned

as a part of the classy design. The white colour seemed to be linked to the classy and simple design principles and was appealing to all participants.

*This reminds me of the fact that I like clear lines, clear products. I feel this Suunto watch is a real nice looking clear watch and this bathroom picture depicts that kind of freshness and purity... Probably the versatility and the appearance make it trendy. - Participant 6*

Table 5. Priori themes connected to Expressing style

Expressing style				
connecting to desired groups	valuing high quality	communicating luxury	appreciating clear & modern design	connecting to a sporty lifestyle

The sub meanings of the meaning of expressing style are illustrated in Table 5. Different aspects of style that the participants saw the watch to represent, high quality, luxury, sportiness, trendy and modern, all together appeared to make the watch a statement of taste and lifestyle. As meaningful communication enables consumers to connect to desired social groups (Ligas & Cotte 1999, 612), through wearing the watch the participants were able to make a statement and connect to other similar people. What seemed to make the watch desirable in terms of style was the fact that all these aspects were brought together. More basic designs with low quality materials of other similar watches with the same kinds of technical features were considered dull and not so appealing by the participants.

#### **4.1.5 Appreciating technological advancement**

Several participants mentioned the technology of the watch during the interviews. Three of the participants had brought pictures of technology but also others spoke about technology related issues while discussing other meanings. It was apparent that these participants connected an image of high quality technology and progressiveness to the watch. The technological qualities of the product could be connected closely to the functional dimension of the products, as they present the functionality, quality and durability of the product (Wiedmann et al. 2007, 4).

*This is such a versatile watch, you can see your exercise, it's nice to check it in the evening, if it's adequate or too little. It's that this is more than just a watch. - Participant 6*

*It's just that the price and quality are so high, this goes more to the technology department when you think about it... if you just go to have a run you can buy some less expensive version like a Polar. - Participant 5*

It seemed that there were two aspects of appreciating technological advancement: (1) *the actual technical attributes* and what kind of data management and analysis these attributes enabled and (2) *the mental image of high quality technology* and the ideal of progressiveness that goes with it. The versatile and helpful features of the watch, e.g. GPS, distance, speed, heart rate, altitude and other data measurement attributes and analysis tools designed for specific sports like cycling, running or swimming were appreciated in itself. This finding complies with the UTAUT model in the sense that it suggests one factor that influences consumer intention to adopt technology is performance expectancy (Venkatesh et al. 2012, 160). In other studies this factor has been named also as perceived usefulness (Davis et al. 1989, 985). Several participants highlighted the versatile features of Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire as one major factor that had influenced their decision to buy the product.

On the other hand, these attributes were appreciated in a more abstract way as they all promote progressiveness and help people to improve their performance. The ideal of continuous development and staying on top of technological improvement seemed to be appreciated as itself. This applies with the suggestion that technology adoption partly incorporates the element of embracing technology (Vannoy & Palvia 2010, 149). How much the technological features and image was appreciated varied slightly between participants, some highlighted the technical attributes more than others.

*It wasn't just about the heart rate monitor, but about the GPS. I use it as a navigation device in the city. - Participant 10*

*I have a feeling about Suunto that they try to develop things all the time... Like I have this picture in my mind that they want to be a part of the fast evolving technology but still to be stylish. - Participant 5*

*The top notch technology. I work with high technology and got to be where it's developed. And this watch is high technology from Finland and best quality in its own category. - Participant 9*

The image of high quality technology thus contained a deeper metaphor of advancement and pursuing for better. The idea of continuous development is also connected to being “smart”. It was directly mentioned by one participant that the Suunto Ambit3 Sports Sapphire empowered it's wearer to contain the characteristics that are linked to high technology. Thus, the wearer of the watch was seen as a smart person who values the progressiveness and ideals that high quality technology contains.

*You can see that she is wearing a big watch and you can get a lot of information out of it, so you know she appreciates high quality. Maybe that's why you think she is a sharp person. - Participant 5*

One technology related perspective that was brought up in the interviews was convenience. According to Davis et al. (1989, 985), in addition to perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use is another main influencer of technology adapting behaviours. Thus, it seemed that one important perspective in appreciating technological advancement was that it was made convenient and easy to use. One inspirer of creating wearable technology is making technology easy to use and convenient. The convenience of wearable technology was manifested by one participant.

*It says “I'll come where you go”. I travel a lot and the watch comes with me to work and to my hobbies. It's easy to take it with you. – The baseline is that it's always with me. - Participant 5*

However, it was also mentioned by some participants that the watch still had many features they hadn't had time to learn how to use. Thus, it took some effort to familiarize oneself with the features. According to Vannoy & Palvia (2012, 160) effort expectancy was one of the factors influencing technology adaptation. These participants had just recently bought the watch, but regardless felt the features of the watch were useful.

Table 6. Priori themes connected to Appreciating technological advancement

Appreciating technological advancement		
believing in the potential of technology	valuing the ideal of advancement	valuing useful innovation

The meaning of appreciating technological advancement was constructed on three sub meanings as illustrated in Table 6. The sub meanings of believing in the potential of technology and valuing the ideal of advancement represent the more abstract level of appreciation whereas valuing useful innovation like making things more convenient represents a more tangible aspect of the meaning.

#### 4.1.6 Relying on professionalism

Several participants brought up the matter of professionalism. The meaning of professionalism contains different aspects that were discovered in the interviews. These were high quality, safety, intelligent technology, extreme environments and professional athletes. These topics were discussed in the interviews while the participants discussed why they valued the watch and the Suunto brand. The meaning of professionalism seemed to make the participants feel good about their purchase and connect to the Suunto brand.

One way professionalism emerged in the interviews was through professional athletes. Participants connected professional sports to challenges that required high quality equipment in order to ensure the best possible performance and training. Thus, professionals or professional level sports were evaluated as adequate resource of quality measurement. The participants had seen professionals to use Suunto products and therefore felt that the quality of Suunto products must be high enough for their use aswell. This image was also connected to the Suunto Ambit3 Sort Sapphire.

*I've seen top athletes use the same watch, it kind of gives you the image that its good, that also professionals use it. If a professional chooses to use it, it kind of tells something about it. - Participant 2*

*I think Suunto is profiled very strongly to diving, that's why I chose this picture. I have understood it's one of the biggest diving watch brands. Actually for a while ago I didn't even realize they do anything else than the diving stuff. I used to think they don't have anything for ordinary people. - Participant 7*

*If you for example go kayaking with an instructor or something... I don't know if it's subconscious that every instructor always has some kind of a waterproof professional watch in their hand. - Participant 5*

Professionalism was established through professional athletes but the core of the construct stemmed from dimensions around high quality. For a smart sports watch to be of high quality, it meant that it needs to perform well in even the most challenging and dangerous environments, not leaving the wearer in trouble. Thus, relying on professionalism was closely linked to the meaning of appreciating technological achievement, as the high quality technology was an integral part of creating a high performance product. One important aspect in high quality was stated by a few participants: safety. A high quality device was expected to be so dependable and well-designed that it would work even in situations where the risks would actually become reality. This image of high performance was appreciated even by participants who didn't necessarily do these dangerous sports and activities that are performed in challenging environments. The image of professional level equipment was appreciated in itself.

*This watch has such a good reputation in the diving scene that it brings credibility to other hobbies as well. You know, it's so good, all the features and it's dependable. Like if the diving enthusiasts trust it and well they are somewhere like 100 meters deep in the water, you know then it must be good. It's for professional use also. It won't let you down in a situation where risks become reality. - Participant 5*

*These Suunto watches I basically chose because of the GPS and because they are much more developed, I have a lot of other hobbies as well and this is almost used as a safety equipment also. Once when I was flying I had to use it, you see in gliding flying the altimeter is basically the most important barometer when you search for termines to take altitude from and then fly forward again. If you can't find them you basically have to make a forced landing sooner or later. A few summers ago my altimeter stopped working in the plane and I had to use the watch. - Participant 9*

Table 7. Priori themes connected to Relying on professionalism

Relying on professionalism			
valuing high quality	looking up to professionals	considering safety issues	appreciating challenging environments

Thus, the meaning of relying on professionalism consisted of the sub meanings of valuing high quality, looking up to professionals, considering safety issues and appreciating challenging environments as can be seen from Table 7. Somewhat similarly as the meaning of expressing style, also the meaning of relying on professionalism reflects the symbolic and expressive dimension of the brand. The semantic dimension of the brand refers the ability to carry meaning and values (Bouchet 2013, 40). In here, the underlying value was high quality and thus dependable functionality, that shows as the appreciation of professionalism.

#### 4.1.7 Trying ones limits

Training and doing different kinds of sports was prominently the most discussed issue during the interviews as almost all participants had collected sports related pictures. Several participants talked about heavy exercise and pushing one's limits during training. This image of challenging and also excelling oneself was seen as an important mental and physical goal related to training and sports activities. Overcoming challenges could be seen as an important meaning that the participants also connected to the Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire watch.

There seemed to be two different levels of trying one's limits. The first level was connected with ordinary training. For some of the participants it seemed important to train properly if any training was done. Challenging oneself in normal training was seemingly thought of as something to pursue while training. The idea of doing things properly could be seen through these statements.

*I'm not a lonely wolf but I guess I like to train alone because I don't like it if the workout slips into just chatting. That's not what I'm looking for from my training at all, when I work out I like to do it for real. - Participant 2*

*This doesn't look like me at all but if you think about Suunto products and all you get this image of a crossfit person, a woman with muscle and good condition.. It's like heavy exercise, maximizing your heart beat, challenging yourself. - Participant 1*

*This has to do with performance, the biggest amount of recovery that the watch understands is 120 h. ... So maybe you want to show that you are going for your full potential, like when you do something you do it properly. - Participant 9*

In addition to trying one's limits and challenging oneself in normal training, special performances could be identified as another important situation where it seemed important to try reach one's full potential. These special performances could be competitions, marathons or other physically and mentally challenging situations.

*This for me is excelling oneself, taking new challenges and overcoming them. Climbing is new for me, so we did a course in the Alps and the picture is from there. There's a 100 meter direct fall there and a 300 meter fall there so you had to move forward astride. I actually was the first of our group to reach the crest and I haven't even ever done it before. So that was the biggest thing where I excelled myself for a long time. - Participant 9*

*This is about when you excel yourself in an incredible way. When you've achieved a top performance level, the feeling on the home stretch of a marathon where it all comes together, your role models and goals. That feeling is like the pearl that makes a staging point on your bigger journey towards improving yourself. - Participant 3*

Table 8. Priori themes connected to Trying one's limits

Trying one's limits			
training heavy	excelling oneself	doing things properly	competitive mindset

The meaning of trying one's limits comprises of four highly interconnected sub meaning as illustrated in Table 8. Trying one's limits is fundamentally connected with the meaning of appreciating technological advancement as both meanings share the orientation towards achievement and excellent performance. However, unlike in the technology aspect, trying one's limits is more a mental and behavioural orientation, when the technology aspect relies a lot on



the functionality and performance of the device. Trying one's limits seemed to be appreciated also as a philosophy or an orientation towards life. By having the attitude of trying one's limits, participants could seemingly build their sense of self as achievers and also communicate that image to others. The deeper metaphor that the meaning of trying one's limits thus conceals seemed to be a "go-getter" attitude as well as achievement and respect.

#### **4.1.8 Embracing special experiences**

Throughout the empirical data it could be discovered that some of the participants seemed to value some moments, occasions and experiences over others. While participants discussed their experiences, a line between ordinary training and experiences and special sporting moments like competitions or other activities could be defined. During interviews the participants brought up experiences they had enjoyed, regardless of how strongly the experiences were sports related. Majority of the experiences that were brought up and highlighted by the participants were somehow special but also ordinary training moments in the nature were described with enthusiasm. However, all these experiences seemed to share the aspect of embracing and enjoying the experience and living in the moment.

Participants quite rarely spoke of their social environment while describing the collected pictures, but when describing valued experiences the social aspect was more prominent. Sharing a moment during sports activities or just spending time in the outdoors with friends was seen as something special that differentiated the moment from ordinary days.

*I guess above all it's about the social aspect, that you have fun with your friends and it doesn't always have to be such serious performance like in my other pictures. -- I have found activities and people that are fun to be with. The nicest things always involve company and usually these activities also have some kind of a travelling aspect. Instead of just taking a beach vacation we go downhill skiing for a week. - Participant 9*

*Actually with mountain biking, sometimes we take packed lunch to this place we go by bikes and fry sausages by the fire. So it's also the pleasure of enjoying life and stopping for a while to be together with your people and sitting in the sun. Also with downhill skiing, it's nice. - Participant 1*

The image of an active holiday was clearly presented while participants described special moments. The active holiday or travelling was closely linked to spending time outdoors in specific, beautiful natural scenery. Also competitions and specific sporting events like marathons or triathlons were brought up. These environments and special sports related moments made the experiences rise above the ordinary. Special experiences seemed to be quite important to the participants. One participant told she sort of collected these moments and it was important to have these kinds of moments and that she also liked to share them in her social network. It seemed like the special experiences gave the participants something to wait for and it seemed important to have moments that rose above the ordinary. This notion goes with the statement that sports brands have a special ability to make people dream (Bouchet & et. al. 2013, 32).

*This could link to the triathlon picture, like big challenging competitions that act as a staging point on your journey. The incredible scenery and challenging environments, you have to work hard to get to the finish line, it's not easy. But it's about enjoying all of it on the way. - Participant 3*

*Getting to the top of a mountain. You know, ultimate experiences. You have a long day behind you but it's so amazing when you get to reach your goal. And get to see breath-taking places. - Participant 9*

*I haven't done hiking so much after I moved back to Finland but if I just had the money and time I would probably go, it would be lovely to go to the mountains during fall. It is an important part of life... It could be a motivator for a holiday. - Participant 5*

Table 9. Priori themes lined to the meaning of Embracing special experiences

Embracing special experiences			
rising above the ordinary	taking a holiday	stopping for a moment	reaching a top performance

The meaning of embracing special experiences was constructed upon four sub meanings as illustrated in Table 9. According to Bouchet et al. (2013, 39), brands can act as experience producers and thus it is obvious that here the meaning of embracing special experiences reflects the sensorial, experiential dimension that has also been found from previous studies. In the meaning of embracing experiences several other meanings that have been discussed earlier

came together. The special experiences that the participants embraced were comprised of a combination of the elements of mental and physical wellbeing, connecting to nature, achieving goals or trying one's limits. Enjoying the moment could emerge in very simple daily routines like a lovely morning run in the forest but especially in special moments like beating one's marathon record or hiking the Alps with friends. The deeper metaphor that was discovered here thus was stopping and fully enjoying the moment.

## **4.2 Brand meanings reflecting the relationship facets between Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire and its users**

This chapter addresses the second research question, "How do these brand meanings reflect the relationship between women consumers and Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire?". Much like the consensus map that combined the meanings that emerged most strongly from the empirical data, this chapter examines the brand relationship on a more collective level, aiming at comprising a unified view on the relationships participants have with Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire. The concept of brand relationship is approached, as presented in the theoretical framework, from the perspective of different qualifying facets: love/passion, interdependence, intimacy, self-connection, partner quality, commitment and nostalgic attachment.

Based on the eight found meanings and their sub meanings, it was analysed which qualifying facets determined the brand relationship between participants and Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire. Five qualifying facets emerged from the data. The other two facets introduced by previous literature didn't come out as clearly or not at all. The five facets that seemed to determine this specific brand relationship were *interdependence*, *self-connection*, *intimacy* and *brand partner quality*.

### *Interdependence*

Interdependence refers to the level of how integral a part of life the brand is for the consumer (McInnis et al 2015, 10). Nine out of ten participants told they used Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire almost every day, also outside sport activities. Therefore, the watch was incorporated in the participants' lives, and frequent interactions with it were made. However, even though interdependence as a brand relationship quality is often thought to describe solely "routine" or "necessity" kind of relationships, this view could not be identified from the found meanings.

The watch was a part of the participants' everyday life and routines but regardless, was thought of with respect and positive feelings. Interdependence was apparent because the participants found the features of the watch very useful and liked to utilize them in their training routines. Thus, in addition to the fact that the watch was used every day, interdependence was most clearly apparent through the meaning of setting and achieving goals and its sub meanings, measuring and analysing data, motivating, improving oneself and self-management. The core meaning highlighted here was measuring and analysing data, as the participants clearly were dependent on it in the process of setting and achieving their personal goals or if they just wanted to analyse data even though they didn't use it to reach a specific goal. As the sub meaning of measuring and analysing data was closely linked to the meaning of appreciating technology advancement in the sense of that technology enables data measurement, also that meaning reflected the relationship quality of interdependence. This could be especially seen through the sub meaning of appreciating useful innovation, both in the sense of the useful features and the fact that as a product, the watch was easy to use every day as it is a wearable product.

### *Self-connection*

Self-connection reflects the degree of how well the brand is able to express an important aspect of the identity (Fournier 1998, 364). This could be considered as a very important quality of the Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire brand relationship as all the meanings found are somewhat expressive in their nature. Thus, the participants obviously had selected this specific watch, because it incorporated aspects that presented important fields of interest: wellbeing, connecting to nature, setting and achieving goals, expressing style, appreciating technological advancement, relying on professionalism, trying one's limits and embracing special experiences. Some meanings had more self-expressive importance for some participants than others.

According to McInnis et al. (2015, 10), self-connection can be measured e.g. by how well the brand fits with the consumer's life goals or problems or if the brand makes statements that are important to the consumer. For example the meanings of setting and achieving goals and trying one's limits fit well into this description, as they are made real through actual goals that the participants were able to realise with the help of the watch. On the other hand, e.g. the meanings of expressing style, appreciating technological advancement and relying on professionalism

clearly reflected statements that the participants were keen to incorporate into their self-concepts. The best example of this is the meaning of expressing style; by wearing the Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire the participants for example mentioned they would appear smart and sporty and important reference groups would immediately identify them as similar others. Appreciating technological advancement and relying on professionalism on their behalf made statements that expressed e.g. valuing high quality and high technology. The meaning of wellbeing clearly expressed that the participants valued a healthy way of life. The meaning of connecting to nature, on the other hand, appeared to also fit well to the facet of self-connection as one of its sub meanings, taking a moment of your own, reflects the search of connecting or reconnecting to oneself.

### *Intimacy*

According to Reis & Shaver (1998 in Fournier 1998, 365), strongly held brands and the knowledge that consumers develop about them create deeper meanings between the brand and the consumer, resulting in intimacy and more durable relationships. Indeed, intimacy was clearly one of the brand relationship qualities that defined the relationship the participants had with Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire. As noted in the discussion about interdependence, the watch was worn almost every day. The more experiences, interactions and personal associations the consumer accumulates with the brand, the stronger relationship becomes (Fournier 1998, 365). Thus, by frequent interaction and the longer these interaction continue, the more intimate the relationship becomes. Also, the fact that the watch measures a lot of very personal data makes the relationship extremely intimate – this appears to be something that would apply to all wearable sports technology brands. The more data get measured, the more intimate the relationship becomes. As intimacy also predicts the durability of the relationship as noted above, the notion that the brand relationship between the participants and Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire was characterised by intimacy also predicts that there is a larger threshold for the participants to change to an alternative option as the watch becomes something very personal.

### *Brand partner quality*

According to Fournier (1998, 365), brand partner quality relates to e.g. how well the consumer can depend on the brand and how reliable and predictable the brand is or how well the consumer can trust the brand delivers what s/he desires versus fears. The meanings of technological

advancement and relying on professionalism strongly reflected good brand partner quality. The meanings of appreciating technological advancement and relying on professionalism had similar components that in both meanings, reflected appreciating trustworthiness, like the sub meanings of appreciating high quality, valuing the idea of advancement and considering safety issues. These meanings reflected reliability and predictability in the sense that the participants could rely on the quality of the product and that if a risk in a challenging environment would actualize, the product would deliver the desired outcome.

The qualifying brand relationship facets that didn't emerge from the found meanings so clearly were love/passion and nostalgic attachment. *Love/Passion* refers e.g. to how the consumer feels he/she really loves the brand, is the consumer ready to make sacrifices to keep using the brand, does the idea of not accessing the brand disturb the consumer etc. (McInnis et al. 2015, 10). The word "love" wasn't used while the participants described the watch and nor did it emerge from the found eight meanings. However, some participants reported that the idea of going through training without it disturbed them and that the watch would go everywhere with them, also when they travelled. Therefore, some aspects of affection could be identified, but these feelings could in this case rather go under the facet of interdependence. However, participants did obviously like the watch very much and found it important for them. Still, the empirical data lacked evidence of a strong emotional attachment that would go under the facet of love/passion or at least, only milder levels of love emerged.

*Nostalgic attachment* was another relationship facet that, based on the meanings and the data, didn't emerge. Nostalgic attachment means the product or brand offers the consumer a possibility to reconnect with a sense of a past self (Solomon et al. 2012, 15). The only meaning that distantly reflected a connection to the past was embracing special experiences, as the past experiences served as the foundation that motivated the participants to pursue for new special experiences that rose above the ordinary.

However, instead of reflecting the nostalgic, past-oriented direction, the meanings were rather *future-oriented*. For example the meaning of setting and achieving goals demonstrates this very clearly. Setting and achieving goals was truly future-oriented, as the core of the meaning was to help the participant achieve something in the future, whether it was just to improve one's condition or a specific sport related ability. Also other meanings can be seen as future-oriented: wellbeing reflected pursuing a healthier way of life, a state that could be reached in the future

if not in the present. Trying one's limits reflected pursuing a top performance and excelling oneself in the future through hard training. The meaning of appreciating technological advancement as a mindset is already future-oriented as it builds on the value of advancement and making things better or more effective in the future. Thus, in this specific context and presumably also broadly within the larger context of wearable technology, a new qualifying facet of brand relationships emerged: orientation towards the future.

### **4.3 Conclusions and re-evaluation of the framework**

To understand a specific brand relationship requires a thorough understanding of the meanings the relationship provides to the customer. In addition to understanding what meanings customers connect with Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire, it is important to understand the relative weights of these meanings in order to create a thorough understanding of which brand relationship qualities these meanings reflect. The relative weights of the most important meanings are depicted in Tables 10 and 11.

In order to identify the most important meanings, specific parts of the empirical data were analysed. The ZMET interviews were conducted by dividing each interview into eight steps. Step 5 identified what the participant considered as the most important picture that described the most relevant meaning that the participant linked to Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire. In step 8 the participant was asked to pick all the pictures that she considered to reflect the most important meanings, letting the participant decide the number of the pictures. In step 8, participants usually picked 3-4 pictures from the total number of 8-11 pictures. The overall importance of all the found meanings was evaluated by considering whether the meanings were mentioned in these two steps and further analysed by scoring the importance depending on how many participants mentioned the meanings as well as considering the category of meaning importance. Three categories of meaning importance were determined. If a meaning got a score in Category 1, it means the meaning was mentioned in step 5 as the most relevant meaning. If a meaning got a score in Category 2, it means the meaning could either be indirectly concluded from step 5, thus the picture in step 5 had another visible meaning in addition to the most important meaning, or the meaning was discovered in step 8. If a meaning got a score in Category 3, it means the meaning was mentioned in step 8. The most important meanings from the empirical data were filtered by analysing the three most important meanings that were

divided into the three Categories provided by each participant. The most important meanings of each participant by Category are depicted in Table 10.

Seven meanings out of the total eight meanings got a score in this analysis. Each meaning got a score in each of the three Categories, depending on how many times the meaning was mentioned in each Category by the participants multiplied by the factor of each Category. Category 1 was given a factor of 1.5, Category 2 was given factor 1.25 and Category 3 was given factor 1.0. The overall importance order was determined by the Total Score of each meaning. The total score for each meaning was calculated by adding together all the three scores from each Category. The scoring of the meanings can be seen from Table 11, depicted in the actualized importance order. The scoring method is only used to give directional information about the relative weights of the meanings as the method is very simple and straightforward.

Table 10. Most important meanings by participants

Participants	Category 1 (step 5)	Category 2 (step 5/ 8)	Category 3 (step 8)
1	Setting & achieving goals	Wellbeing	Connecting to nature
2	Setting & achieving goals	Trying ones limits	Wellbeign
3	Setting & achieving goals	Wellbeign	Connecting to nature
4	Setting & achieving goals	Wellbeign	Expressing style
5	Appreciating technological advancement	Wellbeign	Connecting to nature
6	Expressing style	Wellbeign	Connecting to nature
7	Setting & achieving goals	Expressing style	Connecting to nature
8	Setting & achieving goals	Wellbeign	Connecting to nature
9	Setting & achieving goals	Connecting to nature	embracing experiences
10	Appreciating technological advancement	Setting & achieving goals	expressing style



Table 11. Weighted importance of each meaning.

	Category 1 (factor 1,5)	Category 2 (factor 1,25)	Category 3 (factor 1,0)	Total Score
setting & achieving goals	10.5 (7 )	1.25 (1)	0	11.75
wellbeing	0	7.5 (6)	0	7.5
connecting to nature	0	1.25 (1)	6 (6)	7.25
expressing style	1.5 (1)	0	2 (2)	3.5
appreciating technological advancement	3 (2)	0	0	3
embracing experiences	0	0	2 (2)	2
trying ones limits	0	1.25 (1)	0	1.25

The analysis shows that three meanings clearly got higher scores than the other five meanings. These meanings are setting and achieving goals (11.75), wellbeing (7.5) and connecting to nature (7.25). The relevance of these three meanings is supported by the fact that they were visible throughout all the empirical data. It must however be pointed out that these meanings, like the other six meanings, contained several sub meanings. All of these sub meanings may not have been prominent in the relevance importance evaluation process or some were more prominent than others. This was especially visible when it comes to the meanings of setting and achieving goals and wellbeing. Setting and achieving goals consisted of several sub meanings, such as measuring and analysing data, motivating, supporting setting goals, achieving goals and improving oneself. As was pointed out in the discussion of the meaning of setting and achieving goals, some participants saw the measuring and analysing data itself as a valuable meaning, whereas others looked at it from the perspective that it had instrumental value in motivating oneself to set and achieve specific goals. Thus, it could be said that the participants were either information driven or achievement driven. However, both these types of participants evaluated the construct of setting and achieving goals, with all its sub meanings and different aspects, as a very important meaning of the Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire. Setting and achieving goals was evaluated as the most important meaning by seven out of ten participants, which reflects the image that the participants really valued the usefulness of the technology in the product.

Wellbeing got the second highest score of 7.5 by being mentioned six times in Category 2. Thus, the meaning of wellbeing was also perceived as a very important meaning connected to Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire. As was discussed earlier, the meaning of wellbeing was constructed upon two main themes, physical and mental wellbeing, together resulting in overall wellbeing. While this meaning came up during the discussion of the most important aspects, these two main themes appeared equally. Even though the meaning of setting and achieving goals was most often mentioned as the most important meaning, it can be said that the meaning of wellbeing was almost as important, as the meanings and sub meanings of setting and achieving goals could be valued as instrumental for achieving the physical and mental wellbeing.

The meaning of connecting to nature got also a high score of 7.25 by being mentioned once in Category 2 and six times in Category 3. Even though connecting to nature was mostly mentioned in Category 3, it must be stated that this meaning was very prominent throughout all the interviews. In addition to wellbeing it was the only meaning that gained much intention in every interview, especially because all participants had collected pictures depicting nature. In addition, as has been mentioned before, the meaning of connecting to nature was closely linked to other meanings, one of which was wellbeing. Therefore, it must be said that even though some meanings appeared more important than others, they should be viewed as a bigger entity as some meanings are very tightly linked to each other.

Expressing style got a score of 3.5 and appreciating technological advancement got a score of 3. Thus, these two meanings were not seen as predominant throughout the participants as the three meanings with the highest scores. However, unlike two of the meanings that scored high scores, wellbeing and connecting to nature, the meanings of expressing style and appreciating technological advancement both got a score in the Category 1. Thus, unlike wellbeing and connecting to nature, expressing style and appreciating technological advancement were evaluated as the most important meaning by some participants (expressing style: 1 participant, appreciating technological advancement: 2 participants). Therefore, the insight these meanings provide for future brand development should also be valued. As can be seen from the scoring table, different participants valued different meanings, but the overall scoring order can give valuable insight on how to prioritise the found meanings in possible practical implications.

The relative weights of each meaning also give insight on which of the qualifying facets of the Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire brand relationship are emphasized most by the participants. Based on the scoring of the meanings, it appears that three facets were highlighted in the brand relationship perspective: *self-connection*, *interdependence* and *future orientation*. As self-connection was reflected through basically all the found brand meanings it is obvious that it had major importance in the definition of the brand relationship between the participants and the watch. The second brand relationship quality that clearly emerged was interdependence, which should be evaluated as an important aspect of this specific brand relationship as it reflects the meaning that got the highest score – setting and achieving goals. Also the newly found facet of orientation towards the future was reflected through several meanings, especially through the meaning of setting and achieving goals which got the highest score among all meanings. It must be noted that the facet of future orientation appears to be especially characteristic in the context of wearable sports technology brands.

Another brand relationship quality that should also be emphasized here is *intimacy*. This is because in this specific brand relationship, intimacy and interdependence are closely linked constructs, regardless of the fact that this view is not supported by earlier research on the brand relationship facets. Earlier research suggests that interdependence regards mainly brands that serve the lower levels of the need hierarchy and very pragmatic and mundane needs (Fournier 2015 in McInnis et al 2015, 6). Previous studies have shown that these kinds of brand relationships might even have to go through some “unbranding” activities where the prominence of the brand is hidden by the consumer (Coupland 2005, 116), thus the brand in those relationships is not seen as important and desirable. However, in this specific brand relationship, interdependence got other meanings. Here, interdependence was rather seen as a valuable construct that based on the utility the participant received from the relationship (measuring and analysing data → setting and achieving goals), but unlike in previous studies, this utility was actually placed rather high on the need hierarchy and seen as valuable itself. Therefore, in this specific brand relationship, interdependence leads to intimacy. As a result of actions of interdependence (frequent interaction and ongoing gathering of very personal data), an intimate brand relationship is constructed. The fact that this notion has not emerged in previous literature might depend on the context of the study. Thus, the finding that interdependence leads to intimacy seems to be explicitly typical in the context of wearable technology brands.

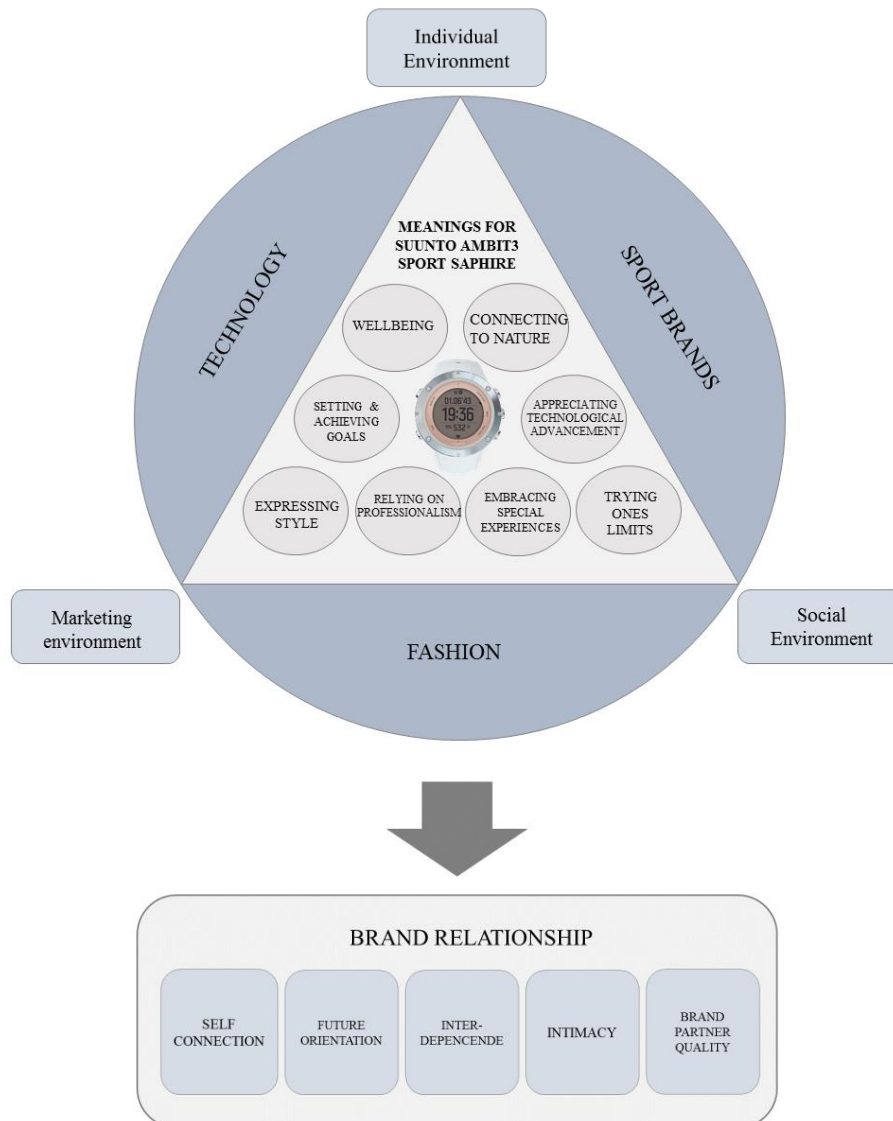
Next, the theoretical framework is re-evaluated and accordingly altered. The re-evaluated framework is illustrated in Figure 6. The synthesis of the theoretical framework in this study suggested that the concept of wearable technology consists of three main domains: the field of technology, the field of sports brands and the field of fashion. In light of the findings from the empirical data, these three fields combined together serve as an applicable context that characterises the field of wearable sports technology. This evaluation stems from the fact that among the found meanings the participants attached to Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire, meanings such as appreciating technological advancement (technology), setting and achieving goals, trying one's limits, wellbeing, connecting to nature (sports) and expressing style (fashion) could be identified. It is suggested that further research on the phenomenon of wearable sports technology applies similar views that combine these three fields as the fundamental context of the phenomenon.

As the case in the study represents a sports brand, the theoretical framework predicted, that the meanings would reflect the four dimensions typical for sports brands: *functional*, *sensorial*, *semantic* and *somatic dimension*. This view was supported by the research findings as every predicted dimension was found in the meanings: e.g. considering the *functional dimension*, the meaning of setting and achieving goals and the sub meaning of measuring and analysing data or appreciating technological advancement and the sub meaning of valuing high technology and valuing useful innovation incorporated reflected a functionally driven aspect. Considering the *sensorial dimension*, the meaning of embracing special experiences or sub meanings of connecting to nature, such as relaxation, taking a moment of your own or admiring challenging environments, reflected the sensorial dimension. Considering the *semantic dimension*, all meanings seemed to have expressive and symbolic features, especially the meaning of expressing style. Considering the *somatic dimension* that uniquely is typical for sports brands, the meaning of wellbeing or the meaning of trying one's limits reflected the somatic dimension as participants frequently described bodily behaviours, i.e. training.

Altogether eight interconnected meanings were attached to Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire. These meanings were *wellbeing*, *connecting to nature*, *setting and achieving goals*, *expressing style*, *appreciating technological advancement*, *relying on professionalism*, *trying one's limits* and *embracing special experiences*. Three of these meanings were clearly emphasized throughout the data: the meanings of setting and achieving goals, wellbeing and connecting to nature. Also the meanings of appreciating technological advancement and expressing style

should be emphasized even though they scored lower in the respective order of relevance. However, all these meanings were highly interconnected and should be understood and utilized as an integrated entity that explains consumers' perception and behaviour.

Figure 6. Re-evaluated framework



The theoretical framework also suggested that brand meanings have an integral role when it comes to the nature of the brand relationship, respectively. As suggested, the qualifying facets of the Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire brand relationship could be defined based on the found brand meanings. The framework suggested that qualities of a strong brand relationship would incorporate one or more of the following: *love/passion*, *interdependence*, *self-connection*, *commitment*, *brand partner quality*, *nostalgic attachment* and *intimacy*. The analysis of the found meanings showed that in this specific case example, only some of these qualifying brand

relationship facets applied along with one new brand relationship facet that was found. These were *interdependence*, *self-connection*, *brand partner quality*, *intimacy* and a newly found facet, *future orientation*.

However, it must be noted that in this specific case example, unlike in previous research, the facet of *interdependency* got different meanings: it was seen more as a valuable construct itself, rather than just a necessity. Also, in this specific example, the facets of interdependence and intimacy were closely connected, as intimacy occurred as a result of the frequent actions that determined interdependency.

From the data of this specific case example, one new qualifying facet of the brand relationship emerged. This new facet has not been identified or at least widely acknowledged in the brand relationship literature. The new facet, *future orientation*, replaced the nostalgic attachment orientation in this case example. In addition, the facet of orientation towards the future is expected to emerge as an important facet that qualifies also other brand relationships within the context of wearable sports technology.

## 5 SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Summary of the research

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyse the brand meanings Finnish female customers attach to Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire and examine how these meanings reflect the brand relationships between customers and Suunto as a wearable sports technology brand. To achieve this purpose, two research questions were determined to guide the fulfilment of this purpose:

1. What meanings do female customers of Suunto attach to Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire?
2. How do these brand meanings reflect the relationships between female customers and Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire?

The theoretical foundation of this research was built on three different entities: the concept of wearable technology, the contemporary literature of brand meanings and the prior research of brand relationships. As the field of wearable technology isn't much researched from the consumer perspective, previous literature lacked an integrated view on the concept of wearable technology. Therefore, in order to gather understanding of the concept of wearable technology, three different fields of literature were combined. Aspects relevant to this study were combined from the fields of sports brands, technology and fashion.

In the field of sports brands, four dimensions that should characterise sports brands were introduced: *the functional*, *the sensorial*, *the semantic* and *the somatic*. From the field of technology, the most advanced models of technology acceptance and the influencing factors were introduced. The constructs that the different models introduced, performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions, hedonic motivation, price value, habit, perceived innovativeness and perceived fashionability guided important aspects that might be valuable in determining the concept of wearable technology. From the field of fashion it was highlighted that clothing might be the primarily means of communicating the social identity and therefore self-expressive behaviours should be taken into account in the research setting.

The theoretical framework was mainly built on previous literature about brand meanings and brand relationships. The three dimensional co-creative process of brand meanings development was introduced and the three environments, the marketing environment, the individual environment and the social environment, were discussed in further detail. Next, the respective connection of the two theoretical construct of brand meanings and brand relationships was introduced. The concept of brand relationships was discussed from the perspective of the possible different qualifying facets that previous literature suggests that determine strong brand relationships. These qualifying facets were self-connection, interdependency, love/passion, intimacy, commitment, brand partner quality and nostalgic attachment.

This study was interpretive of nature, as it stands on the social constructionist paradigm. Thus, philosophically, this study viewed reality as subjectively and socially constructed, where reality is interpreted through subjective perception that is influenced by context and an individuals' personal perspective of the world. Therefore it was presumed that all knowledge is dependent upon time, context and the individual generating it. Thus, it is impossible to determine general objective truths as reality is rather a product of social negotiation.

In order to generate useful insight about the research topic, brand meanings and brand relationships within the context of wearable technology, a case study method was applied. Through the case of Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire, real life insight were accessed. Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire is premium sports technology watch targeted at women. As the purpose of this study was to generate understanding on the phenomenon of wearable sports technology brands, this case example fitted the research purpose excellently.

The research was of qualitative nature and adapted a projective hybrid method, the Zaltman Metaphor Eliciting Technique. The ZMET technique addresses the fundamental assumption that consumer thinking is rather image based than language based and therefore applies an interview technique that utilizes pictures participant independently collect of the research topic. The selection of the method was justified as the purpose of the study was to generate a rich understanding of the research topic and the underlying constructs behind brand meanings.

The empirical data was generated by conducting 10 ZMET -interviews among the Finnish Suunto customers that owned Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire. The age of the 10 participants ranged from 32 to 51, which reflected a profile of a typical Suunto customer. Participants were



recruited either through a recruitment advertisement placed on Suunto official facebook page in the end of May 2015 or through snowball sampling, i.e. through contacts of the researcher. Participants were instructed to collect 8-10 pictures that reflected the meanings they attached to Suunto Ambit3 Sport Saphire. Based on the collected pictures, individual interviews were conducted either in the participants' homes, public premises or Suunto headquarters. Interviews were conducted by following the instructive steps of the ZMET method: storytelling, missed images, sorting, construct elicitation, the most representative image, opposite image, sensory images and the mental map. Based on the analysis of the rich data, interpretations were made.

Next, a collective consensus map of the found meanings was constructed. Eight thematic, highly interconnected meanings and several sub meanings were identified. The eight thematic meanings were *wellbeing, connecting to nature, setting and achieving goals, expressing style, appreciating technological advancement, relying on professionalism, trying ones limits and embracing special experiences*. These meanings appeared all to be of self-expressive nature. The relative weights of each meaning were then analysed and it was found that three of the meanings were respectively emphasized: setting and achieving goals, wellbeing and connecting to nature. Also the meanings of appreciating technological advancement and expressing style were identified to have major importance. However, as all the meanings are highly interconnected, they should be viewed as an integrated entity.

Based on the found meanings, the qualities of the Suunto Ambit3 Sport Spahire brand relationship were analysed. Five qualifying facets of the brand relationship were identified. Three of these were directly identified: self-connection, interdependence and brand partner quality. As a result of interdependence, also intimacy was identified. Furthermore, one brand relationship facet, that was new to the marketing literature, was identified: orientation towards the future. This qualifying facet added new knowledge to the brand relationship literature. It was also discovered that two of the facets were especially typical for the wearable technology context: Orientations towards the future and intimacy. In this research setting, intimacy originated from interdependence. Both these qualifying facets were identified typical for wearable technology context as they both concern the utilization of frequently gathered personal data.

## **5.2 Theoretical contribution**

Research should always, on some level, add to the already existing knowledge. In order to achieve academic contribution, research should provide new information and explanations on theoretical discussions, methodology or context (Ladik & Steward 2008, 161). This study concentrated on examining the emerging field of wearable sports technology from a relatively new consumer perspective and therefore, produced contribution mainly from methodological and context perspective.

Methodological contribution can be generated by constructing and testing a new method, by altering an old method or by examining a method in a context that has not been examined by that method before (Ladik & Steward 2008, 162). This research applied ZMET interviews in the context of a wearable sports technology brand Suunto. Before, technology brands have been investigated from the perspective of buyer behaviour and decision making (Hamann, Williams & Omar 2007), but little research has been conducted to investigate the meanings consumers attach to technology brands. As presented in the theoretical framework of this thesis, most of the existing literature in the technology and consumer context have taken less qualitative and less in-depth perspectives, often concentrating on behavioural perspectives such as technology adoption (Venkatesh et al. 2003; Vannoy & Palvia 2010) or innovation diffusion (Sääksjärvi 2003; Tzou & Lu 2009). This study contributed methodologically as it qualitatively examined the meanings consumers connect with a wearable sports technology brand and a specific model, Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire, by applying the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique. By these means and through in depth analysis of the produced data, this thesis produced a holistic perspective on the meanings consumers attach to a specific wearable sports technology brand model.

Contextual contribution refers to adding to the existing knowledge about a specific context. Here, contextual contribution was achieved as the study concentrated examining the emerging phenomenon of wearable sports technology brands, a field that has not yet acquired much attention within the academic marketing research, despite the obvious call for it. This way, this research added to the knowledge and understanding of what kinds of meanings consumers can attach to wearable sports technology brands. On the practical level, this study contributed to the knowledge about the context of the Suunto brand and the customer segment of women in the Finnish geographical context. The results may have relevance to Suunto as a company, as the

found meanings and sub meanings can be used in further marketing strategies or product development.

According to Ladik & Steward (2008, 163), contribution can be divided into eight respective levels that represent the amount of advancement the research offers. The contribution of this study reached the level three of the continuum, extension of a new theory/method in a new area, as was noted earlier.

### **5.3 Managerial implications**

Marketing research should always pursue to offer useful insights also for practitioners. As this research examined the context of wearable sports technology that has until now gained surprisingly little attention from the consumer research perspective, in addition to offering valuable information for the Suunto organization, the findings of this research can offer valuable insight on how the consumers perceive wearable sports technology brands also on a larger scale of the wearable sports technology field. The following implications can offer insights that can be utilized both in the product development as well as in branding and in marketing strategies.

First of all, attention to the ways marketing research is conducted should be put under closer consideration. In order to gather deeper and insightful understanding of consumer perceptions and behaviour, researchers must engage managers and customers more actively to the research process by enabling them to fully present their thinking (Zaltman 1997, 424). Accessing the underlying themes and values behind consumer thinking helps marketers to better understand the motivations behind consumer behaviour. Traditionally marketing research concentrates on using linguistic techniques, but as it has been found that thinking is rather image based than language based (Zaltman 1997, 424), the usage of images to gain empirical data might help to generate a fuller understanding of consumer thinking. Therefore, this study proposes projective techniques such as ZMET to be used due to their ability to convey also consumers' subconscious perceptions.

This study revealed eight thematic meanings that women customer of Suunto attached to Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire. These thematic meanings can help marketers and product development to better understand the themes that are important to women consumers within the wearable

sports technology field. Generally speaking, it should be noted that the themes that arouse from this research in the form of varying meanings are all of self-expressive nature and would rate rather high on a hierarchy of products of mere necessities versus products with symbolic value. It is also worth noting that the variety of meanings was relatively rich. It is suggested that marketers of wearable sports technology brands reflect these meanings to their strategic portfolio of brand meanings and evaluate whether the scale of the portfolio incorporates the full potential of these meanings. Next, to offer some reference ideas, some selected meanings are shortly analysed from the practical implication perspective.

The theme of luxury emerged though the meaning of expressing style. Some participants saw this as an admirable thing and others found it did not fit the desired simple style they were keen to express. Thus, there might be more varying needs and desires in the form of niches or segments within the female target consumers that marketers could identify and by those means, develop better targeted wearable sports technology products and brands.

Another possibly insightful implication might rely on the meaning of wellbeing: in addition to physical wellbeing, also mental wellbeing was emphasized as an important aspect women consumers link to the overall meaning of wellbeing. Thus, it might be valuable to take a look at the possible activities and features that would incorporate the mental aspect of wellbeing into the product or to the branding and marketing activities.

Connecting to nature emerged as a rather important meaning that incorporated several aspects in the form of sub meanings. Connecting to nature had both a relaxing aspect and a challenging aspect but regardless of the aspect, nature seemed to have a central role when it comes to how the participants viewed Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire. Therefore, it is suggested that marketers consider whether they are exploiting the metaphors linked to nature to their full potential in their current marketing. In this study, nature seemed to be more than just an environment, it seemed to call for deeper metaphors of adventure or relaxation. It is suggested that the metaphors linked to nature are thoroughly exploited in marketing and branding, for example by the means of storytelling or experiential marketing.

The meaning of relying on professionalism seemed to root to the heritage of the Suunto brand. Suunto was seen as a reliable and ultimately high performance brand. Partly, this image seemed to rely on the aspect of challenging environments where Suunto products can be used. For

example, the heritage of the diving products seemed to extend the high quality image to cover the whole brand and product range, even models that didn't actually incorporate the same features. Therefore it is suggested that the image of these challenging environments that emphasize the dependability and performative aspects linked to the brand should be exploited in the whole brand image.

From the brand relationship perspective, it is suggested that marketers consider especially the following qualities that appeared to describe the Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire brand relationship: orientation towards the future and intimacy, as a result of interdependence (frequent use and measurement of highly personal data). It appears that these two qualifying aspects of the brand relationship are especially typical for wearable technology brands due to their functional foundations. As intimacy has been investigated to improve brand relationship strength and durability, it is suggested that this aspect is taken into consideration and utilized to its full potential within the brand relationship management and product development.

#### **5.4 Evaluation of the research quality**

This study was interpretive in its nature as it focused on identifying and analysing subjective meanings arising from the data. The philosophical base of this study, the social constructionist paradigm, sees the findings of a qualitative study as subjective, researcher bound interpretations of the reality (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 21). These subjective interpretations cannot be reproduced exactly in the same way elsewhere, which is why the quality of this research cannot be evaluated based on reliability, validity and generalizability, criteria commonly used while evaluating quantitative research (Saunders et al. 2009, 156-158). Instead, the evaluation in this study is based on the criteria most often used in qualitative research, *trustworthiness* (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Trustworthiness can be divided into four domains: *dependability*, *transferability*, *credibility* and *conformability* (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 294).

*Dependability* can be determined by evaluating how well the research process is documented. According to Eriksson & Kovalainen (2008, 294), the research should be able to indicate proper traceability and logic in order to obtain transparency, a factor considered very important especially within verbal protocol methods (Todd & Benbasat 1987, 507). Dependability becomes valuable as it allows the reader to evaluate the overall quality of the research process (Moisander & Valtonen 2006, 27). In order to support the transparency of the research process

here, all parts of the research from the emergence of the research purpose, theory development, detailed descriptions of data generation and analysis as well as detailed description of the situational factor of the research have been explicitly documented and presented. The ZMET interviews were recorded and transcribed in order to enable the researcher to return to the data and make correct and relevant analysis. In the research findings chapter, the researchers quoted continuously to the transcribed interviews in order to formulate an accurate picture of the supporting evidence towards the analysed findings.

*Transferability* refers to showing a connection between the current and previous research (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 294). The researcher should be able to find similarities between the research or parts of it and already existing literature. Thus, the research should be able to be applied in other contexts resulting in similar findings. Also, in qualitative studies, the results are always context dependent and therefore it is impossible to exactly verify the validity of the context dependent findings. In this study, the research phenomenon, wearable sports technology, is relatively new and offers a fresh context for brand meaning research. Therefore, existing literature on the meanings connected to wearable sports technology could not be identified. Only limited similarities between themes that were closely linked to the phenomenon, namely the field of sports brand, technology adoption and fashion, could be found. However, some higher level similarities on fundamental concepts related to the literature and findings concerning brand meaning and related issues could be found. Both these similarities were emphasized during the analysis of the found meanings.

*Credibility* addresses the researcher's knowledge on the topic as well as sufficient amount and quality of the gathered data. As the findings reflect the interpretation of the researcher, she needs to be familiar with the research topic and the presented data has to be adequate to deserve the made conclusions (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 294). According to Lincoln & Guba (1985, 304), in order to learn the phenomenon in depth and build trust with the respondent, the researcher needs to engage herself with the phenomenon for a prolonged period of time. In this study, this requirement was fulfilled as the research process started 8 months prior the execution of the first interview, during which the researchers closely familiarized herself with the phenomenon and filled of wearable technology through literature, media, by attending events that discussed the phenomenon and by discussing the wearable products category with corresponding field sales experts. In order to make sure the researcher also had sufficient knowledge and understanding of the case context, Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire and its users,

the topic was discussed with the Suunto research team members that had impacted the development of the product at hand.

Lincoln & Cuba (1985, 307) also suggest *triangulation* as a suitable way to measure research credibility. Triangulation refers to usage of versatile sources or perspectives of information. For example, this refers to incorporation of different methods, theories and sources in knowledge and data generation as well as discussing the findings with other researchers in order to improve findings credibility (Lincoln & Cuba 1985, 301-316). In this study, the empirical data was gathered from 10 participants, thus 10 different sources of information were used. Secondly, theoretical triangulation was applied, as the research framework was constructed upon a wide perspective of different theoretical sources. Thirdly, as ZMET itself is a combination of different methods, also methodological triangulation was obtained.

*Conformability* means connecting the findings and researcher interpretations firmly to the data in a way that enables other people to understand them (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 294). The concept of conformability stems from the postulate of objectivity (Denzin 1994, 508), but in constructionist research complete objectivity cannot be reached as the creation of knowledge is often based on examining subjective perspectives. In addition to subjective views of the research informants, constructive research is largely based on the interpretation of the researcher. However, conformability requires that the research findings stem from the research informants rather than from the imagination of the researcher (Lincoln & Cuba 1985, 318). To increase conformability in this study, the interpretative findings were closely linked to the empirical data by supplying the reader with a variety of actual quotations. This way, the reader can individually evaluate whether the made interpretations were valid or not. Also, in order to justify conformability between the quotations from the ZMET interviews and the original sources of information, the collected pictures, a random sample of photos are illustrated in Appendix 3.

## **5.5 Further research directions**

Wearable sports technology is still an emerging and continuously growing field that hasn't drawn much attention within marketing research. It is obvious that it needs to be researched further. It is essential to examine the meanings consumers attach to wearable sport technology brands more closely as it is the meanings that determine the relationships consumers create with

brands and as these meanings and the corresponding relationships have not been thoroughly studied before. Wearable technology products are the first technology product category that people are continuously wearing, which makes the phenomenon an interesting research topic. The amount of research conducted on the meanings people attach to any kind of technology brands that the researcher here could identify was surprisingly small, especially considering the continuously growing attention and adaption of technology products. The meanings consumers attach to wearable technology should be studied in order to produce more in depth understanding based on which marketers can develop the products and related marketing strategies.

It must be noted that this study, as every other qualitative constructionist study, has its limitations and therefore leaves much space for further research. Firstly, this specific study concentrated on one specific brand model, Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire, especially designed for women. In order to gain a more versatile understanding, it would be necessary to conduct research where informants would consist of both genders. Thus, Suunto, or other operators in the field, would benefit from studying a wider variety of models that are targeted to both male and female consumers. As technology has traditionally been considered more masculine in nature, it would be interesting to see whether there would be differences on the meanings associated with wearable sports technology between female and male consumers.

Secondly, the age of the participants of this study ranged from 32 to 50 years. It would be interesting to examine if younger consumers would attach varying meanings to wearable sports technology brands, as the younger generation has already been familiarized with technology since their childhood. Thirdly, this study consisted of informants located only in Finland. Therefore, it would be valuable to generate a more international or global perspective by studying consumers from other geographical locations. If such studies are conducted, it is suggested to take the socioeconomic atmosphere into consideration, as meanings attached might vary among countries and areas. People living in technology affirmative atmosphere, presumably bigger cities and developed countries, might attach different meanings to wearable technology products than people living in differing areas. This might affect what kinds of values and features consumers are looking for in wearable sports technology products and brands.

Lastly, this study concentrated on meanings attached to a premium model product, Suunto Ambit3 Sport Sapphire. From the current wearable sports technology field, also inside Suunto



product range, several other levels of model quality and image can be identified. Therefore, it would be insightful to examine meanings related to other product or model categories determined by how prestigious or high quality they are meant to be and perceived by consumers. The data of this research already by coincidence revealed that several participants had very differing perceptions of lower quality wearable sports technology products, such as activity bracelets.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: Images of the Suunto Ambit3 sport Sapphire watch (source: Suunto 2015)



**APPENDIX 2: The research participant recruitment advertisement in the Facebook page of Suunto (filtered to show only to Finnish users), published on May 28 2015.**

**Suunto**  
28. toukokuuta · 🌐

Etsimme Suunto Ambit3 Sport Saphiren käyttäjiä haastateltavaksi Suunnon kanssa toteutettavaan pro gradu -tutkimukseen, joka käsittelee puettavaan teknologiaan liitettäviä merkityksiä. Haastattelut toteutetaan kesä – heinäkuun aikana haastateltaville sopivina aikoina ja sopivissa lokaatioissa, ensisijaisesti etsimme haastateltavia Etelä-Suomen alueelta. Haastattelu kestää n. 1t, josta saa kiitokseksi -50% alennuskupongin Amer Sports Brand Storeen. Haastatteluun valitaan 10-20hlöä ilmoittautumisjärjestyksessä. Mikäli olet kiinnostunut osallistumaan tai haluat kysyä tutkimuksesta, ota yhteyttä: [hilla.karamaki@gmail.com](mailto:hilla.karamaki@gmail.com). Mainitse viestissä: nimi, ikä ja kaupunki, jossa haastattelu voitaisiin toteuttaa.



**APPENDIX 3: Examples of the images brought to the interviews by the participants**





**IN THIS WORLD  
THERE IS NO FORCE EQUAL TO THE  
STRENGTH OF A  
DETERMINED  
WOMAN**

[www.facebook.com/fitnessgoddesses](http://www.facebook.com/fitnessgoddesses)

ITEM: PINKY CRIP \$49.99 | CARDIUS EXCEL SINGLET \$65.99 | ALTITUDE 3/4 TIGHT \$55.99 | SLIMLINE HEADBAND \$9.99 (WOMEN'S) | EYEGLASS STRAP \$12.99 | BODIES MAXIME L/S TOP \$73.99 | ROAD RUNNER SHORT TIGHT \$59.99







