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Using stories to communicate corporate identity on the web: A study of Nordic fashion companies.

International Business Communication

Master's thesis

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Title of thesis: Using stories to communicate corporate identity on the web. A study of Nordic fashion companies

Objective of the Study

The objective of the study was to examine how stories are being used to communicate corporate identity in the Nordic fashion industry. The study focused specifically on the web communication of small and medium sized Nordic fashion companies. The study explored the communication discovered on the selected web sites to answer the three research questions: 1) To what extent do Nordic fashion companies use storytelling when communicating their identity to global consumers on the web? 2) What kind of story elements do they use in their web communication? 3) Based on their stories, how unique are their individual identities?

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The theoretical framework of the study was based on identity management research as well as traditional and corporate storytelling theories. Through a method of qualitative content analysis, the study examined the web sites of 10 up-and-coming fashion companies from Finland as well as 10 companies from the more successful fashion countries of Sweden and Denmark.

Findings and Conclusions

The study revealed that despite the proven benefits of storytelling, majority of Nordic fashion companies hardly ever use stories when communicating their identity to global consumers. Instead of communicating their characteristics through appealing and well-structured plotlines, companies mostly settle for simply describing their identity though product features and design. Founders of the companies are often portrayed as heroes on a mission start their own business.

Differentiation between the companies was minimal. All companies communicated nearly the same kind of features and characteristics. Minimalism, functionality and contemporary design as well as high quality and tailoring, were all popular traits among the studied brands. No large differences between the use of storytelling of the Finnish, Swedish and Danish companies were discovered. However, the findings show that Finnish companies emphasized ecological values as well as production processes and selection of materials slightly more.

The findings of this study indicate that companies are not aware of the full potential that storytelling has as a method of business communication and differentiation. Furthermore, as far as communication is concerned, the up-and-coming Finnish companies are on the same level with their Swedish and Danish competitors.

Keywords: corporate identity, communication, storytelling, fashion, clothing industry

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Tutkimuksen tavoitteet

Tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli selvittää miten pohjoismaiset muotialan yritykset käyttävät tarinoita kertoessaan identiteetistään kuluttajille. Analysoimalla pohjoismaisten pienten ja keskisuurten vaatetusyritysten verkkosivuja, tutkimus pyrki vastaamaan kolmeen tutkimuskysymykseen: 1) Missä määrin Pohjoismaiset muotiyrityksen käyttävät tarinoita kertoessaan yrityksensä identiteetistä globaaleille kuluttajille? 2) Minkälaisia tarinallisia elementtejä yritykset verkkoviestinnässään käyttävät? sekä 3) Kuinka erottuvia yksittäisen yrityksen identiteetit ovat kommunikoitujen tarinoiden perusteella?

Teoreettinen viitekehys ja tutkimusmenetelmät

Tutkimuksen teoreettinen viitekehys perustui maineen hallinnan tutkimuksiin, sekä perinteisen tarinankerronnan ja yritystarinoiden teorioihin. Laadullisen sisällönanalyysin keinoin tutkimus tarkasteli kymmenen nousevan suomalaisen sekä viiden ruotsalaisen ja viiden tanskalaisen mainetta saavuttaneen muotiyrityksen verkkosivujen viestintää.

Tutkimuksen tulokset ja johtopäätökset

Vaikka tarinallisuus on todistettu toimivaksi viestinnän keinoksi, aineistosta esiin nousseiden tutkimustulosten mukaan pohjoismaiset muotiyritykset eivät juuri käytä tarinoita viestiessään identiteettiään kuluttajille. Tunteisiin vetoavien ja harkittujen juonirakenteiden sijaan yritykset tyytyvät kuvaamaan identiteettiään lähinnä tuotteiden ja designin ominaispiirteiden avulla. Tekstien sankareiksi nousevat yrityksen perustajat.

Erottautuminen kilpailijoista oli vähäistä. Kaikki tutkitut yritykset käyttivät lähes samoja sanoja kuvatessaan yrityksensä identiteettiä. Suosittuja käsitteitä olivat muun muassa minimalismi, funktionaalisuus ja moderni design sekä korkea laatu ja istuvuus. Vaikka suomalaisten, ruotsalaisten ja tanskalaisten tarinankäytössä ei ilmennyt suuria eroja, suomalaiset korostivat viestinnässään hieman enemmän ekologisuutta, tuotteen alkuperää sekä valmistusmateriaaleja.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat etteivät pohjoismaiset muotiyritykset täysin tiedosta tarinankerronnan potentiaalia viestinnän välineenä ja erottautumisen keinona. Viestinnässään suomalaiset yritykset ovat menestyneempien ruotsalaisten ja tanskalaisten veroisia.

Avainsanat: tarinankerronta, yritysidentiteetti, viestintä, verkkoviestintä, muoti, vaateteollisuus

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1 Introduction

In the spring of 2012, I was sitting at a student event waiting to hear what Totti Nyberg, the then-CEO of a young Finnish clothing company Makia had to say about the challenges of being in the fashion business. He started his speech by stating that Makia does not really have any story behind its brand and then went on to tell the audience about the importance of quality control, the challenges of finding international retailers, and the interesting ways their company did marketing.

About an hour or two later, Don Brown from the legendary French-American skateboarding and streetwear company Etnies joined the stage to talk about their collaboration with the Finnish brand. Contrary to what his colleague from Makia said earlier, Mr. Brown started his speech by stating that the best thing about the up-and-coming Finnish brand was that they had such a good story to tell, a unique story that differentiated them from the rest.

This contradiction got me intrigued. Was communicating a story an effective way to make your company's message heard? And if so, were Finnish fashion companies, like Makia, taking full advantage of this method of communication? From that point on I, as a fan of both fashion and great stories, knew that this was something I wanted to investigate more. Thus, the topic of this research project came to be storytelling as a way of communicating corporate identity and as a way to stand out from competitors, specifically in the fashion industry.

To familiarize readers better with this research project, this introductory chapter provides some background to the topic, presents the aim of the study and its research questions, as well as discusses how the topic relates to the field of international business communication and introduces the structure for the rest of the paper.

1.1 Background for the thesis

The world is going through a change. Regular consumers are increasingly basing their purchasing decisions on their feelings rather than on their needs or technical knowledge, and thus, companies can no longer merely compete with product functions or price. This section provides insights into how this change has brought the ancient art of storytelling back into the spotlight and into the use of business communication professionals, and why storytelling is such an interesting and necessary area to study.

Today purchases are made more and more for emotional, non-materialistic and sometimes even non-rational reasons, and the demand is shifting towards products that appeal to people's hearts and provide them with unique experiences (see e.g. Argenti 2009; Brown 2009; Fog, Budtz & Yakaboylu 2005, Hegarty 2011; Jensen 1999; Roberts 2006; Smith 2011). In the words of Danish futurologist Rolf Jensen (1999, pp. 1-5), we are moving away from the data-oriented "information society" towards a feeling oriented "dream society". Or entering the age of "attraction economy" as a known marketing specialist Kevin Roberts (2006, pp. 9-12) puts it. Today, to be successful, products have to look and feel right as much as they have to perform, and companies need to satisfy people's need to be engaged and entertained. (Hegarty 2011, p. 9; Lea-Greenwood 2009, p. 220; Roberts 2006). Furthermore, as globalization and technological advances make the world smaller, the patterns of consumption will become more alike in different parts of the world (Jensen 1999, 190). This phenomenon of globalization and the change of consumer culture are especially evident in the fashion business (see e.g. Lea-Greenwood 2009, p. 220 and Hines 2007, p. 17). A renowned advertising guru John Hegarty even argues (2011, p. 9) that, in a way, today all business is fashion business.

A great challenge in today's globalized and impulsive business environment in general, and in the fashion business in particular, is how to appeal to the hearts of consumers and make them prefer your company over the competitors. Argenti argues (2009, p. 70) that

corporate identity and image might be the only factors whereby people can distinguish one company from another. With a strategically managed corporate identity and corporate communication, companies can gain a strong reputation and distinct competitive advantage (Balmer & Gray 1999, p. 175). Furthermore, this allows companies to charge a premium for their products (Lewis 2001, p. 31). Creating a strong brand and a strong identity is especially important in the highly competitive fashion market, where very similar products compete for the attention of consumers (Lea-Greenwood 2009, p. 220).

In addition to brand attributes, fashion consumers are increasingly interested in manufacturing processes and other corporate social responsibility related issues. (see e.g. Dickson 1999, 2000; Hustvedt and Bernard, 2010; Jegethesan, Sneddon & Soutar, 2012). Undoubtedly, companies today need to be increasingly transparent and communicate their identity and activities more publicly than ever before. However, as van Riel (2000, p. 158) suggests, having more communication does not equal having appealing communication. Van Riel (2000, p. 159) as well as Fog et al (2005, p. 68) argue that mission statements, brochures and other forms of corporate communication often aim to convey the true characteristics of a particular company, but end up claiming nearly the same characteristics as its competitors. Many researchers believe stories to be more believable, more memorable and generate more enthusiasm than the traditional statements and reports that companies are more accustomed to producing (see e.g. Dowling 2006, p. 84).

The same effect can be seen in marketing communications, as traditional advertising is losing its effectiveness. Many believe communicating a compelling story behind your idea to be more effective way to make an emotional bond with your stakeholders and gain competitive advantage than using traditional forms of marketing communication or advertising (see e.g. Brown 2009; Dowling 2006, Fog, Budtz & Yakaboylu 2005; Holten Larsen 2000; Hegarty 2011; Ramzy & Korten 2006; Pulizzi 2012). In fact, research measuring consumers' emotional responses found marketing communications

which tells a story to be more successful and more enduring, than one that merely focuses on product function and category positioning (Smith 2011, p. 33).

Consequently, in order for products to deliver added value to customers, or for new ideas even to be heard in this modern society, companies have to communicate a compelling story that clearly explains how they make a difference (Brown 2009, p. 141; Fog et al 2005, p. 89, 227). Research shows that many business communication professionals are actually already using stories in their organizations and stories have an important role in communication strategies (Ioffreda & Cargiulo 2008, p. 39). However, others feel that, despite their benefits, stories are still quite an unconventional way of business communication (Barker & Gower 2010, p. 308). Clearly the area of storytelling in business communication needs to be investigated more.

One industry that relies strongly on identity and brand is fashion. People everywhere have heard of the story of Coco Chanel and her ambition to liberate women from the constraints of corsets, or Levis Strauss and his unbreakable denim pants that went from being simple work wear to an iconic part of modern attire. Some might even have heard about Armi Ratia and how her strong leadership made Marimekko a household name in Scandinavia and even in the closet of Jacqueline Kennedy. Still it seems that Finland is quite far behind as far as fashion business is concerned.

Compared to the global levels, the business of fashion in Finland is very small. Even in the neighboring countries, Sweden and Denmark, fashion and clothing industry plays a far bigger role. Could communication be the reason to explain why fashion companies in Sweden and Denmark are doing better than the ones in Finland? Sweden and Denmark have traditionally been viewed as being better at predicting consumer needs, building successful brand and doing marketing communication (Gorski 2011, p. 13; Mehtälä 2013; Mäkkylä 2012, p. 7). Experts feel that branding and storytelling is an area that Finnish fashion companies need to improve. In the last few years though, new Finnish clothing companies have emerged that have been able to reach consumers

interests and create a buzz even on an international level. But how have these companies managed to appeal to global consumers, gain reputation and even create an attractive brand? Could the way they use stories to communicate with global consumers on the web have something to do with it?

As far as storytelling in business is concerned, plenty of research has been done on the use of stories in internal and interpersonal communication within an organization (see e.g. Denning 2006 and Marshal & Adamic 2010). However, research on stories used for external communication is far more rare (for an example of one see Sinclair 2010). And even if the stories of advertising have been studied rather extensively, the same cannot be said about stories in other forms of marketing communication and their role in communicating corporate identity and building an appealing reputation.

In recent years, the business of fashion has gained increasing attention among researchers, especially in the English speaking world (i.e. UK, US & Australia). Research in the fashion field has been made about consumer behavior (see e.g. Phau & Lo 2004; McCormick & Livett 2012; O'Cass 2004), branding (see e.g. Manlow 2011; McColl & Moore 2011; Ross & Harradine 2011) and even corporate identity (see e.g. Ha-Brookshire & Lu 2010; Rantisi 2011; Reinach 2011). However, rather surprisingly hardly any academic research has been done about fashion business in Finland in general, not to mention the business communication of Finnish fashion companies. Much more research has been done about the fashion business of Sweden and Denmark (see e.g. Yen Tran 2010; Hauge 2007; Hauge Malmberg & Power 2009; Melchior 2011; Melchior, Skov & Faurholt Scaba 2011).

This thesis tries to fill this research gap and add to the existing literature by examining the web communication of young fashion companies from Finland, Sweden and Denmark. The next section goes deeper into the objective of this thesis and presents the research questions.

1.2 Aim of the study and research questions

The objective of this research is to examine how stories are being used to communicate corporate identity in the fashion industry, by investigating the web communication of Nordic fashion companies.

To meet this aim, the following three research questions have been formulated:

1. To what extent do Nordic fashion companies use storytelling when communicating their identity to global consumers on the web?
2. What kind of story elements do they use in their web communication?
3. Based on their stories, how unique are their individual identities?

To meet the research objective and answer the above-mentioned questions, the web communication of altogether 20 Nordic fashion companies are investigated. More specifically, the data for this research consists of the web pages of 10 up-and-coming Finnish fashion companies as well as 10 small but well-known Swedish and Danish companies. These web sites are analyzed through a method of qualitative content analysis. The analysis first focuses on the web communication on a more general level and then goes deeper into the use of stories and different story elements. After this section on the research objectives and questions, the next section discusses how this study relates to the field of international business communication.

1.3 Positioning the study within International Business Communication

In this section, the present study is positioned in the research field of international business communication. It first elaborates what gives this study an international feel and then discusses its connection to business communication.

The chosen industry as well as the selected data provides this research project an international touch. Hines (2007, p. 4, 17) argues that although being one of the oldest markets in the world, the fashion market is a prime example of international supply and demand. Thus, research in this area of industry can be said to be international, if not even global in nature. Furthermore, the increased use of internet has created new opportunities for marketing communication on an global level (Bargiela-Chiappini, Nickerson, & Planken 2007, p. 49) and enabled fashion companies to expand beyond their domestic boundaries, without the vast resources traditionally needed for internationalization (Lea-Greenwood 2009, p. 235). Although the companies selected for this research come from the Nordic countries, their web communication can thus be assumed to be targeted not only towards domestic audiences, but consumers around the world.

Some of the theories and concepts used in this study come from the field of marketing and thus can lead the reader to question the relevance to business communication. Some researchers, as well as some companies, see marketing and communications as distinct entities with their own objectives and tactics. For a long time this was the case. However, as Cornelissen (2011, pp. 18, 21-22) argues, over time it has been recognized that they both share some common ground, and most companies are either using similar techniques for both or have merged them into one and the same function. Thus, communicative efforts made for brand building or identity management can be seen as important part of business communication.

This section has positioned this thesis in the field of International Business Communication. The next section overviews the structure of the rest of the study report.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is organized into seven chapters. This introductory chapter has described the background of the thesis, its aim and its link to the field of international business communication. The next chapter will describe the fashion industry in more detail. The third chapter presents earlier research on the topic of corporate identity and storytelling as well as introduces the theoretical framework used for this particular study. The fourth chapter introduces the methods and data used in the empirical part of this study and discusses their validity. The fifth chapter investigates the collected data and presents the findings. The sixth chapter discusses the findings in relation to the theories presented earlier, and finally the concluding seventh chapter summarizes the findings, explores their implications, discusses the limitations of the study and presents ideas for future research.

2 Fashion as business

This research project investigates the web communication of Nordic fashion companies. This chapter provides a short introduction to the business of fashion in section 2.1, some differences between the fashion industries in Finland, Sweden and Denmark in section 2.2 as well as introduces some future business trends that companies in this field need to consider in section 2.3.

2.1 Different fashion categories

Fashion industry is an umbrella term that can be used to describe several industries, such as clothing (also known as apparel), accessories, textile, home décor and sometimes even cosmetics. The focus of this study is on companies operating in the clothing and accessories field. Thus, whenever fashion is referred to in this study, it is seen as comprising of clothing and accessories.

The design and manufacture of fashion garments lies at the heart of fashion industry (Dillon 2010, p. 10), however, a wide range of different types of fashion companies exist in terms of product price, quality and production. Dillon (2012, p. 10) as well as Sorensen (2009, p. 21) divide fashion products into three main categories: haute couture, ready-to-wear (also known as designer wear) and mass market (also known as high-street) products.

Haute couture consists of limited, expensive, high-quality products that are developed by design houses exclusively for private customers (Dillon 2012, p. 10). In this category one will find the major fashion companies of the world, such as Chanel, Balenciaga and Dior, run by recognized and internationally famous designers (Sorensen 2009, p. 21).

Products in the ready-to-wear sector are less expensive than haute couture, but still high in quality, in terms of fabric, cut and finish (Dillon 2012, p.12). Products are not custom made unique pieces, but still produced in limited numbers (Sorensen 2009, p. 22). However, unlike haute couture, ready-to-wear pieces are manufactured in standard sizes, and therefore more suitable for large-scale production for wider audiences (Dillon 2012, p. 12 and Sorensen 2009, p. 22). The trend-led products in this category from companies such as Calvin Klein, Donna Karan and Prada, are usually sold in designer's shops, independent stores and exclusive department stores (Sorensen 2009, p. 22).

The least expensive and most industrialized level of fashion is the mass market clothing (Dillon 2012, p. 14). Companies in this category, such as H&M, Zara and Mango, produce designs based on popular trends and are influenced by ready-to-wear collections (Dillon 2012, p. 14). However, the fabrics in this category are usually cheaper, production levels higher and construction techniques modified to keep the prices low (Dillon 2012, p. 14). While couture fashion relies on craftsmanship to sell, mass-produced clothing depends on branding to make them appear unique among their competitors (Hancock 2009, p.5). Nevertheless, as Sorensen (2009, p. 22) admits the three-level view of the fashion market, is perhaps a little too simplistic, as many companies and products fall somewhere in between the three. The companies in this study can be seen to fall into the category of ready-to-wear garments, or somewhere between ready-to-wear and mass market.

Large number of consumers buys their clothes in the mass-market category (Sorensen 2009, p. 22). However, consumers rarely stick to one level when buying their clothes (Sorensen 2009, p. 22). Accordingly, the consumption of fashion is fragmented and discerning (Sorensen 2009, p. 20). The demands of consumers change quickly, which results into fashion companies attempting to maintain their share in a highly competitive market, by creating strong brand awareness and running rigorous marketing campaigns (MarketLine 2012b, p. 11). Sorensen (2009, p. 20) argues that in some parts of the fashion market the competition has been moving away from the emphasis on price to

other factor, such as quality, design and style. She feels however, that this non-price competition has had only limited success. How Finland ranks in this global competitive business of fashion, is discussed next.

2.2 Finnish fashion business compared to the world

Worldwide fashion is a massive business. In fact, global fashion can be seen as one of the largest and most competitive sectors of world trade (Easey 2009, p. 3).Revenues in the global market for clothing, accessories and luxury goods in 2011 were worth more than 1,300 billion Euros (MarketLine 2012a, p. 7). However, the market is highly fragmented with a large number of small players. The number of clothing companies in 2011 in the EU area alone was more than 102,000 (Euratext 2011).

Compared to the global levels, the business of fashion in Finland is very small. Even in the neighboring countries, Sweden and Denmark, fashion and clothing industry plays a far bigger role. In 2010, the clothing export in Sweden was 1.2 billion euros, and in Denmark even higher with 3.2 billion euros, whereas in Finland the number was only 250 million (Jännäri 2012, p. 45). It is quite evident that our Scandinavian neighbors have reached heights that we are still dreaming about and Finnish fashion business clearly has opportunities for growth.

The whole fashion industry in Finland is rather small. For years it has been fragmented into a few traditional industrial corporations and several creative small entrepreneurs (Lille 2010, p. 4). The number of Finnish clothing companies dramatically decreased during the recession of the 1990's that wiped out almost all domestic manufacturing (Lille 2010, p.4), but during the last decade several new innovative fashion companies have been established. However, the domestic market is limited and the distribution channels scarce, and therefore in order to succeed, Finnish fashion companies simply must aim for international markets (Lille 2010, p. 5).

Traditionally Finnish clothing companies have been accustomed to producing and selling standardized products, and emphasized meeting practical needs instead of focusing on producing added value (Lille 2010, p. 9, 32-33). Even though fashion is nowadays more and more based on creating images and association, in Finland value brought by design and communication, is still out shadowed by the traditional industrial values (Lille 2010, p. 9). To succeed in an international context you simply must act differently.

What are Finland's successful neighbors doing better then? Swedish companies have traditionally focused on creating demand and images with effective brand building (Lille 2010, 15). The Marketing Manager of Swedish Fashion Council, Helena Mellström argues (as quoted in Mäkkylä 2012, p. 7) that successful Swedish companies are excellent at brand building and marketing communication, even though they hardly ever use traditional and costly forms of advertising. Her colleague Lotta Ahlvar, the CEO of Swedish Fashion Council, agrees that the key to the success of Swedish companies is effective branding and storytelling (as quoted in Gorski, 2011, p. 13). Thomas Jonasson, the CEO of Stockholm Modecenter, feels that this type of brand thinking is something that the Finnish fashion industry is still lacking (as quoted in Mäkkylä 2012, p. 7). The CEO of the Federation of Finnish Textile and Clothing Industries Satu Mehtälä (interviewed March 11, 2013) agrees that historically Swedes and Danes have been better at being connected to the consumer and building fashion brands. However, she argues that the Finnish fashion industry has its own strengths: high quality, creativity and unique design. According to her, Swedish brands are often made for the masses, whereas in Finland different brands are more distinguishable and the design more versatile.

Additionally, what is noticeable in the successful Swedish companies is that they were founded by people with a set of different kinds of skills (Lille 2010, p. 33-34). Many Swedish companies, such as Acne and WeSC, were established by brand management professionals, not by fashion designers, whereas in Finland new fashion companies

usually consist of one or two designers aiming to employ themselves. Essential part of that success is to have a strong vision, a good combination of different skills, strong knowledge of production and materials, and enough business know-how to be able to get investors intrigued (Lille 2010, p. 32). For this research project fashion companies from Finland as well as Sweden and Denmark were investigated to see if the claims highlighted in this section hold true. The next section discusses some future trends affecting the fashion industry, as being aware of them is another essential factor of success.

2.3 Future business trends affecting the field of fashion

In a recent report on Finnish clothing and textile industry, Lahti, Boncamper, Liesvirta, Puoskari, Sirviö and Lehtonen (2012, p. 190-129) highlight some future megatrends that are affecting the industry globally. The consumption of textiles is expected to grow, with the biggest growth being in the medium priced consumable products (Lahti et al 2012, p. 190). The European market will specifically provide increasing opportunities for tailored, special and luxury products (Lahti et al 2012, p. 190). However, as the natural resources all over the world diminish, the use of natural materials in the textile industry will decrease and the demand for completely new materials will grow. (Lahti et al 2012, p. 191)

Due to the rising trend of individualism, the demand for tailored products is expected to grow to the level of branded products (Lahti et al 2012, p. 191-192). Moreover, increasing number of consumers will get more involved in the design and production process of their individualized products and will become so called prosumers, i.e. "participative consumers" (Lahti et al 2012, p. 191-192). An example of this can already be seen in the sport shoe category where many manufactures allow consumer visiting the brand's web shop, to design their own shoes to a certain extent.

Due to the ongoing globalization and development of information and communication technologies, increasing number of people will have access to the latest news and information. This is believed to accelerate the productization of new innovations as well as increase the need for transparency (Lahti et al 2012, p. 190). Additionally, consumer will increasingly expect fashion companies to be ecologically and ethically responsible (Lahti et al 2012, p. 191; Mehtälä 2013). In fact, transparency can already be seen as a major competitive factor in the fashion industry (Lahti et al 2012, p. 191).

Overall, the field of fashion business is believed to become even more fragmented. Thus, companies will have to rethink their target consumers more precisely and think of what resonates with the lifestyle and desires of their specific target audience (Mehtälä 2013). When trying to reach the fragmented group of consumers, the role of networking will become even more significant. Especially the smaller companies will benefit from effective networking and co-operation with well-established brands. (Lahti et al 2012, p. 191 and Mehtälä 2013)

The abovementioned trends are believed to have an effect on the fashion industry in the near future. Later, in the empirical part of this study, it will be investigated, whether any of these trends can already be seen in the web communication of the selected Nordic fashion companies.

This chapter has provided a short introduction to the world of fashion business. The next chapter, Chapter 3, will review earlier research and literature on corporate identity and reputation management as well as corporate storytelling and story structure.

3 Corporate identity and corporate storytelling

This study concentrates on the web communication of Nordic fashion companies and the use of stories in communicating corporate identity to global consumer. This chapter reviews earlier research and literature on corporate identity and reputation management as well as corporate storytelling and story structure. The first section, numbered 3.1, elaborates on how communicating corporate identity through stories can help companies gain competitive advantage. Section 3.2 goes through the benefits of stories, after which some definitions of stories are provided in section 3.3. Then, in section 3.4 the critical components of an effective corporate story are presented after which in section 3.5 different styles of corporate storytelling are discussed. Finally, based on these topics, section 3.6 presents a theoretical framework that will be used in the empirical part of this study.

3.1 Corporate identity, reputation and competitive advantage

When one studies business communication and marketing communication, many different concepts come up, concepts such as corporate identity, image, reputation, and brand. This section clarifies these concepts and explains how they all relate to one another as well as discusses their importance in differentiation and gaining competitive advantage. After this, the following sections go deeper into storytelling and how it can be used as a tool for effectively communicating a corporate identity

The key to effective marketing communication in any business, but fashion business in particular, lies in understanding the consumers and informing them about the benefits of your company and products over those of the competitors (Lea-Greenwood 2009, p. 218). In order to differentiate on the competitive global fashion market, companies must be able to justify their existence and why their products rise above what other companies are offering (Lille 2010, p. 5). In fact, many researchers believe

communicating a strong corporate identity to be the way to distinguish a company from its competitors.

So, corporate identity is the key. But what exactly is meant by corporate identity? Joep Cornelissen, researcher and professor of corporate communication and organization theory (2011, pp. 8-10), defines corporate identity as the basic profile and values communicated by a company to all its stakeholders. Simply put, with a corporate identity a company defines what it is, what it stands for, what it does and how, and where it is going (Melewar, 2003, p. 197). According to Argenti (2009, p. 68), a company then communicates this expression of its reality to its stakeholders, who then form an image, or images, based on the messages they received. Thus, the image is a stakeholder's reflection of an organization's identity. Over time these images form a collective representation of a company, i.e. a corporate reputation. Cornelissen (2011, p. 59) believes that this reputation can then make customers, as well as employees, investors, and other stakeholder groups, prefer a certain company over its competitors. Furthermore, if a company has a strong reputation among the consumers, it can charge a premium for its products (Lewis, 2001, p. 31).

Although the concepts of corporate identity and corporate brand are often used rather synonymously, Balmer and Grey (2003, pp. 979-80; 992) see critical differences between the two. One of the biggest differences is that while the concept of corporate identity is applicable or even necessary for all companies, corporate branding is not. As Balmer and Gray (2003, p. 992) suggest, corporate identity can be seen as a requirement for establishing a corporate brand, but not all companies have a corporate brand, nor even need one.

Nevertheless, many scholars (e.g. Melewar 2003, Balmer & Gray 1999, Cornelissen 2011) suggest that the key to establishing a strong reputation or brand and achieving competitive advantage is the effective communication of the company's identity and its distinct characteristics the different stakeholders. This is true in fashion business as

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well. According to Hancock (2009, p. 3), the communication between a particular clothing brand and the consumers is the key to making the brand more special and making people's first choice of purchase. Through communication, the fashion retailer, clothing manufacturer or designer label will be able to reach out and grab an individual's interest (Hancock 2009, p. 3).

The path that communication creates from corporate identity to competitive advantage can be best seen in Balmer and Gray's (1999, p. 175) model of the corporate identity-corporate communications process, illustrated in Figure 1, below.
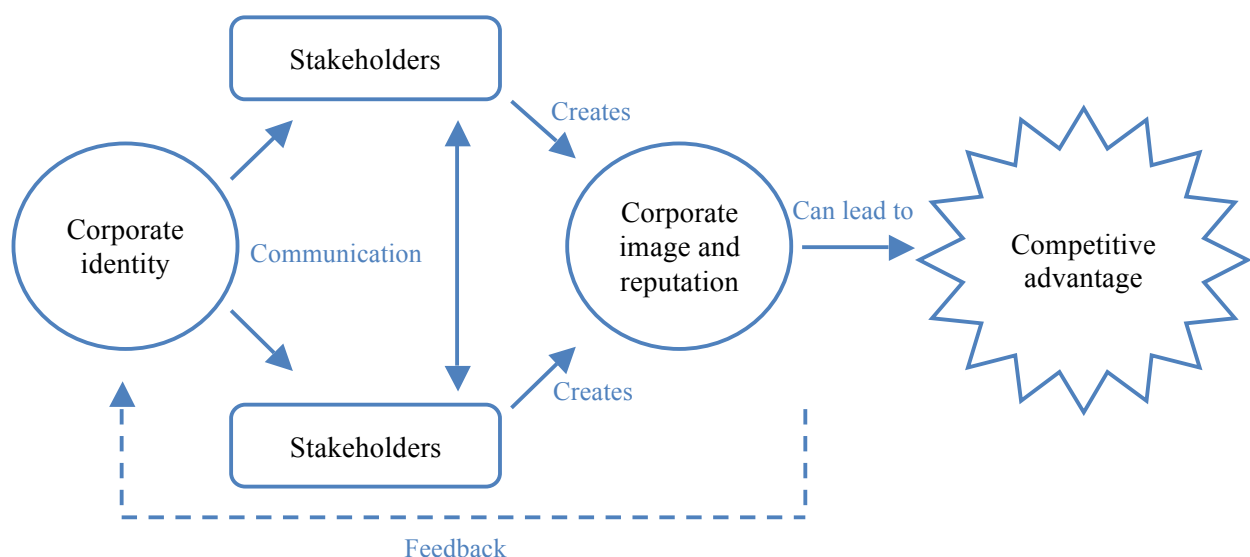
Figure 1. A model of the corporate identity - corporate communication process
(simplified from Balmer & Gray 1999, 175)

Through corporate communication, stakeholders perceive the company's identity, and image and reputation are formed (Balmer & Gray 1999, p. 171). One could say that corporate communication forms a bridge between a company's identity and the resultant image and reputation (Balmer & Gray 1999, p. 174). In other words, once a company has determined the characteristics of its desired corporate identity, it has to find a way to communicate this identity to its stakeholders effectively and consistently. The bridge of communication is what this research project is particularly interested in.

A fairly simple model of communication, where the message moves from the sender to receiver, is true in fashion business too. The sender is the producer or the seller of the fashion goods, the message is what this fashion company wishes to say either encoded in text, visuals or even in music (Lea-Greenwood 2009, p. 220). The receiver that gets the message is then the fashion consumer or the target market (Lea-Greenwood 2009, p. 220). However, it is not always this simple. Some sort of interference or noise can obscure the communication and the fashion consumer may not receive or interpret the message in the way the company intended (Lea-Greenwood 2009, p. 220).

It has been proven that stakeholders will be more receptive to corporate messages if the content of these messages are coherent and appealing (van Riel 2000, p. 157). In order to achieve this coherence and appeal, many scholars and experts suggest using storytelling (see e.g. Brown 2009, Dowling 2006, Fog, Budtz & Yakaboylu 2005, Holten Larsen 2000, Hegarty 2011, Ramzy & Korten 2006, Pulizzi 2012, van Riel 2000). Fashion consumer, too, is drawn to a strong brand message, and therefore the aim of a fashion company should be to make consumers understand their story and thus create an instant connection (Hancock 2009, p. 4) The next section goes deeper into the benefits of stories and why companies in general, and fashion companies in particular, should use a corporate story to communicate their identity and validate their reputation and help them build a strong brand.

3.2 Benefits of storytelling

Using stories in corporate communication has many benefits. In fact many business professionals believe stories to be the most powerful form of communication (see eg. Hegarty 2011, p. 95; Smith 2011, p. 27; Barker & Gower 2010, p. 306). This section goes through some of the benefits of storytelling as well as provides some alternatives for verbal storytelling.

The human brain naturally retains stories better than any other forms of information, and thus they are a powerful aid to recall, recognition and relevance (Smith 2011, p. 27). Historically, almost every civilization has used stories for engaging, learning, entertaining and persuading audiences (Hegarty 2011, p. 95). Today there is a scientific understanding that besides being a clear aid to memory and a way to make sense of the world, stories are a great way to make strong emotional connections with audiences and a way for consumer to recognize and identify with brands and companies (Herskovitz & Crystal 2010, p. 21).

In addition to generating more enthusiasm and being more memorable than traditional company statements (Dowling 2006, p.84), story communication promotes consistency and is harder to imitate (van Riel 2000, p. 157). Ramzy and Korten (2006, p. 183) argue that, with a story-based communication strategy, companies can connect more deeply with consumers and differentiate themselves from competitors more effectively, without sacrificing their uniqueness or authenticity. Furthermore, by communicating stories that capture the company's identity, companies can create indispensable value and meaning (Ramzy & Korten 2006, p. 183). Brown (2009, p. 132) suggests that companies can even use stories to convert people's needs into demand and that way create viable new business ideas.

In addition to being a practical solution to promote clear communication, storytelling can help in developing organizational understanding, build stronger relationships within the company and therefore increase the productivity of the business (Barker and Gower 2010, p. 303). Since stories stimulate a sense of community in audiences, they are extremely useful particularly in intercultural settings (Barker & Gower 2010, p. 306).

However, storytelling should not be viewed simply as a way to build a memorable and appealing message. Van Riel (2000, p. 157) suggests that companies should in fact think about their whole corporate identity as a story and use that core story as a source

of inspiration for all internal and external communication programs to ensure coherence and continuity of messages. Cornelissen (2011, p. 10) agrees that in order for the stakeholders to see a company in a favorably way that is consistent with the projected identity, all communication needs to be integrated in tone, theme, and visuals. Thus, corporate identity and corporate story can be seen as the key concept in any communications strategy.

There are some researchers that criticize the way companies today tend to focus on conveying messages through persuasive stories and verbal processes. Salzer-Morling and Strannegård (2004, p. 225) argue that, as markets have become overloaded with these brand stories, it has become more difficult to achieve differentiation and distinct image with a storytelling strategy. They suggest that the use of visual signals, and creating impressions rather than conveying messages, might currently be more effective. Similarly, Carroll (2009, p. 146) argues that increasing advertising literacy and cynicism threaten the traditional approaches to marketing communication that rely on verbal communication and storytelling. Her research on the use of celebrity endorsements in the communications for fashion brands suggests that instead of written cues, fashion companies should focus more on visual signals.

In her research, Sinclair (2005) used Social Presence Theory and Media Richness Theory to study storytelling, and found that if a company chooses to use stories as a communication medium, complex and confusing matters, such as organizational change or strategy are best communicated through verbal stories, whereas written stories can be used for communicating less complex issues, such as an organization's vision, values or brand promises.

Although the use of visual cues seems to be increasing, evidently written stories can still be used for communicating corporate identity, creating a favorable reputation and to differentiating companies from their competitors and thus win over consumers. The next section elaborates on what constitutes as a story and what does not.

3.3 Definitions of story

There are many views on what a story actually is. In the 1960's the famous French literary theorist and semiotician Roland Barthes presented a rather wide-ranging definition of narrative: everything is narrative or at least can be treated as one (as quoted in Czarniawska 2004, p. 17). Organization theorist and storytelling researcher Czarniawska (2004, p. 17), however, defines narrative as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event or action (or series of events or actions) that are chronologically connected. She makes a distinction between a narrative and story by stating that for a narrative to be a story, it needs a plot (p. 19). Similarly to Czarniawska, a fellow organizational storytelling researcher Gabriel (2000, p. 239) defines stories as narratives with plots and characters, generating emotion through a poetic elaboration of symbolic material.

According to Czarniawska (2004, p. 19) a plot then is something that describes the path from one state to another, usually consisting of an event and action to that event, or chains of actions and events. Similarly, Gabriel (2000, p. 239) explains plots as events (such as conflicts, predicaments, trials, coincidences, and crises) that call for actions (such as choices, decisions, and interactions) whose outcomes are often at odds with original intentions and purposes.

Stories are a specific genre of text. Following Halliday's model of analyzing lexicogrammatical features of texts, linguists Gerot and Wignell (1994, p. 193-219) classify texts into genres by asking what is their social purpose or function and goal, through what kind of generic structure do they achieve those goals and what lexicogrammatical choices are involved in this.

According to Gerot and Wignell (1994, p. 204) the social function of a narrative is to amuse, entertain and deal with actual or vicarious experiences in different ways, by presenting problematic events that lead to crises or turning points, and in the end to a

resolution. Stories also have a specific generic structure. First the scene is set and the participants introduced. Then a step back is taken to evaluate the plight after which a crisis arises. Finally the crisis is resolved and the situation re-oriented if needed. (Gerot and Wignell 1994, p. 204) Accoring to Gerot and Wignell stories also focus on specific and usually individualized participants. Other lexicogrammatical features include use of past tense, temporal conjunctions and temporal circumstances as well as material (or behavioral and verbal) processes. (Gerot & Wignell 1994, p. 204).

So a story is almost always said to be about change through time and a transformation of some sort. However, representation of simple events that follow each other, but have no necessary relation to each other, can be taken out of the category of stories (Squire, Andrews & Tamboukou 2008, p. 10). The same can be said for the representation of causal but not chronological or experiential sequences (Squire, Andrews & Tamboukou 2008, p. 10).

Gerot and Wignell (1994) introduce several other text genres besides the narrative; spoofs, recounts, reports, analytical expositions, news items, anecdotes, procedures, descriptions, hortatory expositions, explanations, discussions, and reviews. Out of these genres introduced by Gerot and Wignell, two commonly used genres stand out: recounts and descriptions. A comparison of the features of the stories, recounts and descriptions can be seen in the Table 1, on the next page.

Table 1. Different characteristics of stories, recount and descriptions (based on Gerot & Wignell 1994, p. 193-219)

	Stories	Recounts	Descriptions
Social function	To amuse, entertain and deal with actual or vicarious experiences in different ways, by presenting problematic events that lead to crises or turning points, and in the end to a resolution	To retell events for the purpose of informing or entertaining.	To describe a particular person, place or thing.
Generic structure	1) Orientation: sets the scene and introduces the participants 2) Evaluation: a stepping back to evaluate the plight 3) Complication: a crisis arises 4) Resolution: the crisis is resolved, for better or for worse 5) Re-orientation: optional	1) Orientation: provides the setting and introduces participants 2) Events: tells what happened, in what sequence 3) Re-orientation: optional - closure of events	1) Identification: identifies phenomenon to be described 2) Description: describes parts, qualities and characteristics
Lexico-grammatical features	- Focus in specific and usually individualized participants - Use of material processes (or behavioral and verbal processes) - Use of temporal conjunctions, and temporal circumstances - Use of past tense	- Focus on specific participants - Use of material processes - Circumstances of time and place - Use of past tense - Focus on temporal sequence	- Focus on specific participants - Use of attributive and identifying processes - Frequent use of epithets and classifiers in nominal groups - Use of simple present tense

The social function of a recount is to retell events for the purpose of informing or entertaining. In the generic structure of a recount, first the setting is provided and participants introduced. Then, the text recounts the events by telling what happened and in what sequence. In addition, there can be an optional re-orientation or closure of

events. Like stories, recounts focus on specific participants, use past tense, material processes and circumstances of time and place. However, recounts can be seen more as factual accounts of past event. (Gerot & Wignell 1994, p. 194)

The social function of a description is to describe a particular person, place or thing. The structure of a description first identifies the phenomenon to be described and then describes its parts, qualities and characteristics. Descriptions too focus on specific participants, but unlike stories or recounts, descriptions use simple present tense and attributive and identifying processes. In addition they are characterized by frequent use of epithets and classifiers in nominal groups. (Gerot & Wignell 1994, p. 208)

These characteristics defined by Gerot and Wignell listed in Table 1 are useful for studies, such as this thesis, that try to distinguishing stories from other texts genres. Similarly to Gerot and Wignell, also Gabriel (2000, pp. 25-26) introduces three particular types of narratives that must be distinguished from proper stories (even if they are not unrelated to them): opinions, proto-stories, and descriptions i.e. reports. Opinions often contain some factual or symbolic material, but are lacking a plot, characters and action. Proto stories are fragment of stories that can be emotionally and symbolically charged to a high degree, but have an undeveloped plot. They do have a beginning, but unlike true stories, they lack a proper end. Descriptions can have a plot and characters, but they are presented with highly factual tone, without reading any meaning into the events described, and thus lack the compelling narrative power of stories. (Gabriel 2000, pp. 25-26) In this research project the views of both Gerot and Wignell and Gabriel are used when examining whether Nordic fashion companies are using stories to communicate their identity or other types of text genres.

Evidently, there are many different understandings and definitions of stories. Perhaps the most comprehensible definition is given by Sinclair (2010, 41), who understands a story as a verbal or written description of true or fictional events structured by a plot. But surely if one wants to define what a corporate story is a little more is needed?

Holten Larsen (2000, p. 197) defines a corporate story as a comprehensive narrative about the whole organization, its origins, its vision, and its mission. It is much more than just a simple vision or mission statement, however. According to Holten Larsen, an effective corporate story combines strategic as well as creative thinking, and provides a common thread that then runs through the everyday activities of all employees and all communication.

Corporate reputation specialist Dowling (2006, p. 83) argues that the role of corporate story is to explain the behavior of a company in regards to its mission and morality, and in this way create an emotional bond with key stakeholders that will help to foster their trust and support. Fog, Budtz and Yakaboylu (2005, p. 69) see corporate story as something that expresses a company's distinctive character and its reason for being. This story can then be used for closing the gap between desired corporate identity and the perceived image, and all messages communicated in and around the organization should stem from this story (Fog et al 2005, p. 55)

So a corporate story is a little different than a traditional story. But how do traditional story types relate to corporate stories? Garbriel (2000, p. 83) classifies stories into four major types: comic, tragic, romantic and epic. Similarly Czarniawska (2004, p. 21) presents four classical story forms: comedy, tragedy, romance and satire. According to Czarniawska (2004, p. 22) these classical forms are so easily recognizable and appreciated even by modern audiences that it is difficult to replace the traditional stories with revolutionary and experimental ones. Overall, she feels that the classical plots are very resilient, even in today's modern world.

Baruch, a professor of organizational behavior and management, sees things a little differently. In his research (2009, p. 15), he compared organizational stories and traditional fairytales and found that the two are very different, sometimes even opposites. Organizational stories are quite materialistic and are based, or at least intend

to be based, on reality, whereas fairytales tend to be more metaphoric and symbolic (Baruch 2009, p. 16). Organizational stories usually also lack the enchantment, invention, and closure of fairy tales (Baruch 2009, p. 15). Companies sometimes tend to turn organizational stories into fairy tales, especially in their public relations and brand building. Baruch warns (2009, p. 22) that these types of stories should be taken cautiously, even suspiciously, as they viewed as impression management, and be dismissed as nonsense by most stakeholders (Baruch 2009, p. 23).

Fog et al (2005, p. 64) believe however, that the classical fairytales can be used as inspiration when developing a core corporate story. They believe that a company's quest in business may indeed resemble a fairytale in many ways. However, instead of a prince fighting to save a princess, companies are usually fighting for an idea, and instead of dragons or demons, what stand in the way of their success are competitors, lack of innovation or even negative public opinion. Argenti, too, (2009, p. 71) states that the most appealing stories, both in business as in literature, often involve an unsung hero or an underdog (e.g. an entrepreneur with a noble purpose hoping to do things differently) that audiences can admire and relate to. Moreover, according to Hancock (2009, p. 4), and effective fashion branding strategy tells a great story using history and cultural symbols that most people can understand. Fog et al (2005, p. 65) believe that by using the principles of classical storytelling a company can paint a picture of a shared challenge that employees have to overcome together and thus reinforce the culture and spirit of the company while at the same time sending a clear message of the its values to a wider audience.

Even though the aim and content of classical stories and company stories are different in many ways, they are made of similar components. These components of an effective storytelling are presented in the next section.

3.4 Components of a corporate story

There are many different views on how a corporate story should be crafted. In fact, Fog, Budtz and Yakaboylu (2005, p. 32) argue that since stories have so many different factors that need to be fine-tuned to specific audiences and situations, it is impossible to give hard set of rules or fixed formula for good storytelling. However, they do suggest (2005, pp. 32-33) that most stories entail at least four basic elements illustrated below in Figure 2: 1) clear message, 2) some kind of change, conflict or cause 3) compelling characters and 4) a well structured plot.
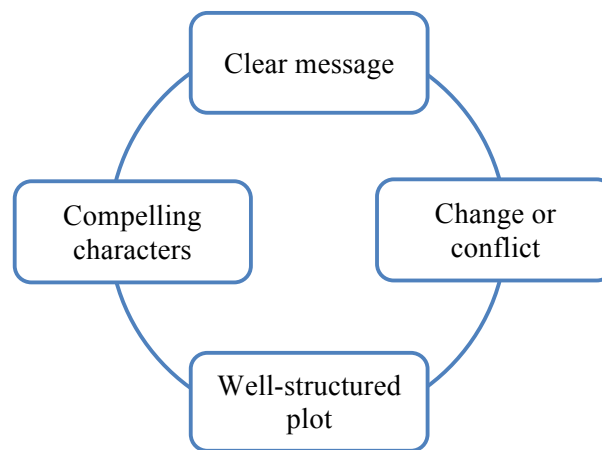
Figure 2. Four components of storytelling
(based on Fog, Budtz & Yakanoylu 2005, p. 33)

These four components can be used as checkpoints when developing a corporate story, and can be applied in a variety of ways depending on the purpose and context in which the story is being told. Each component will be discussed in more detail in the following subsections.

3.4.1 Clearly defined message

Corporate storytelling is not about telling stories just for the sake of it, but rather about using stories to communicate clearly defined messages that reflect positively on the company (Fog et al 2005, p. 34). The central message (i.e. the premise of a story) is a

moral or ideological statement that works as a main theme throughout the story. However, a message is something more than just a slogan or payoff (Fog et al 2005, p. 82). Essentially the message needs to mirror either the company's cause, or the experience it is trying to sell (Fog et al 2005, p. 83). Brown (2009, p. 137) believes that at the heart of any good story is a message about how the company and its products or services, satisfy the needs of the stakeholders in some powerful way. Van Riel adds (2000, p. 157-158) that the message should be relevant and add value to the stakeholders.

A central message is clearly important, but what exactly should be expressed and how? According to Fog et al (2006, p. 81), a corporate story must express the essence of the company and its reason for being i.e. what it is fighting for or how it makes a difference or what cause it wants to achieve. They believe that if a company does not stand for something more profound than making money, then it is not likely to make a memorable difference to customers or employees, either.

The story itself becomes a proof of the central message and a means to make the message understandable and digestible. Fog et al's (2005, p. 34) advice is to stick to just one message per story, since a story with several central messages can become messy and unclear.

3.4.2 Change or conflict

Good stories captivate people by addressing their emotional need to find solutions to problems and bring order to chaos (Fog et al 2005, p. 35). Thus, a good story is set in motion by a change or conflict, and centers on the struggle to attain, defend or regain harmony. Therefore once the message for the corporate story has been decided, the company needs to assess the level of conflict within that message (i.e. how big a difference does your cause actually make and what are you fighting against) (Fog et al 2005, p. 84).

The conflict is a barrier that the company needs to overcome in order to achieve its goal (Fog et al 2005, p. 84). Through the conflict the story communicates the narrator's point of view, values and message to the audience (Fog et al 2005, p. 36). A conflict in a company story does not have to be negative, but rather it is about creating a distinct brand (Fog et al 2005, p. 84). In addition to a conflict or a cause, dreams also make good story drivers (Fog et al 2005, p. 87). Thus, instead of fighting for a cause, a company can sell a dream. To identify its own specific cause or dream, a company can ask which longing or desire its customers want to pursue, and how the company provides them an opportunity to do so (Fog et al 2005, p. 89).

The conflict should not be so over-the-top that the story becomes too chaotic, but you need some kind of change to captivate an audience (Fog et al 2005, 36). It is difficult to build a strong corporate story without any conflict (Fog et al 2005, p. 85). If a company is fighting for customer needs that have already been met, there is no strong adversary to drive the story forward (Fog et al 2005, p. 85). It is important to be passionate about making a difference. Trying to please everyone can result in a weak and irrelevant message, whereas with a strong message and story you can gain a loyal customer base (Fog et al 2005, p. 89).

3.4.3 Compelling characters

In order for the conflict to play out, the story needs compelling characters (Fog et al 2005, p. 39). In fact, Herskovitz and Crystal (2010, p. 21) argue that a persona, i.e. the articulated form of the company's character and personality, comes first and all other elements of a corporate story unfold from there.

A classical hero figure appeals to basic wants and needs deeply embedded in human nature (Fog et al 2005, p. 93). Just like a classical hero in a fairytale, a company also has a set of skills and passion driving it towards its goal (Fog et al 2005, p. 92). The

company can be characterized for example as courageous, decisive, rebellious, curious, caring, honest, responsible or acknowledged or some kind of mixture of these traits. (Fog et al 2005, p. 92; Herskovitz & Crystal 2010, p. 26). However, it is important to remember that the audience will continuously compare what a company says about itself to its actions. Thus, if the company's actions prove to be conflicting, their brand will suffer (Herskovitz & Crystal 2010, p. 26). Van Riel (2000, pp. 157-158) agrees that an effective story has to refer to the unique characteristics of a specific company in a realistic manner.

In addition to a hero of some sort, a successful story conflict generally needs an adversary with an opposing agenda (Fog et al. 2005, p. 41). However, in a corporate story, the adversary does not have to be an actual evil being, but it can be a physical or psychological obstacle, such as customers' lack of confidence in the company's products, or employees' lack of faith in their abilities. By battling against this so-called adversary, the hero of the story will develop and resolve the conflict (Fog et al 2005, p. 41).

When creating the characters for the corporate story or choosing which existing characters to use, it is important to keep the audience in mind. A good story gives its characters a sense of purpose and involves participants in action (Brown 2009, p. 137). In order for the audience to get involved with the story, they must be able to identify with the characters and the conflict (Fog et al 2005, p. 41). Furthermore, with a relatable, recognizable and memorable persona, a company can create a long-term emotional bond with the audience (Herskovitz & Crystal 2010, p. 21).

Herskovitz and Crystal (2010, p. 26) argue that, because of habit or comfort, companies tend to address explicit customer needs or explicit features and benefits, instead of focusing on the company's character and personality. Another mistake Herskovitz and Crystal feel that companies often make is that they focus on the plot before the persona. This they say happens for example in ad campaigns where a clever idea overshadows

the persona of the brand and people forget what the ad is actually selling. However, the stories of two different companies can have a strikingly similar plot, but the differences in their individual personas will make their stories unique (Herskovitz & Crystal 2010, p. 23). Moreover, inconsistent story lines featuring very different personae, can lead to confusion and unease, while a well-defined, consistent persona can grow with the times and be used in changing situations (Herskovitz & Crystal 2010, pp. 23-24).

3.4.4 Well-structured plot

Once the message, conflict and characters are in place, it is time to think about the plot, i.e. how the story should progress. According to Fog et al (2005, p. 44) a story must have a precise structure to propel it forward and maintain audience interest. Many scholars have analyzed dramatic structure, beginning with Aristotle in his Poetics. Aristotle proposed the idea that well-constructed plots have a beginning, middle and an end (Alanko & Käkelä-Puumala 2008, p. 193). This traditional view is illustrated into Figure 3, where first the scene is set, then a conflict or change occurs setting the boundaries for the rest of the story and finally the conflict is resolved (see eg. Fog et al 2005, Czarniawska 2004 and Gabriel 2000). According to Baruch (2009, p. 18), both fairy tales and organizational stories tend to have a three-fold structure with a beginning, body and end; however, the content of all three parts is comprehensively different.

1st ACT	2nd ACT	3rd ACT
Setup	Confrontation	Resolution
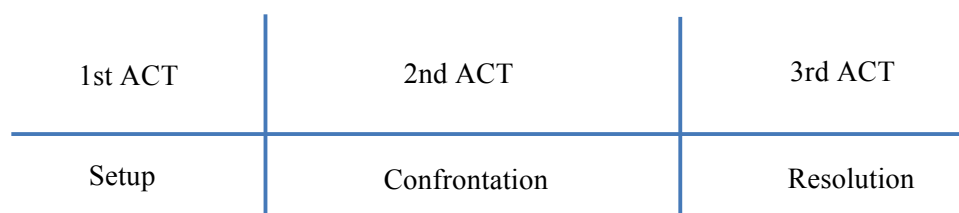
Figure 3. Three-act plot stucture

The three-act-structure later evolved into a five-act-structure also known as Freytag's pyramid after the German playwright and novelist Gustav Freytag. In this structure, illustrated in Figure 4, the plot of a story consists of five parts: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and dénouement (ie. conclusion) (Alanko & Käkelä-Puumala 2008, p. 194).
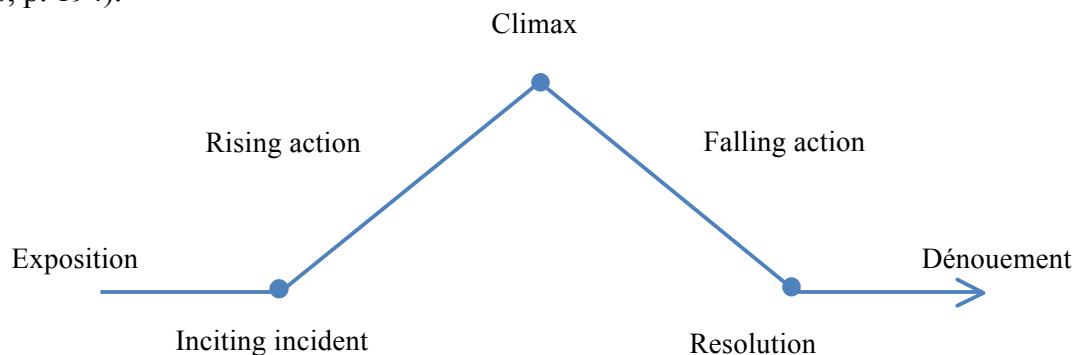
Figure 4. Five-act plot sturcture or Freytag's Pyramid

In the exposition the writer gives the setting, introduces the characters as well as provides other facts needed for understanding the story. The inciting event or force then sets in motion the action. During the rising action the story gains interest as the opposing ideas come into conflict and proceed toward the climax. The climax marks the turning point in the action, where rising action reverses and becomes the falling action. Falling action then winds the plot down towards a resolution of the conflict. Finally the story concludes, misunderstandings are explained and loose ends tied up. (Alanko & Käkelä-Puumala 2008, p. 194)

These examples of dramatic structure and the principles of classical storytelling can be helpful when forming a core story for a company. However, there is no single, universal way of creating a plot. Instead the company story can be seen more as a strategic platform for communication that can be translated into various actual stories for different contexts (Fog et al 2005, p. 95).

Even though there are no universal rules for creating a good corporate story, scholars and practitioners do offer some guidelines for how to make the story more effective. Holten Larsen (2000, p. 197) recommends for the story to be only a few pages long, but broad and deep enough to guide everyone's behavior in relation to the organization. According to Brown (2009, p. 137), for a corporate story to be convincing, it needs to have enough detail to ground it in reality, but no unnecessary detail to overwhelm the audience. A powerful story does not have to make the reader cry, but it does need to have strong emotional punch (Brown 2009, p. 138). Instead of a creating a tidy beginning, middle and end, Brown (2009, p. 148) suggests investing in an ongoing, open-ended narrative that engages people and encourages them to carry the story forward and write their own conclusions. The next section discusses different styles for corporate storytelling.

3.5 Different corporate story strategies

As discussed in the earlier section, a good story consists of the abovementioned four elements. However, the style of storytelling can differ. This section describes some possible strategies for corporate storytelling.

Robert McKee, an expert on screenwriting whose methods are often used also by corporate executives, suggests that a good story expresses how and why life changes. According to McKee (1999, p. 181), a story begins with a situation in which life is relatively in balance until some kind of event happens that throws life out of balance. The story then proceeds to describe how, in an effort to restore balance, the main character's subjective expectations crash into an uncooperative reality. A good story explains what it is like to deal with these opposing forces, calling on the main character to dig deep and make difficult decisions.

Business journalist, as well as communication professionals, often use a structure similar to McKee's, by first setting a scene, then highlighting the main characters and

outlining the plot and finally describing a possible resolution (Dowling 2006, p. 90). In fact, research done by Joanna-Beth Sinclair (2010) shows that business journalists value stories and consider company messages in a form of a story, or hidden story, to be significantly more newsworthy than press releases without a story. The main purpose of the stories following McKee's structure is to inform and create interest in a company and in this way help shape the beliefs and expectations of stakeholders (in Dowling 2006, p. 90).

Some companies develop their corporate story based on their customer promise and brand. These stories usually speak about the company's character and often personify this through the founder of the company. Dowling (2006, p. 91) argues that, to be effective, these stories need to resonate with the lifestyle and desires of the target audience. Here, Dowling feels a distinct corporate identity also helps, so that people who buy into the story can signal their association with the company.

Dowling (2006) presents a model that he feels is even more effective. He believes (2006, p. 91) that McKee's style of storytelling is not likely to go beyond informing and creating interest to engage stakeholders and shape and improve their image of the company. Furthermore, Dowling believes that stories based on brand promise are not the best way to enhance a company's reputation either, since they say little about the company's morality and thus can result in strong opposition from the public. He believes that a story that incorporates the full reputation platform of mission, morality and modes of behavior, is likely to be stronger.

In Dowling's model, seen in Figure 5 below, company's mission, morality and its behavior form a reputation platform that can be used as a basis for a corporate story. This story can then guide stakeholder's beliefs and eventually build up and reinforce a favorable reputation.
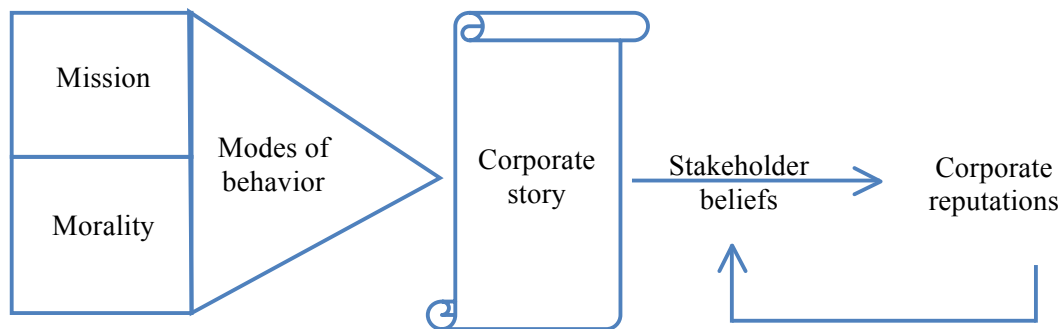
Figure 5. Components of a Reputation Story (simplified from Dowling 2006, p. 86)

Much like Dowling, Fog et al (2005, p.62) believe that the first step in forming a core story for a company is to create a shared mental image of the company's reason for being that clearly defines where the company is going and addresses both the head and the heart. Fog et al believe (2005, p. 63) that to be able to have a long-term effect externally, you have to start with the people inside the company, i.e. the employees. If the employees can identify with this story and feel they make a difference, they will also proudly share the story forward (Fog et al 2005, p. 63). Simply put, an ideal corporate story is realistic and relevant description of an organization, created in an open dialogue with the organization's stakeholders (van Riel 2000, p. 157).

To conclude the previous sections, corporate identity is a way for companies to differentiate themselves from others and gain competitive advantage. However, in order for the consumers to form and image consistent with the initial identity effective communication is needed. This is where storytelling can be used as an effective tool. Based on the literature reviewed in previous sections on corporate storytelling, its definitions, components and styles, the next section provides a theoretical framework which will be used to study the storytelling practices of Nordic fashion companies.

3.6 Theoretical framework

Based on the literature reviewed earlier in this chapter, a theoretical framework for this research project was formulated. This framework is illustrated in Figure 6 below.
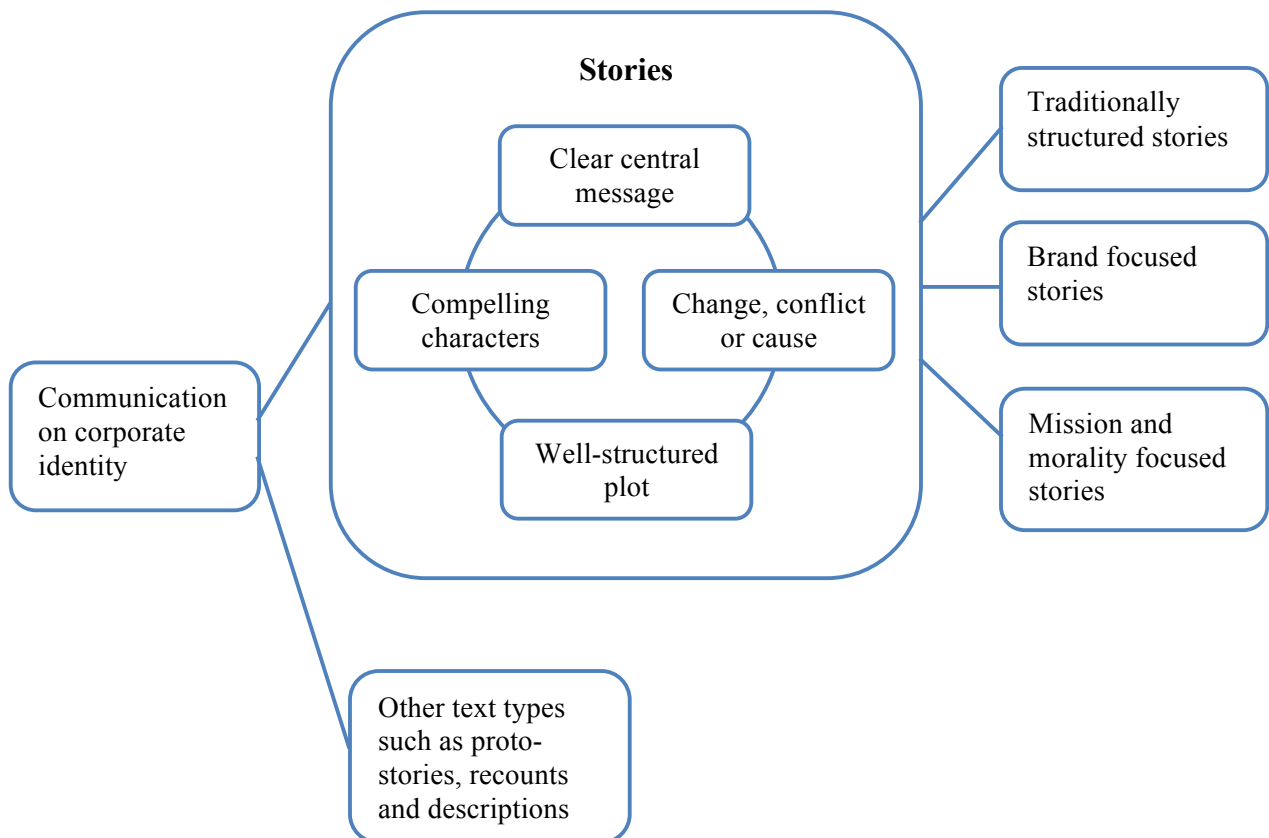
Figure 6. Visualization of the theoretical framework

In this model, communication can be divided into stories and other types of communication, such as recounts and descriptions as well as proto-stories. Stories then consist of a clear message, some kind of change, conflict or cause, appealing characters and well-structured plot. Some of the stories follow the traditional story structure, by first setting a scene, then highlighting the main characters and outlining the plot and finally describing a possible resolution. Others focus the customer promise and brand, by bringing forth the company's character through the founder and his/her persona.

Some stories are based on the mission, morality and behavior of the company. An effective story can follow one of these themes, or be a combination of several.

This framework will be used to study the websites of selected Nordic fashion companies. First, the parts of the website that share information about the company and its identity will be identified. Then, these parts will be analyzed to see whether the texts are in fact stories or something else. Then, the four story elements of message, characters, causes and plots, will be searched in the texts and examined, after which the uniqueness of communicated messages and identities will be evaluated.

This framework provides a basis for the empirical study presented in the coming chapters. This study is specifically interested in how Nordic fashion companies communicate their identity to global consumer, whether they in fact use storytelling to do this, and if so, what kind of stories they are using. More detailed explanation of the chosen research methods and gathered data will be presented next in Chapter 4.

4 Data and methods

As the review of literature and research presented in previous chapters show, communicating corporate identity of fashion companies through storytelling is a complex and rather uncharted area. Therefore, this study investigates how Nordic fashion companies are using storytelling when communicating their identity to global consumers, by analyzing information found on company websites. This chapter first clarifies the collection of data in section 4.1, then presents the methods of analysis in section 4.2, as well as discusses the trustworthiness of the study in section 4.3.

4.1 Company websites as data

This section describes the data gathered for this research in more detail. The chosen methods and the trustworthiness of the study will be discussed in the following sections.

Fashion companies were chosen as the object of study, since, as noted in the literature review, fashion business is a prime example of a competitive and consumer-centric market. In addition, since traditional channels of marketing communication and advertising can be seen to be on decline whereas the use of internet as a communication channel is increasing, this study concentrates on web communication. The companies were selected based on the recommendations by industry professionals as well as the knowledge of the researcher herself.

The data gathered for this research consisted of the web sites of 20 fashion companies from Finland, Sweden and Denmark. These web sites were examined to see what kind of role stories play in their web communication. Ten out of these twenty selected companies were up-and-coming Finnish clothing brands who are aiming to reach consumers on a global level. Half of these companies (Makia, IvanaHelsinki, Globe Hope, Costo, Minna Parikka) has already reached some awareness and success, whereas

the other half (Samuji, Minni f. Ronya, R/H, KaksiTvå and Month of Sundays) are smaller and known in limited circles. As a comparison to the Finnish companies, ten companies from the more successful fashion countries of Sweden and Denmark were examined. This was done to see whether or not any differences exist in their style of communication.

All 10 of the Finnish companies can be described as small companies, employing less than 50 people and with a maximum turnover of EUR 10 million, and majority even micro companies, employing less than 10 people and with a maximum turnover of EUR 2 million (according to the European Union's definition). The companies from Sweden and Denmark were equal of size or slightly bigger. In addition some of these companies were slightly older and thus likely to be more experienced. Due to their small size, these companies are likely to have limited resources for marketing communication, and thus were found to be more interesting to study than large corporations with vast experience and traditions as well as access to larger resources.

All of the selected companies, as well as information on their country of origin, line of products, founding year and website address, can be found (in alphabetical order) in the following Table 2.

Table 2. Companies selected for research

Name	Country of origin	Product line	Founded	Website
Acne	Sweden	Menswear, womenswear and accessories	1996	http://www.acnestudios.com
Bruuns Bazaar	Denmark	Menswear and womenswear	1994	http://www.bruunsbazaar.com
Costo	Finland	Accessories	~2006	http://www.costo.fi
DAY Birger et Mikkelsen	Denmark	Womenswear and home decor	1997	http://www.day.dk/eu/eu
Designers Remix	Denmark	Womenswear and childrenswear	2002	http://www.designersremix.com/eu
Elvine	Sweden	Menswear and womenswear	~2001	http://www.elvine.se
Filippa K.	Sweden	Menswear, womenswear and accessories	1993	http://www.filippa-k.com
Globe Hope	Finland	Menswear, womenswear and accessories	2003	http://www.globehope.com/en
IvanaHelsinki	Finland	Womenswear	1998	http://www.ivanahelsinki.com
KaksiTvå	Finland	Accessories	2005	http://www.kaksitva.com
Makia Clothing	Finland	Streetwear	2001	http://makiaclothing.com
Minna Parikka	Finland	Shoes and accessories	2005	http://www.minnaparikka.com
Minni f. Ronya	Finland	Womenswear	2010	http://www.minnifronya.fi
Month of Sundays	Finland	Womenswear	2010	http://www.monthofsundays.fi
Nümph	Denmark	Womenswear	~2005	http://www.numph.dk
R/H	Finland	Womenswear	2010	http://www.rh-the-label.com
Samsoe & Samsoe	Denmark	Menswear, womenswear and accessories	1991	http://www.samsoe.com
Samuji	Finland	Womenswear	2009	http://www.samuji.com
Swedish Hasbeens	Sweden	Shoes and accessories	~2007	http://www.swedishhasbeens.com
WESC	Sweden	Streetwear	1999	http://wesc.com

All of the data gathered was in English. The company websites were accessed and analyzed during the spring of 2013. The websites were accessed for the last time on the 19th of June 2013. From these company websites, specifically the sections describing the company (usually titled about, about us, story etc.) were investigated in more detail. In addition to the company websites, different social media channels used by the companies were used as additional data to observe whether any additional story material was found and if the messages communicated there were consistent with the messages communicated on the websites. Additional data was gathered mostly from Facebook since it is a popular channel for information about brands and products for young consumers today. In addition to textual data, some investigation was done over the use of visual cues, but more as part of the bigger context and not on a profound detailed scale.

This section has described the data collected for this research project. The next section describes the methods used to analyze the data in more detail.

4.2 Qualitative content analysis as a method

As explained in the previous section, this research uses texts found on company web sites of Nordic fashion companies as data and thus, is interested in the phenomenon of storytelling within the particular context of web communication of fashion companies. This section discusses why qualitative method best suits the purposes of this study as well as describes the data analysis in more detail.

Qualitative research has become an increasingly popular approach to business research (Bryman & Bell 2003, p. 280). It usually seeks to understand a certain phenomenon in all its complexity and within a particular situation and environment. (Maykut & Morehouse 1994, pp. 43-44). Bargiela-Chiappini, Nickerson and Planken (2007, p. 176-177) suggest using qualitative methods when the phenomenon being studied is complex, social in nature or cannot be quantified. In their view, qualitative research is suitable

especially for research that aims to gain insights into communication processes and meaning on the basis of words or texts and tries to identify patterns in communicative behavior. Similarly, Bryman and Bell (2003, p. 279) argue that qualitative research usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data.

Qualitative research includes several different methods, the collection and analysis of texts and documents being one of them (Bryman & Bell 2003, pp. 281-282). According to Marshall and Rossman (1999, p. 117) using documents as data often requires a specialized analytic approach called content analysis. Historically, content analysis has been viewed as a way of obtaining a quantitative description of the content of communication, and thus counting the mention of specific words was important. However, today it is viewed more widely as a method for interpreting and describing communicative items (Marshall & Rossman 1999, p. 117), and thus, can be used also for qualitative research.

Qualitative content analysis is probably the most widespread approach to the qualitative analysis of documents (Bryman & Bell 2003, p. 417). It comprises of searching-out of underlying themes in the materials being analyzed. (Bryman & Bell 2003, p. 417). The raw material in content analysis may be any form of written communication, or include even pictures, speeches and music (Marshall & Rossman 1999, p. 117). The analysis of texts essentially investigates how writers employ language and linguistic strategies to evoke meanings and achieve a particular communication purposes as well as helps us to characterize and better understand communication in a particular context (Bargiela-Chiappini et al. 2007, p. 201; Pälli, Tienari,& Vaara 2009, pp. 924-925). In the text based-approach of analysis of narrative or stories, the central of concern is the internal organization of stories, typically their characterization, modes of emplotment, themes, and other textual features (Gubrium & Holstein 2009, p. 17). The analysis of texts traditionally focuses on authentic, naturally occurring data, however, the social nature of the text should also be taken into account (Bargiela-Chiappini et al. 2007, p. 201).

The process of analysis in this research project was divided into four steps. The first step was to look at the websites on a more general level to find out whether any similarities or differences were found on their overall look and feel. This part also included finding the section on these websites that talked about the identity of the selected companies. Next, the texts found on these sections were examined more closely to see whether they were in fact stories or other text genres. This was done by looking at the structures of the texts and their lexicogrammatical features. After this the different story elements were studied to find out what kind of plots, characters, conflict or causes and messages were being used. Finally based on these elements, the uniqueness of individual corporate identities was evaluated. In practice, the analysis required finding the concepts, looking at their context as well as reading between the lines to find interpretative meaning. An excel sheet specifically made for this research project was used to write down findings as they appeared. Whether the findings of this study can be regarded as trustworthy will be discussed in the next section.

4.3 Trustworthiness of the study

This section addresses questions related to trustworthiness of the research project. Traditionally the quality of research has been assessed through the criteria of reliability and validity. However, as Bryman ad Bell (2003, p. 286) point out, the two criteria have been criticized for not being relevant or suitable for qualitative research. Instead, a qualitative research project, such as this one, can be assessed through the criteria of trustworthiness. Trustworthiness then is made up of four criteria: transferability, dependability, confirmability and credibility (Bryman & Bell 2003, p. 288). To evaluate these four criteria and thus the trustworthiness of a research project, Marshall and Rossman (1999, pp. 190-191) suggest responding to a set of four questions.

First, Marsall and Rossman (1999, pp. 190-191) suggest asking how transferable and applicable the findings are to another setting? This research project aims to get a deeper

understanding of storytelling as a communication tool, specifically in the context of web communication of fashion companies. Thus the findings as such are not directly applicable to a different kind of setting. However, as Bryman and Bell (2003, p. 289) note, the findings of qualitative research tend to be contextual to the specific topic studied due to the deep and intensive study of a small set of data, instead of a broad investigation of large corpus. Similarly Maykut and Morehouse (1994, pp. 43-44) feel that discoveries of qualitative research are not meant to be extensive generalizations but contextual findings that help in getting a deeper understanding of the selected topic.

A researcher can help readers make judgments about the possible transferability of findings to other setting by providing them with a detailed description of the research process (Guba and Lincoln 1985, as quoted in Bryman & Bell 2003, p. 289). To meet the criterion of transferability, this paper provides an overview of the theories and methodology used in the study. To enhance the transferability of findings, description of the analysis process is given in the methodology section. In addition, example texts and images are provided alongside the findings.

To evaluate the criteria of dependability Marshall and Rossman (1999, pp. 190-191) suggest asking whether the findings would be the same, if the study would be replicated? If this study was replicated at a later time, the findings might differ due to the fact that the target channel of communication selected for this research project, i.e. internet, is being developed constantly. The companies selected may update the information they provide on their websites, resulting to the research data being slightly different at a different time. However, to enhance dependability, copies of the studied texts are provided at the appendices of this report. These could be used to better replicate the study at a later time.

To establish dependability, Bryman and Bell (2003, p. 289) also suggest keeping records of all phases of the research process in an accessible manner, so that peers can assess whether proper procedures have been followed. To enhance the dependability of

this study, the key steps of the research project are described in this report. Moreover, the choices made when selecting the material studied and selecting the methods used are reported and justified.

Confirmability i.e. objectivity of the research project can then be assessed by asking the question: can one be sure that the findings are not a fabrication from the researcher's biases or prejudices (Marshall & Rossman 1999, pp. 190-191)? Marshall and Rossman (1999, p. 117) feel that the strength of a content analysis is that the data can be collected without disturbing the research setting in any way. However, this method also has its weaknesses as the analysis of the data entails considerable amount of interpretation by the researcher (Marshall & Rossman 1999, p. 117). To help display the logic of interpretation of data in this study, both written and visual examples directly from the studied websites are provided in the Findings chapter.

Many scholars feel that complete objectivity is impossible in qualitative business research (Bryman & Bell 2003, p. 289). However, researcher should show that he or she has acted in good faith and has not allowed personal values or theoretical preferences influence the research process and its findings (Bryman & Bell 2003, p. 289). Although the researcher of this study has acted in good faith, it should be noted that she is a Finnish woman, with a background in marketing and business communication and a particular interest in the fashion business. If the same study would be conducted by a researcher with different knowledge and characteristics, it is possible that interpretation of findings and their emphasis might end up being slightly different.

Finally, Marshall and Rossman (1999, pp. 190-191) advice asking how credible the findings of the study are and how the readers can evaluate this credibility? According to Bryman and Bell (2003, p. 288-289), establishing credibility involves both ensuring that research is carried out according to the principles of good practice and submitting research findings to the members of the social world.

This study report follows the principles of good practice by first introducing the research topic, then reviewing the theories of well-established researches on corporate identity managements as well as corporate storytelling. In addition, the selection of the data and research methods are justified, the findings are adequately presented and discussed in relation to the earlier research. Thus, this research project can be deemed credible. Furthermore, the paper will be available both in electronic form on the web as well as in paper form in the public library of Aalto University, and thus can freely be examined by anyone who wishes to do so.

To conclude, trustworthiness of the present study was examined through the criteria of transferability, dependability, confirmability and credibility. Even though some elements that had a somewhat undesirable effect on trustworthiness were identified, generally speaking this study was conducted in accordance with good scientific conventions.

This chapter has described the data used for this study, presented the study methods and discussed their trustworthiness. The following chapter will present the findings of the study.

5 Findings

This chapter presents findings derived from the study of the web communication of Nordic fashion companies. The aim of this research project was to discover how stories are being used to communicate corporate identity in the fashion industry. Following the research questions presented in the introductory chapter, this chapter is divided into five sections. The first section 5.1 focuses on the overall look and feel of the websites and does not directly respond to one particular research question. However, it gives a nice overview of the studied websites and works as a great starting point for the findings to follow. The second section 5.2 first identifies the parts of the studied websites that communicated about the identity of that particular company, and then elaborates whether story communication was used to do so. Section 5.3 complements the previous one by discussing the use of visuals supporting storytelling. The fourth section 5.4 goes deeper into the different story elements. Finally, the fifth section 5.5 evaluates the uniqueness of the individual identities of different companies based on the characteristics communicated.

5.1 White is the new black

This section presents findings on the overall look and feel of the websites of selected Nordic fashion companies. It first concentrates on the perceived function of the websites, then talks about the available languages as well as the color scheme and layout. Finally the area of social media is briefly touched upon.

All companies had a website with visual images and varied level of textual information. Websites were either informative with several pages of information on the company, a web shop displaying products for sale, or something in between. Interestingly, majority of the Finnish companies' websites were mainly informative, with some added web store features, whereas almost all of the Swedish and Danish websites were clearly web

stores that had some informative elements. Historically Sweden and Denmark have had a stronger tradition of trading. Even in the modern way of e-commerce they can be seen more advanced. Thus it is no wonder that they seem to be using their company websites for the purpose of selling their products more than their Finnish counterparts. Standing out from the rest, the website of Finnish company Samuji mainly consisted of images and short video clips and had no information on the company besides contact information. A more detailed illustration of the occurrence of the different types of websites discovered can be found on the Figure 7 below.
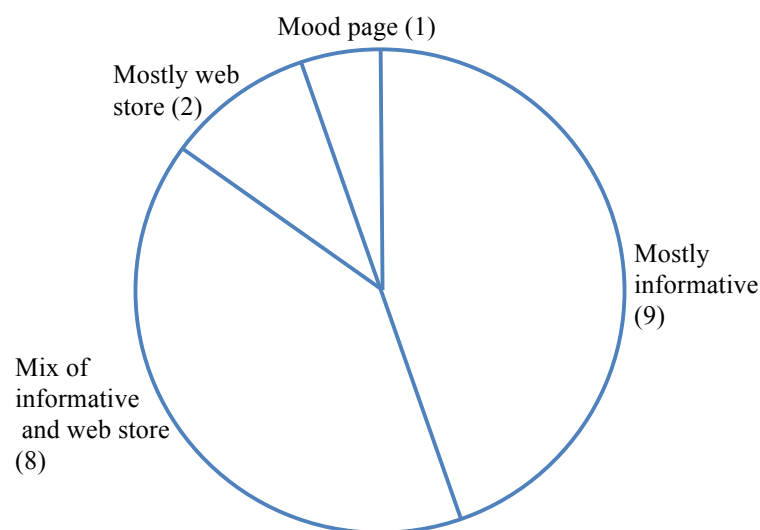
Figure 7. Perceived function of the websites studied

The domination of English as the common business language of the world is clearly seen in the studied websites. All of the studied companies had an English website. In fact, majority of the companies provided information solely in English, and only three companies provided information in additional languages. Month of Sundays in Finnish, Globe Hope in Finnish and German and DAY Birger et Mikkelsen in Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish, Dutch and German. As all of the selected companies are targeting consumers on a global level, the choice to use English seems natural. However, a question still rises whether additional languages would be beneficial, as a large portion of the world's consumers do not have a good command of English.

When examining the web sites on a general level, and observation made that a combination of neutral colors of black, white, grey and beige were used in majority of the pages. The striking similarity of the website design and color scheme is visible in Figure 8, which portrays 15 out of the 20 website studied.
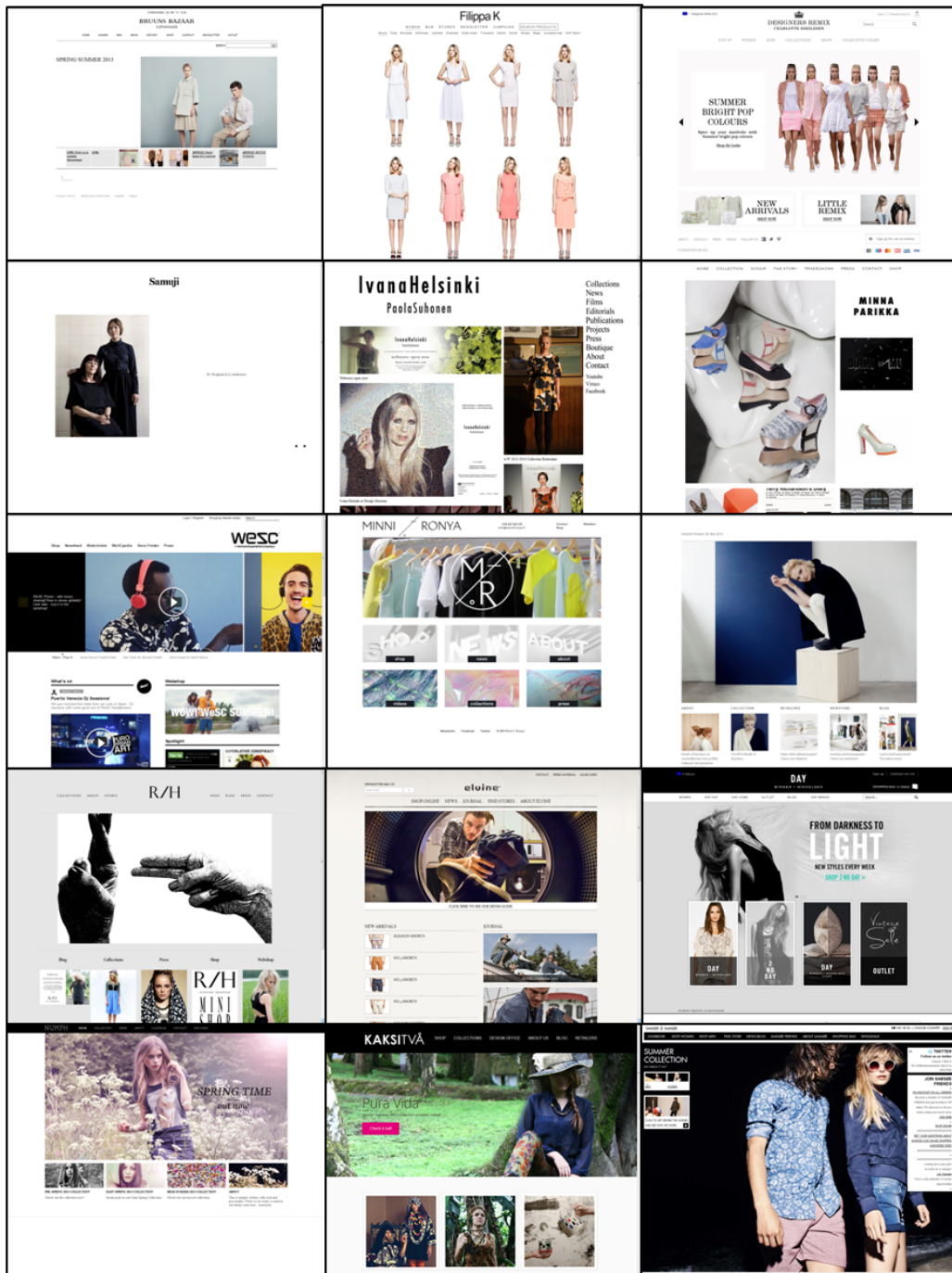
Figure 8. Illustration of the similarity of the design of the websites.

All of these websites depicted in Figure 8 had a similar simple, stripped-down style. Surprisingly some brands known for colorful and patterned design in their products still chose to have a sleek and minimalistic style on their websites. Perhaps the color palette and design of the website was kept simple to bring out the design and colors of the clothes more. It is an industry tradition for example to wear black at fashion shows, in order to not take attention away from the clothes displayed.

Despite the remarkable resemblance of the majority of company websites, a few exceptions were discovered. Makia, Globe Hope, Costo and Swedish Hasbeens did have a more colorful layout design that better matched their somewhat quirky and lively brand identities. Examples of the more colorful layouts can be seen in Figure 9 below. With the excess of black and white, stripped-down style, these more colorful designs did stand out more. In the sections to come more observations on the use of visual imagery to support the corporate story will be discussed.
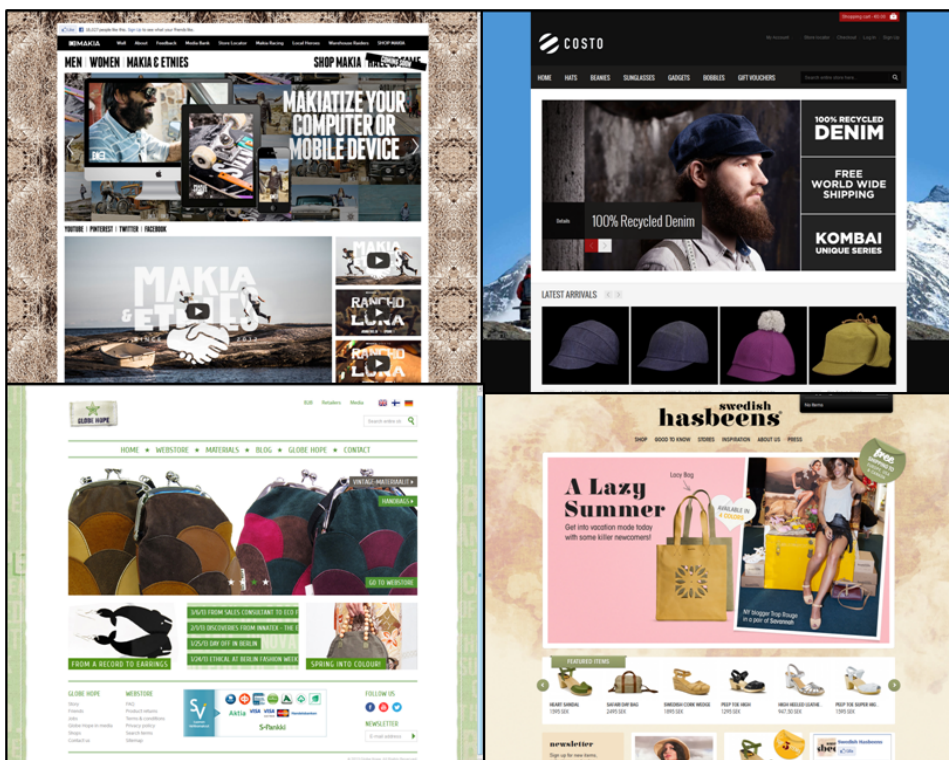
Figure 9. Websites with a slightly different look

Another interesting area of the analysis was the presence of social media channels on the company websites. Social media has become a significant communication channel in today's world, especially among young adults. All of the studied fashion companies had their own page on Facebook and majority also a Twitter account. Some companies also had an account on video-sharing websites YouTube or Vimeo and were using photo-sharing services such as Pinterest or Instagram. Link to these channels and services were provided on all but one of the studied websites. Even though Bruuns Bazaar had a Facebook page, for some reason it did not provide a direct link to it on its company website. The popularity of social media can also be seen in the fact that majority of the companies investigated, had a section in their websites resembling a blog or web diary. In the coming section the use of social media for communicating the company's story will be discussed more.

This section has presented the findings on the overall look and feel of the selected websites. The next section identifies the parts of the studied websites that communicate about the identity of that particular company, and then elaborates whether story communication was used to do so.

5.2 Descriptions are rich, stories are rare

After looking at the overall look and feel of the studied websites, the analysis moved to identifying sections on the websites communicating corporate identity i.e. what it is, what it stands for, what it does and how, and where it is going. Majority of the companies had a clear section on their web site dedicated to telling visitors what the company is all about. In most cases this section was titled *About, About us* or the word *about followed by the company name*. However, a few websites without any clear identity section were discovered. As noted earlier, Samuji's website was a cavalcade of visual images with only contact information and links to the web shop and social media sites written at the bottom. Nowhere in this site was there any detailed information

about the company. WeSC on the other hand had a blog-like site with plenty of textual and visual content, however a section communicating the background of the company was not found directly from the home page or main navigation. After a bit of searching such a section was found elsewhere in the website however.

Three companies, Day Birget et Mikkelsen, Globe Hope and Minna Parikka, had titled their background section with the word story. In addition to these three, Bruuns Bazaar had titled this section with the word history. Even though only four companies referred to their identity page as the story or history, several others did have some section of text titled story or history in their website or Facebook page. A list of these sections can be found on the following Table 3.

Table 3. Titles of identity pages and references to stories.

Company	Title of the identity	Any other section referring to story or history
Acne	About	History used as the main heading of the text on identity
Bruuns Bazaar	History	History used as the main heading of the text on identity
Costo	About Costo / us	Section titled History found under the identity page
DAY Birget et Mikkelsen	Day Story	Section titled Day Story found under the identity page
Desinger's Remix	About (us)	-
Elvine	About Elvine	Section title History found under identity page
Filippa K.	The brand / Company	Section titled The Story found under identity page
GlobeHope	Story	Story used as the main title of identity page
IvanaHelsinki	About	-
KaksiTvå	About us	-
Makia Clothing	About	(section titled history found on company's Facebook
Minna Parikka	The story	Story used as the title of the identity page
Minni f. Ronya	About	-

Month of Sundays	About	-
Nümph	About	-
R/H	About	-
Samsoe & Samsoe	About Samsoe	Section titled History found under identity page
Samuji	no identity section	-
Swedish Hasbeens	About us	Section titled The Story found under identity page
WESC	no clear identity section	Section titled Brand Story found elsewhere on website

The texts found under the identity section of the company websites varied extensively. The text length ranged from Acne's less than 100 words to more than 1,000 words by Globe Hope. Most common practice was to use somewhere between 200 to 400 words. Some of the companies had only a short, one paragraph text of the background of the company and the design and style of their products, whereas other companies elaborated for several paragraphs on several different topics, such as collections, production and values.

After studying the identity sections of the websites on a more general level, the research concentrated on the use of storytelling. Half of the companies had on their website a section with a title story or history (6 story, 4 history). Naturally this would lead the reader to anticipate that the following text would be written in a form of a story. Surprisingly most of these texts were not stories from their structure or features, but had the form of a typical description instead. In fact, majority of all of the texts found on the identity sections of the studied websites were found to be descriptions, or descriptions with some story-like elements. A few mixtures of descriptions and recounts were also discovered. Rather unexpectedly, only one identity section was discovered to strictly use the story form. A more detailed illustration of the occurrence of different text genres can be found in the Figure 10 below.
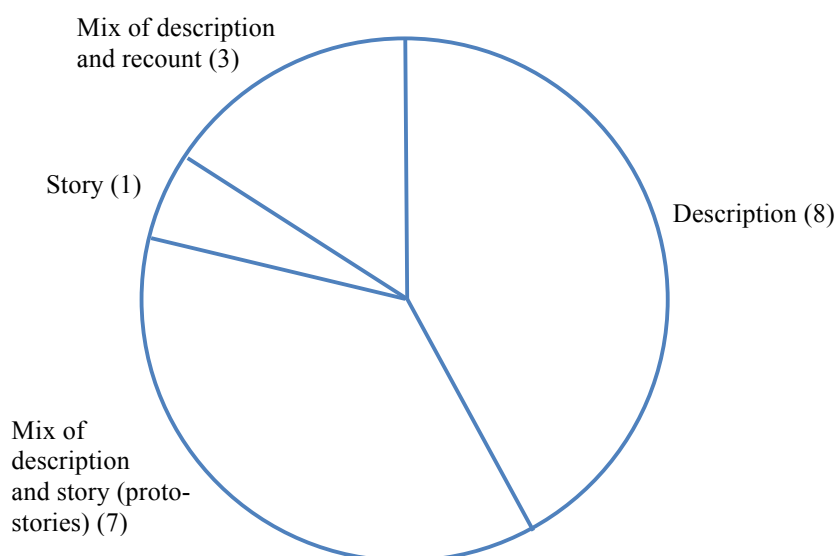
Figure 10. Occurrence of stories and other text genres.

As mentioned earlier, only one of the initial texts could be considered a proper story by its structure and features. This text found on the identity page of the Swedish company Acne can be seen in the Example 1 below. The text uses past tense (e.g. *was, led, witnessed, utilized*) viewed as a typical lexicogrammatical feature of a story. Even though the text is very short it does manage to follow a plotted structure. First the scene is set and the main characters (four creatives) introduced after which their cause (ambition to develop a lifestyle brand) is presented. This cause then drives the story forward that result into success among the press and well as the retailers.

(1) Founded in Stockholm in 1996 by four creatives, Acne's ambition was to create and develop a lifestyle brand through the production of desirable products as well as helping others build their brands. This ambition led to diverse assignments in advertising, graphic design and television production.

Acne witnessed a space in the market for denim and utilised this forward thinking nature to create 100 pairs of unisex jeans. The denim garnered press and short thereafter leading boutiques wanted to carry the characteristic jeans with bright-red stitching. These are the foundations of Acne.

Majority of texts were simply descriptions. A typical description, taken from the website of Finnish company KaksiTvå, is depicted in the Example 2 below. It follows the typical generic structure of a description by identifying the company in the first clause and then describing its qualities and characteristics described in the following clauses. What sets a text like this apart from a story is the fact that it has no plot. Neither does it have any clear conflict or cause needed to set a story in motion and drive forward. In addition to the typical generic structure of a description, this text uses clauses with a simple present tense (e.g. *run*, *includes*, *provides*, *comes*, *are*), whereas a story would use a past tense.

(2) Designer duo Marjo Kuusinen & Piia Keto run together KaksiTvå from Helsinki, Finland. Kaksitvå includes an accessory brand and a design office.

KaksiTvå collection includes bags, jewelry, accessories and apparel. The product family also includes pillows, dishes and other decorative items.

KaksiTvå design office provides services for companies. Service includes illustrations, as well as design-, product-, and event planning. You name it we do it!

The spirit of KaksiTvå comes from the nature of the designers, humor and love of adventures. Inspiration for the design comes from everything that happens around them.

KaksiTvå products are mainly manufactured in Finland. KaksiTvå pays attention to ecological aspects of products using recycled materials when possible.

The name KaksiTvå comes from the word for number two in Finnish (kaksi) and in Swedish (två). The designers came up with the name when they met a pair of Finnish-Swedish twins whose dissimilar personalities inspired them to this day.

Many of the text however, were mixing story-like features into descriptions. An typical text mixing a story and description from the Finnish company R/H can be found in the text example 3 below:

(3) The letters R and H come from the first letters of both designers` last names, Riiheläinen and Hernesniemi. R/H designers Hanna Riiheläinen and Emilia Hernesniemi met while studying in the University of Art & Design Helsinki. After working in different fields of

fashion & design, Riiheläinen at Zac Posen in New York and Hernesniemi in Berlin at Agency V they decided to create their own design world through their own collection.

R/H`s unique world of colors, shapes and relaxed style developed into a collection rich on playful details combined with nordic minimalism, insightful feminine cuts, colorful prints and a certain spirit of black magic – still light and easy to wear. R/H plays with the contrasts of masculine and feminine through mixing soft materials with rough details. R/H`s garments are always made of fine materials such as silk, bamboo jersey and ecological reindeer leather, all combined with beautiful prints. The designers get inspired by atmospheres, music and the female anatomy. The R/H woman is a balanced individual with a creative mind.

This text uses past tense (e.g. *met*, *decided*, *developed*) but also present tense (e.g. *plays*, *come*, *are*, *is*). In addition, the structure of the text as a whole does not clearly follow the typical story structure. In the beginning the text does follow a story-like structure in telling what the founders did in past. However, after that the text changes into a description of the company' style of the design, products and target consumer i.e. what they do now.

Another example from the Swedish company Elvine seen in the text Example 4 below does the opposite. It first describes the brand and its products and then moves into telling a story of Elvine Mänd and his grandson Daniel who created the company.

(4) Elvine is a Swedish clothing brand inspired by Gothenburg's unrefined subcultures and the legacy of traditional craftmanship. We create sophisticated clothes for unsophisticated behaviour.

Elvine Mänd may not be known by a lot of people, but her legacy and name is embroidered on the behinds and across the hearts of many. Elvine worked as a seamstress in Estonia during the Second World War. When the Russians invaded, Elvine made a run for Estonia's neighbour, Sweden.

In 1975, Elvine's daughter gave birth to a boy named Daniel Mänd, who would revive Elvine in a whole new way. Daniel grew up in the outskirts of Gothenburg, and quickly became one with the streets and its graffiti culture. With the opening of his own street wear store, Daniel realized what it was he and his friends weren't able to find in the clothing

industry. He wanted to create something that came entirely from him and Gothenburg's unrefined street culture, but made in the tradition of his grandmother.

Wanting to reach people from the street, Daniel found inspiration in his everyday life, and more importantly, in his friends. It was about having a good time and bringing his community closer together. And somehow, the founder had become the very essence of his own brand. The unsophisticated boy from the streets became obsessed with quality and sophisticated craftsmanship. Daniel's life on the streets merged with his grandmother's functional legacy to create a new kind of Elvine: Sophisticated clothes for unsophisticated behavior.

Some mixtures of description and recounts were also found on the identity pages of Samsoe & Samsoe, Designers Remix and Bruuns Bazaar. Out of these the best example of a description followed by a recount is found on the website of Danish company Samsoe & Samsoe (See Appendices). The text first describes the brand profile with a couple of paragraphs and then moves to list significant events in the company's history.

So the original data found on company websites did not include many stories. However, when the Facebook pages of the companies were investigated, some additional company stories were found. The text found on Makia's website (See Appendices) was simple description without plotted structure or identifiable characters. However, the text found on the company's Facebook page, seen in the text Example 5 below tells a story of how the company was founded, while at the same time creating an image on the essence of the company and brand and even the design of their products.

(5) In 2001, two snowboarders got a vision of creating their own streetwear label. Joni Malmi, Jussi Oksanen and fellow industry head Ivar Fougstedt departed on a mission that would later become Makia.

After a short stint and a few printed t-shirts, the euphoria of a new challenge had turned in to a reality of trying to handle everyday tasks that none of them had prepared to commit to.

Makia was forgotten, almost as fast as it was discovered. The hype had died and the three returned to their daily routines and went on with their lives until...

On a break from his duties, Joni had returned back home to Helsinki, to spend a few weeks with his family. One night out on town, he stumbled in to his old team mate Jesse Hyväri. Jesse had retired from an extravagant career, also in professional snowboarding, a few years earlier and wanted to calm down and went on to study tailoring in Helsinki. The friends had a few beers in a local pub and realized that they shared a similar vision and taste in fashion, and that Jesse had the skills to turn the dream in to reality. Not too long, and Makia was brought back to life.

The two went on to rent a small cellar as a working space in Punavuori, the old workers district in Helsinki. Jesse started cutting and sewing the clothes and pretty much lived on the old couch for the rest of the time. But that didn't stop him from creating a unique line of clothes that now distinguishes Makia from the rest. Timeless simple cuts that he had brewed in his head for the whole time.

From there on out, the road to this day has been rugged. Full of ups and downs as life usually is, but the style has remained the same and a few good people have joined us along for the ride.

Today we are proud to introduce you clothes as we see them, Makia.

This version has all the necessary elements required for a good story. Following a fairly traditional plotline, the story first introduces the main characters on a mission: Joni Malmi and Jussi Oksanen with a background in snowboarding and Ivar Fougstedt, a business professional. After a promising start, a conflict occurs and it seems like their story is over, until the character of Jesse Hyväri is brought in. With his tailoring skills and hard work the dream of a successful company continues and production of Makia products begins.

Another example of company that had taken a different approach on their Facebook page compared to their web site was Acne. As presented earlier, the text on Acne's website could by its structure and lexicogrammatical features already be regarded as a story. However, on their Facebook page the company shares a slightly longer story that is far more informative and captivating. This story can be seen in the text Example 5 on the next page.

(5) Acne was founded in 1996 inspired by a global movement cross breading creative disciplines. With the motto 'Ambition to Create Novel Expression', Acne developed into a dynamic creative collective working across the borders of fashion, film and advertising.

Acne Studios launched its first collection with the most iconic garment of all, 5-pocket denim. In 1997 the company designed 100 pairs in raw denim with red stitching, which were distributed to friends, family and a hand full local clients. With denim as its backbone Acne Studios started building a full Prêt-à-Porter collection in 1998.

Characterized by founder and Creative Director Jonny Johansson's interest in photography, art, architecture and contemporary culture, Acne Studios found another kind of resonance with the world by doing things that were genuinely joyful and heartfelt. The result of choosing this unique path has turned Acne Studios into a well-respected multidisciplinary creator of Prêt-à-Porter, magazines, furniture, books and exhibitions."

The examples 4 and 5 provided here beg the question, why the great stories provided in Facebook are not utilized in the official websites. In addition to websites and social medial sites, companies have other platforms for communicating their story as well. IvanaHelsinki did not provide a clear story on its company website. However, in the past the company did provide a story printed in the price tags attached to the garments being sold. This story can be seen below in Example 6.

(6) In 1938 did manufacturer Ivan J. Paolovski arrive by train to Helsinki from Vyborg which was under Russian occupation at the time. He founded the Globe's most Northern match factory into the dark uninhabited wildwood of Eastern Helsinki.

Ivan's ideology of ascetic, genuine everyday life gained many supporters in the form of motivated factory workers. And every other Saturday they went camping. In this match factory the light of life was growing and the factory grew into an entire sector of town East Helsinki was born. Today IvanaHelsinki is one of the biggest match factories in the world. By the way IvanaHelsinki also manufactures clothes.

This story about the history of IvanaHelsinki, even though being simple and captivating, was completely made up. The company no longer uses this story in its price tags. However, similar stories are used to provide a background for each collection when they are launched. Similarly to IvanaHelsinki, the Finnish company Globe Hope

communicates stories on their price tags as well. These stories tell the road of every individual garment from an old material to a recycled new product. Even though they do not talk about the company directly they do tell a lot about the idea behind their business.

So, according to the findings of this study, majority of the texts were not in fact stories, but description or mixtures of descriptions and story-like elements i.e. proto-stories instead. Alongside the analysis of the textual elements found on the identity pages, some observations were made on the visual elements as well. These observations are presented next.

5.3 Visual images used for support

In addition to analyzing the textual elements found on the identity page, the visual images on used alongside the texts were observed. Majority of the websites were using a mixture of images and text on their identity section. In many cases when the text was talking about the founder(s), a simple image portraying these people was provided to support the text. In Figure 11 below you can see two typical examples of this strategy from the Finnish company Month of Sundays and Danish company Bruuns Bazaar.

Figure 11. Examples of identity pages with an image portraying the founders.

Despite these images seen in Figure 11 supporting the text on some level they cannot be seen as being particularly narrative. The two companies who used several more supporting images to alongside their written texts were Globe Hope and Costo from Finland. Example images from Costo's and Globe Hope's identity pages can be found in Figure 12 and Figure 13 below.

Figure 12. Images from Costo's identity page.

Figure 13. Images from Globe Hope's identity page.

Quite surprisingly four companies were using only text on a light background. Examples of pages without any imagery on their identity page can be found in Figure 14 below.

Figure 14. Examples of identity pages without any images.

The absent of images made these pages look rather dull and uninviting, especially compared to the other pages on the same websites where visual images are being used. The observations made on the varying use of images or lack thereof, raises a question: are companies consciously planning how the text and images work together, or are choices perhaps made by chance?

In addition to still image, more than half of the studied companies provided some kind of video material accessible through their website. Half of these videos were narrative videos telling more about the company and its background (e.g. Elvine, KaksiTvå, Minna Parikka and Filippa K) and another half were simply mood films with imagery on the clothing (e.g. IvanaHelsinki, Minni f. Ronya, Samuji, WeSC) or recording of fashions shows presenting collections (e.g. Acne, DAY Birger et Mikkelsen, Designer's Remix) . A few companies had worked with an outside collaborator to produce a full-length documentary film or a web-series on the company. Great examples of these being the "Making of Makia" web-series broadcasted on Basso Media and KaksiTvå's "Home is where your heart is" documentary.

Overall storytelling was not used extensively as a method of communication on the studied websites of Nordic fashion companies. Despite the lack of clear story communication strategies, some story elements were discovered. The next section will go into more detail on the different story elements found on the studied sites.

5.4 Skilled designers and creative individuals following their calling

Despite the fact that a large part of the texts were not in fact stories with a proper plot, the study continued to investigate the different components of storytelling described in the literature review. This section goes through the findings related to those components.

Eleven out of the twenty companies clearly individualized and named the people behind the brand by using a proper noun. In some cases the name of the company itself already referred to the founder either directly (e.g. Minna Parikka, Filippa K's Filippa Knutsson) or slightly more indirectly (e.g. DAY Birget et Mikkelsen's Keld Mikkelsen, Bruuns Bazaar's Teis and Bjorn Bruun, R/H's Hanna Riihelä and Emilia Hernesniemi). These companies naturally based their stories on the founders. In addition to these, several other companies communicated their background through the founder, (IvanaHelsinki's Paola Suhonen, Globe Hope's, Seija Lukkala, KaksiTvå's Marjo Kuusinen and Piia Keto, Month of Sundays' Milla and Iina Kettunen, Elvine's Daniel Mänd and Designers Remix's Charlotte Eskildsen)

Instead of naming specific characters some companies referred to the people behind the brand with common nouns. Samuji, Swedish Hasbeens and Samsoe & Samosoe used the personal pronoun "*we*", whereas Makia talked about "*a group of friends*", nümph about "*seven young women*", WeSC about "*five guys*" and Acne about "*four creatives*". What links these expressions is that they talk about a number of characters, sometimes more specifically, sometimes less. Contrary to all other studied companies, the Finnish

company Costo chose to use simply the brand Costo itself as the character of its story. When compared to Scandinavian neighbours, the Finnish companies seemed to use the actual names of the people behind the company slightly more. Interestingly, both the Finnish company Makia and the Swedish company Acne did not clearly name the people behind the brand on the texts found on their websites, but did so on their Facebook pages.

Based on the information communicated on the company websites, majority of the Finnish companies were founded by one or few designers, whereas the Swedish and Danish companies were more a combination of people with different backgrounds and roles. Interestingly, the Finnish companies also brought out the educational background of the founders more than their Scandinavian colleagues. The three companies that operated on the streetwear market (Elvine, Makia and WeSC) naturally emphasized their founders' background in skateboarding or snowboarding, to increase credibility among their target audience.

Three companies did not communicate any clear information about the people behind the brand. Minni f. Ronya did not talk about the founders at all, even though their brand name gives an impression that the company was possibly started by women called Minni and Ronya. Swedish Hasbeens talked about a woman named Anita whose collection of wooden clogs inspired the unnamed founder to start their business, however, no additional information about the founders were given. The Finnish company Samuji also chose to keep the people behind the brand unnamed, even though the founder of the company Samu-Jussi Koski has an impressive background working as the creative director of the internationally known Finnish clothing company Marimakko.

In addition to the main characters i.e. the founders of the company, five out of ten Finnish companies and five out of the ten Swedish and Danish companies also talked about who their target consumer is. Some of these companies settled to describe their

target consumer with just a few qualities. The R/H woman was said to be "*a balanced individual with a creative mind*", whereas the clothes of Bruuns Bazaar were made for "*modern style obsessed men and women*", to give a few examples. Some other companies on the other hand described their target consumers in a lengthier manner. For example IvanaHelsinki's dresses were made for "*charismatic drummer girls and girl-women with beautiful souls [-] that love moonlit field, pirates, dark forests, crummy motels, champagne states of drunkenness, fragile butterflies, passionate relationships, cowboys and guardian angels*". In another more descriptive example, the Month of Sunday woman "*walks uneven path and takes a break from the rush wherever she wants*", "*is spontaneous, nice and smily, but also thoughtful lover of silent moments*" and "*dresses her sister by playfully combining clothing details and loving everything soft on her skin*". Contrary to these companies, a few others talked about having a much larger group of target consumers. Costo's products were for everyone, whereas Minna Parikka's and WeSC's for women or people all over the world.

Majority of the companies (15 out of the 20) articulated some kind of cause or mission behind their business. The most popular cause for starting a business was having the hunger to start one's own label or the need to create something that the founders felt were missing from the market. The former was more common with Finnish companies and the latter more common with Swedish and Danish companies. All in all, Swedish and the Danish companies were a little better at describing their cause with nine out of the ten companies doing so, compared to their Finnish equivalents with only six out of the ten companies.

As noted earlier, majority of the studied texts did not have properly plotted structure and thus cannot be considered actual stories. However, the few that did use a plotted story structure followed a rather traditional form, where first the scene is set and characters introduced, then some kind of driving force is presented, and the story set towards a climax of success. Naturally the ending is left open, as the reality of the company story still continues.

This section has presented the different story elements discovered in the studied texts. The next section will take a closer look at the messages communicated by the different companies to evaluate the uniqueness of their identities.

5.5 Universal uniqueness leads to slim differentiation

After looking at the different story elements, this section evaluates the uniqueness of the messages and communicated corporate identities. The style of the studied texts varied considerably. However, the messages and meaning were not that different.

Majority of the studied companies identified themselves clearly as a clothing or fashion companies. However, some exceptions were discovered. A few companies identified themselves as something more than just a clothing brand. Finnish IvanaHelsinki described itself as art, fashion and cinema brand and KaksiTvå as accessory brand and design service provider and Samuji as creative studio and design house. The Swedish companies Acne and WeSC on the other hand emphasized being a lifestyle brand, not just a brand that makes clothing.

Overall the Finnish companies used a more direct communication approach in defining what their company is about. Often their text started with a sentence "x is a". Some first clauses found on the identity pages of Finnish company's can be seen in the Example 7 below.

> (7) (a) Ivana Helsinki is an independent art, fashion & cinema brand, delicately mending Slavic rough melancholy and pure Scandinavian moods.
> (b) Minni f. Ronya is a ready-to-wear women's label from Helsinki.
> (c) Globe Hope is an innovative Finnish company that designs and manufactures ecological products from recycled and discarded materials.
> (d) Samuji is a creative studio and design house based in Helsinki, Finland.

Swedish and Danish companies used a more indirect approach where the purpose of the company was not as clearly stated but written in between the lines. Clauses found on the identity pages of Swedish and Danish companies can be seen below in Example 8.

> (8) (a) The name We Are The Superlative Conspiracy WeSC comes from the sense of unity that has always been exceptional in the skateboarding community - the creativity, the attitude and the people is what laid the foundation of WeSC.
> (b) The identity of Samsoe & Samsoe is based upon unique and recognizable Scandinavian design.
> (c) DAY Birger et Mikkelsen is the brainchild of Keld Mikkelsen, whose vision was to bring beautiful, ethnic influences from his world travels and merge them with Scandinavian simplicity, masculine tailoring and vintage inspired styles.
> (d) Bruuns Bazaar started in 1994 by two brothers, Teis and Bjørn Bruun and quickly became one of the pioneers within the Scandinavian fashion scene.
> (e) The new Danish clothes brand nümph is the result of the dream of seven young women

So there was some variance in the way the companies communicated their reason for being. However, the words used to describe their style or design were very similar. Majority of the studied companies identified themselves or their design as being a mixture or combination of two or more, sometimes opposing characteristics. The abundance of these kinds of descriptions can be seen in the Table 4 on the next page.

Table 4. Similar characteristics discovered.

- YET -	MIXTURE	COMBINATION	OTHER
Makia: modern yet old fashioned. **Globe Hope:** classical yet including many interesting and surprising details. **Filippa K:** uncomplicated yet modern clothes **Bruuns Bazaar:** identifiably Scandinavian yet international look **Nümph:** feminine yet edgy; faultless yet affordable	**IvanaHelsinki:** mix of past and present **Minni f. Ronya:** mix of functionality and spontaneity **R/H:** mix of soft materials and rough details **WeSC:** mix of streetwear and fashion **DAY Birger et Mikkelsen:** luxurious mix of modern classics, embellished details, exquisite craftsmanship and inventive elements; jet setter mixed with free spirit	**Costo:** quality workmanship and ecological production solutions combined with unique style **R/H:** playful details combined with Nordic minimalism **WeSC:** skateboarding, art and music combined with fashionable design **Minna Parikka:** combination of surrealism, playfulness and contemporary design	**R/H:** contrast of masculine and feminine **Elvine:** life on the streets merged with grandmother's functional legacy **DAY Birger et Mikkelsen** merge ancient embroidery, patterns, prints and trimmings with contemporary silhouettes and tailoring; fusion between near and far, local and global; balance of art and craftsmanship, ancient and contemporary, ethnic and international

Furthermore, almost all of the studied companies described themselves or their design as being unique. However, when the characteristics used to describe this uniqueness where examined more closely, it was discovered that often companies used the exact same descriptors to do so. The most common characteristics used by the researched Nordic fashion companies were *timeless* or *ageless*, *tailored* or *crafted*, *minimalistic* or *simple*, *modern* or *contemporary* but still *classical*, *old-fashioned* or *traditional* as well as *functional* and *detailed*.

Functionality, minimalism, modernity are all used to define Scandinavian or Nordic design in general. Thus it is natural for the studied companies to use these characteristics to describe their design. They might be enough to differentiate Nordic companies from their global competitors, but within the Nordic market they make all companies sound exactly the same.

Quality was also a very popular characteristic among the studied companies. This seems natural, as high quality is something that is expected from companies in the ready-to-wear or designer category of fashion. Brands in the mass market segment, such as H&M for example, whose products consumers buy mainly due to their low price, are not expected to have such high quality.

All the Finnish companies except one directly referred to themselves being Finnish, from Finland or based in Finland. Most of these companies also articulate the city they were based in and some went into even more detailed information by talking about the neighborhood they were based in (e.g. Makia in the old workers district of Punavuori, IvanaHelsinki in downtown Helsinki). Contrary to this, one Finnish company, Month of Sundays, did not have any reference to its country of origin in the texts found on its website. The Swedish and Danish companies referred to their origin more indirectly than their Finnish counterparts. Especially the Danish companies tended to emphasize their Scandinavian roots more than their Danish ones. As interesting as the origin of the specific company can be, a consumer from across the globe might not be too familiar with each Nordic country, let alone their cities or neighborhoods.

Another difference between the Finnish and Swedish and Danish companies was the amount of information given about the production of the clothing sold. More than half of the Finnish companies spoke about their production process i.e. how and/or where their products were manufactured. Some of the Swedish and Danish companies did refer to uncompromised materials and tailoring. Surprisingly however, only one company out of the Swedish and Danish companies (Swedish Hasbeens) spoke about the manufacturing of their product in more detail. This might be explained by the fact that traditionally Finns have been selling their products through their technical features, whereas the Swedish and Danish companies are more accustomed to creating images. However, certain level of transparency is expected by modern day consumers and thus, being as transparent about production processes can be seen as a valuable asset.

Company values can be seen as another factor greatly effecting corporate identity. Only five out of the ten Finnish companies and five out of the ten Swedish and Danish companies brought out directly or slightly indirectly the values of their company on their website. The communicated values have been listed into Table 5 below.

Table 5. Communicated values of studied companies.

COMPANY	VALUES
Costo	Sustainable design with quality, ecology and style
Designers Remix	Art, positivity, creativity and beauty of simplicity (mentioned slightly indirectly)
Elvine	Quality and sophisticated craftsmanship (mentioned slightly indirectly)
Filippa K	Style, simplicity and quality
Globe Hope	Aesthetics, ecology and ethics
KaksiTvå	Humor and love of adventures (mentioned slightly indirectly)
Makia Clothing	Trust, honesty and no-nonsense attitude as well as minimalism and functionality (mentioned slightly indirectly)
Samsoe & Samsoe	Freedom and simplicity (look) Personality, identity, credibility, innovation and quality (brand) Freedom and a democratic approach to design (company)
Samuji (Facebook)	Simple functionality, love of necessary things and kindness
WeSC	Punk mentality, creativity, community and having fun as well as going your own way, being proud of that and being creative (mentioned slightly indirectly)

Only four of the studied companies, Globe Hope, Costo, Samuji and Filippa K, expressed their values directly and clearly. Other six talked about their values slightly more indirectly. And the rest of the companies did not talk about their values at all.

The most common values were quality, functionality and simplicity or minimalism. All of these are considered to be the foundation of Scandinavian or Nordic design, and thus natural values for Nordic companies. However, one can question whether these should

be considered values as such, or more characteristics of the company's design. Still they do reflect the company's identity, even if they do not that much reflect the way they do business.

Interestingly, the Finnish companies seem to be following the ecology trend more than their Scandinavian neighbours. Five out of the ten Finnish companies (R/H, Globe Hope, Costo, KaksiTvä and Samuji) named ecology and sustainability as an important part of their values or production, whereas only one of the Swedish and Danish companies (Swedish Hasbeens) brought out the importance of being environmentally friendly. Culturally Finns put a high value on nature and are interested in ecological issues. This sustainable attitude might be an asset to Finnish fashion companies if these issues become more important in the future.

This chapter has presented the main findings of this research project. In the next chapter these findings will be discussed in relation to the theories presented earlier.

6 Discussion

In this chapter, the key findings of this research project are identified and reflected on based on the theories presented earlier in this paper. The main objective of this study was to examine how stories are being used to communicate corporate identity in the websites of Nordic fashion companies.

Despite the fact that stories have been proven to be an effective way of communication by many experts (eg. Barker & Gower 2010; Cornellisen 2011; Hegarty 2011 and Smith 2011), the study revealed that fashion companies of the North are not currently taking full advantage of this method. To some extent the studied companies were using the word "*story*", even as the title of the section of their website communicating corporate identity. However, majority of the texts were not in fact stories by their structure or lexicogrammatical features. Instead they were either descriptions with some story-like features (or proto-stories), or simply just descriptions.

Even though storytelling was not used extensively, some story elements were found. However, much like the research of Baruch (2009) suggests, the company stories found on the studied websites did not follow the form of traditional fairy tales. Many of them did have relatable characters or a hero with a worthy cause, but no properly structured plot. In addition, they lacked the enchantment, invention, and closure traditionally related with fairy tales. Even though stories are considered an effective way of communication, overusing traditional storytelling methods derived from fairytales should be avoided, as they easily can be viewed as impression management, and be dismissed as nonsense, like Baruch warns.

Many of the studied companies were using very figurative, metaphoric or even poetic language in their communication. A likely reason for this was an effort to make the text emotionally appealing or artistic. However, the end result was often incoherent and

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difficult to read. Most likely the companies were aware of the need to have emotionally appealing communication, but did not possess the necessary skills to make that happen. Just imitating the language of the arts is not sufficient.

Following Cornelissen's (2011) teachings, incorporating storytelling in their communication strategy could help the companies keep their communication consistent and thus help create a favorable reputation among the stakeholders. Still, storytelling should not be viewed simply as a way to build a memorable and appealing message. As suggested by Van Riel (2000), companies should in fact think about their whole corporate identity as a story and use that core story as a source of inspiration for all internal and external communication programs to ensure coherence and continuity of messages.

Majority of the studied companies based their communication on customer promise and brand. Many spoke about the company's character through the founder of the company. As the research of Dowling (2006) suggests, in order for these kinds of stories to be effective, they need to resonate with the lifestyle and desires of the target audience. With this kind of strategy, having a distinct corporate identity is crucial.

As pointed out in the literature review of this study, unique corporate identity can be a great asset in differentiation (see e.g. Balmer & Grey 1999, Cornelissen 2011 and Melewar 2003), especially in the fashion industry (see e.g. Lea-Greenwood 2009 and Lille 2010). Nevertheless, instead of focusing on character and personality, many of the studied companies settled for addressing explicit customer needs or product features and benefits. Most likely they do this out of old habit or comfort, as suggested by Herskovitz and Crystal (2010) in the literature review.

Undoubtedly the texts found on the studied company web sites were aiming to communicate the true characteristics of each particular company. However, much like Van Riel and Fog et al feared in the theoretical part of this report, many of them ended up claiming nearly the same products characteristics.

These companies, aiming to reach markets outside their native countries, communicate a fairly universal identity, textually and visually, probably because they do not want to exclude any possible customers. However, as Fog, Budtz and Yakaboylu (2005) suggest, trying to please everyone can results in weak and irrelevant messages. Whereas a story with strong, authentic message can help companies gain a loyal customer base.

Even though the art of storytelling is as ancient as the humankind, it might still be viewed as a somewhat new tool in the corporate communication environment. Or perhaps we are moving away from powerful verbal and written messages and on to visual signals, as the research of both Salzer-Morling and Strannegård (2004) and Carroll (2009) suggest. In the web communication of the studied companies, it was already visible that storytelling is being often used in other formats than verbal communication. Visual means of communication, such as video, seems to be a storytelling format gaining popularity also in business context. Whether stories are being told through verbal communication or visual means, strong knowledge of effective storytelling is needed.

Overall, many of the studied companies did not follow the rules of good storytelling, and sometimes not even the rules of good communication and grammar. Despite this lack of memorable and appealing storytelling, many of the studied companies have found commercial success. This leads to speculate that perhaps their success is mainly depended on things other than their way of communicating corporate identity to global consumers on the web.

Perhaps top-notch product functions and appropriate price are still enough to get certain level of success, but if a company in today's attraction economy wants to have long lasting success and become a legend, versatile and effective communication and reputation management is needed. The same vision, the same story, has to be included in everything a company does. Moreover, the company needs to aim for a story their stakeholders can spread and build together with their beloved brand.

As noted in Lille's (2010) report, many of the Finnish fashion companies are very small, consisting only of a designer or two. Most likely many of the companies do not have a dedicated professional working on business communication issues, due to limited resources. However, in order to create viable business, more than just artistic vision is needed. Therefore companies would benefit from having a more versatile network of professionals working on creating a successful brand, including people with communication background and good language and storytelling skills. This view is supported by Lille's report that argues that diverse mix of people with creative as well as business knowledge, extensive networking, sufficient financing and good relations with retailers are major factors of success in the fashion industry.

As stated earlier in this thesis, fashion is indeed a highly competitive and fragmented field of business. Many new companies enter the market every year, but only a few survive. The harshness of the business become evident even during the making of this study, as one of the studied Finnish companies, Minni f. Ronya, went out of business during the research process.

Even though minor differences were found on the issues Finnish companies emphasized when compared with their Scandinavian competitors, no large differences were found between the level of storytelling between the different countries. The findings indicate that with proper networks, sufficient financing and versatile combination of skills, including those of communication, Finnish fashion companies can reach the success that the companies from their neighboring countries already have. Moreover, Finnish

fashion brands themselves have many strengths, such as high quality, creativity and distinguishable and versatile design, that they should hold on to.

This chapter has discussed the key findings in relation to the theories and practices presented earlier in this thesis. The following chapter concludes the study.

7 Conclusions

This chapter concludes the research by presenting a brief summary of the study in section 7.1. Additionally, this final chapter discusses the practical implication of its findings in section 7.2 and well as its relevant limitations in section 7.3. Finally, some topics for future research are suggested in section 7.4.

7.1 Research summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate storytelling as a method of business communication. The study was motivated by the current change in marketing communication towards emotionally appealing and captivating messages and by the lack of research on the use of stories in external communication in general, and in the Nordic region in particular. The focus of the research project was on small and medium size Nordic fashion companies. Fashion companies were chosen as the object of study, since fashion business is a prime example of a competitive and consumer-centric market where creating the right kind of image is crucial. Research shows that communicating an authentic and appealing corporate identity can be a considerable asset when differentiating your company from its competitors. Furthermore, communicating it through a story makes the message more memorable and more engaging.

The empirical part of the study was a qualitative research utilizing the tools of content analysis. The data for the study consisted of 10 websites of young, up-and-coming fashion companies from Finland and 10 corresponding companies from the more successful fashion countries Sweden and Denmark. Texts found on these websites were analyzed to find answers to a specific set of research questions.

The research questions that the study set out to answer were threefold. Firstly, the study aimed to investigate the extent to which Nordic fashion companies were using stories in

their web communication. The findings show that despite the benefits of storytelling proven by many researchers ad experts (e.g. Hegarty 2011, Smith 2011, Barker & Gower 2010, Herskovitz & Crystal 2010, Dowling 2006, van Riel 2000, Ramzy & Korten 2006) majority of companies are not in fact using stories in their communication. Instead of captivating stories, the studied companies were using simple descriptions without clear plot structures when communicating who they are to their global audience of consumers. Majority of the companies talked about customer promise and brand, by referring to product features and design rather than communicating company characteristics through a captivating story. Interestingly, a few companies that chose not to communicate their identity through a story on their web site did use stories, and rather brilliant ones, on their Facebook page.

Secondly, the research aimed to find out in more detail what kinds of story elements the studied companies are using in their communication. It was found that the majority of the studied companies communicated their story though their founder or group of founders. Some companies used the actual names of the founders as others chose to keep them anonymous. Finnish companies emphasized more the background of the founders and their designer status, whereas the Swedish and Danish brands highlighted more the versatile mixture of people working for the company. The causes or dreams driving the company stories were fairly similar. Many of the founders had found a gap in the market that they wanted to fill, or simply dreamed of starting their own business. Hardly any of the texts had a proper plot in their structure. The few that did, followed a rather traditional form, however, unlike traditional fairytales left the ending open, supporting the findings of researcher such as Baruch (2009).

Finally, the study explored the communicated messages and the level of differentiation between the identities of different companies. Companies often identified themselves as being unique. However, after closer examination, if was found that all companies ended up communicating the same kind of characteristics. The style was described as being a mixture of two or more traits and the design as minimalistic, functional and modern, all

known qualities of Scandinavian or Nordic design. High quality and tailoring were additional features given to describe the company's products, both being rather self-evident features of the ready-to-wear category of fashion.

Interestingly, sustainable and ecological values were found more on the texts of Finnish companies. In addition, Finnish companies were keener to communicate their Finnish origin, whereas Swedish and Danish companies settled more for being merely Scandinavian. Interestingly, Finnish companies also talked more about their manufacturing process and source of materials than their Scandinavian competitors. This can be seen as a valuable asset, in a modern society increasingly interested in transparency in business.

In summary, the study indicates that companies are not aware of the full potential that storytelling has as a method of communication and improvements in this area could be made. After this summary of the main findings of the study, the next section discusses the implications and practical recommendations derived from this study in more detail.

7.2 Practical implications

As the findings of the study show, the web communication of Nordic fashion companies has its weaknesses. Thus, this section discusses some practical implications of the study and provides suggestions on how the communication of the studied companies could be developed.

The findings of this study suggest that up-and-coming Nordic fashion companies should pay more attention to how they communicate their identity to global consumers on the web. More attention should be put into the details of communication.

Based on the findings of this research project, it can be suggested that stories could be better exploited to communicate an authentic and appealing corporate identity. Companies should consider using storytelling to make their message more memorable and more appealing, instead of settling for simple descriptions that repeat the same features communicated by competitors. All of the studied companies surely have great stories to tell. Some of them even display these stories on channels other than the company website e.g. Facebook, video material etc. These stories should be used as a basis for all communication, especially when talking about the identity of the company.

Nordic fashion companies should familiarize themselves with the principles of effective storytelling more profoundly. Based on previous research, an effective corporate story should first and foremost:

- have a clear message that differentiates the company from its competitors by displaying its unique identity and characteristics
- include appealing characters that the audience can relate to feel connected to and a passion that drives the story forward
- be authentic and in line with the company's behavior
- have the ability to make an emotional connection with consumers and add value to the company's offering
- be engaging enough to create dialogue with the company's stakeholders or even make them spread the story further

These principles of corporate storytelling and the examples of classical dramatic structure given in the theoretical part of this report can be helpful when forming a core story for a company. Then again, it can be argued that there is no single, universal way of creating an effective almighty message in story form. Instead, as Fog et al (2005) suggest the company story can be seen more as a strategic platform for communication that can be translated into various actual stories for different contexts.

Even though the companies are small and have limited resources they should understand the power of good communication and great storytelling. The companies would benefit from having a dedicated person for communication tasks with sufficient language and storytelling skills.

This section has looked at some practical implications of the study. In the next section, the limitations of this study will be discussed.

7.3 Limitations of the study

As any research project, this study has its weaknesses. The essential limitations related to the study are identified in this section. These limitations should then be taken into account when evaluating the findings of this research project.

The excess of theories in storytelling in general, combined with the lack of research in using stories specifically as a tool for external communication, made it challenging to find specific models or theories fitting the purpose of this thesis. Therefore, it was difficult to establish a framework specifically for this research project. Thus, influence was taken from the works of researchers from several different fields, such as marketing and communication, and even linguistics and social sciences, to build a functional framework suited for the content analysis of websites used in this project. However, this specific framework may not be realizable for other types of research subjects.

The most significant limitations however, mainly arise from the data collection and the method of analysis. The thesis consisted of a qualitative content analysis of altogether 20 company web sites from three Nordic countries of Finland, Sweden and Denmark. This is a relatively small data sample. However, the companies selected were highly representative of the selected category and it its very unlikely that adding more companies to the data set would have had a large effect on the findings. Still, the

implications made should be considered as suggestive only. Moreover, since the study was based on qualitative methods and concentrated only on a sample of materials, some care should be taken in generalizing the results.

This section has considered the limitations of the study. Next, some suggestions for future research are provided.

7.4 Suggestions for future research

As the focus of this thesis, corporate identity and storytelling in the web communication of Nordic fashion companies is a fairly new area of interest and has thus not been studied extensively, there are many possible opportunities for future research. In this section some possible topics for further research are presented.

Firstly, this research focused on analyzing the texts found on the web sites of Nordic fashion companies. It would be highly beneficial to study the process of creating these texts and stories, by interviewing company representatives about their communication strategies.

Secondly, As the findings of this study are based solely on the interpretations of the author herself, more research should be done on the preferences of target audiences to find out if stories really work better than other types of communication.

Thirdly, this thesis concentrated only on the web communication of selected companies, but the same corporate identity and corporate story should be used as a basis for all communication. Therefore, possible further studies could be made on other communication channels to see whether there is consistency in the messages.

Finally, as the findings of this study suggest the use of visual and audiovisual ways of communication are increasing. Therefore, the multimodality of web communication would be another fruitful area of future research.

As natural as it is for people to communicate and connect through stories and as ancient as the art of storytelling is, clearly companies are not taking full advantage of this method. We are moving towards society where people increasingly value attraction, dreams and emotional connections when making their purchasing decisions. Thus, in order for companies to succeed in this modern world, they have to learn the basics of memorable, engaging and persuading storytelling or hire people that do.

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Appendix: Studied texts from the identity pages of selected companies

Text from Acne's identity page

History

Founded in Stockholm in 1996 by four creatives, Acne's ambition was to create and develop a lifestyle brand through the production of desirable products as well as helping others build their brands. This ambition led to diverse assignments in advertising, graphic design and television production.
Acne witnessed a space in the market for denim and utilised this forward thinking nature to create 100 pairs of unisex jeans. The denim garnered press and short thereafter leading boutiques wanted to carry the characteristic jeans with bright-red stitching. These are the foundations of Acne.

Text from Bruuns Bazaar's identity page

History

Bruuns Bazaar started in 1994 by two brothers, Teis and Bjørn Bruun and quickly became one of the pioneers within the Scandinavian fashion scene. Today an international brand with a scandinavian heritage.

Bruuns Bazaar was the first brand to present an identifiably Scandinavian yet international look, one that provoked a great deal of interest and recognition around the world. In January 1999, the brand entered the official show calendar in Paris, as the first Danish fashion house.

Bruuns Bazaar is a testament to iconic fashion, classic and sexy with a grown up sensibility that are both streamlined and essential. Well cut, understated and precise. Rather than being too arty or conceptual it is fashion as it is really lived with collections that are direct and focused, simple, flattering and attainable.

Focusing on modern day wear with luxurious sporty elements, men's wear influenced tailoring, easy separates and reduced evening wear. The collections are the essence of what modern style obsessed men and women wants, with the inner workings being just as important as the outer appearance.

The company represents both Bruuns Bazaar and the younger line BZR.
Bruuns Bazaar employs 100 people and distributes its products to more than 20 countries. The Bruuns Bazaar collection is presented in 15 of its own stores in Scandinavia.

The HQ is located in Silkegade 8, 1113 Copenhagen.
Text from Costo's identity page

About Us
Costo is a combination of proper experience in handicrafts and materials, an unique vision of style and a strive for ecological and lasting solutions. All of these different aspects of Costo are connected by an all encompassing idea of quality, which guides all of Costo's doings.

History

Costo's history is a version of the archetypal story of going from rags to riches. In the beginning Costo was situated in a small underground workspace with skills in design and handicraft as its only assets.

Costo was born poor, but managed to turn its constraints to contrivances.

Left with nothing to create from, it started to utilize industrial leftover materials to ease its apetite for creating environmentally conscious designs.

Costo combined this innovation to its unique style, which consists of experiences gathered during extensive travels throughout the world and proper knowledge of latest street fashion.

The result was highly sought-after accessories that combine quality workmanship and ecological production solutions with an unique style.

Mission

Costo's aim is to create something new for the present without altering the sustainability of the future. This philosophy runs through the whole production process of Costo accessories.

When a Costo product is born, it is not just a vision made to reality without giving any thought about the consequences of the choices made in the designing process. In Costo products all the choices reflect Costo's unique philosophy of sustainable design

Company Overview

Costo is a creation of three Helsinki based designers who combined their own unique visions and skills to form something new and unprecedented in the field of design. In today's world where diminishing natural resources question the ethics of constantly designing new things to consume, Costo decided to do things different.

They started to utilize industrial leftover materials to satisfy their need to create in a more sustainable and ecological way. This innovation was combined with their unique visions of style and Costo started to produce different accessories and designs. The concept proved worthy and Costo has been on a roll since then.

Products

Costo accessories combine three aspects: quality, ecology and style, which tangle into the unique philosophy of sustainable design uphold by the people behind the brand.

Costo's measure of quality is based on proper skills in handicrafts and on the experiences gathered when Costo products were done by the designers themselves in the beginning. This knowledge ensures that Costo has mastery over the whole production process so that the quality of production is always in control.

Ecology is in Costo's vision an implicit attribute of quality. A product made properly to last is implicitly also ecological. But Costo's major contribution to ecological design is the utilizing of industrial leftovers as the materials of its products. Using these leftovers Costo makes sure that its products do not add up excessively to the strain that the industry puts on natural resources.

For Costo style is also a criterion for quality and ecology. Costo style ignores trends and fashion fads and it strives to make products that stay fashionable regardless the period in question. Costo style is for everybody. It doesn't pigeonhole people into narrow genres or segments. Costo's style is in fact an anti-style. It goes against the prevailing throw-awayism, where things are produced only for a moment's pleasure. Costo is not servant to any genre or time. It strives for style without borders. For Costo ecology, style and quality go hand in hand.

Texts from DAY Birger et Mikkelsen's identity page

The Day Story

DAY Birger et Mikkelsen is the brainchild of Keld Mikkelsen, whose vision was to bring beautiful, ethnic influences from his world travels and merge them with Scandinavian simplicity, masculine tailoring and vintage inspired styles. The result is a luxurious mix of modern classics, embellished details, exquisite craftsmanship and inventive elements. A selection of essentials and eveningwear - with a contemporary take on everyday couture.

The DAY brand is defined by modern, classic and ethnic designs, expressed in a sexy, stylish way.

As Keld describes it, "DAY Birger et Mikkelsen is a fusion between near and far. Local and global. The sophistication of a jet setter mixed with the free spirit of a modern gypsy."

Since we opened our doors in 1997, DAY Birger et Mikkelsen has become a global design-driven company consisting of Day Women's Main Line, a younger diffusion line called 2nd Day launched in 2011 and a stunning interior design line called Day Home which we introduced in 2005. You can find our collections in over a thousand points of sales in shops in 25 countries around the world.

The Founder
Keld Mikkelsen is the founder and owner of DAY Birger et Mikkelsen. Fashion is deep in his DNA. From his involvement with the textile industry even before his 20's to a decade spent working in Asia. Fascinated by the exceptional craftsmanship in Hong Kong and India, Keld decided to merge ancient embroidery, patterns, prints and trimmings with contemporary silhouettes and tailoring. Transporting these amazing crafts to Denmark, where they are reincarnated into a new life through DAY Birger et Mikkelsen's three lines:
DAY Main Line
2nd DAY
DAY Home

"For us, eternal truth lies in timeless designs," explains Keld. "It's this balance of art and craftsmanship. Ancient and contemporary. Ethnic and international. Which we re-work to become our own with a distinctive Scandinavian style."

Inspiration
Even though DAY Birger et Mikkelsen is international, we are a very personal brand that feels like a family. Keld is joined by his partner in crime, Marianne Brandi, who is the head designer and creative engine behind Day Home. Their daughter, Amalie, is the inspiration behind 2nd Day.

We invite you to enter our online universe and enjoy our easy-breezy approach to understated elegance. More than anything, we want you to feel at home in your clothes, in your surroundings and in your heart.

Welcome to DAY Birger et Mikkelsen.

Texts Designers Remix' identity page

About us

Designers Remix was founded in 2002 by Charlotte Eskildsen with her partner and CEO, Niels Eskildsen. Since then, they have successfully developed the company into a global brand available in over 400 stores all across Europe, Russia, Asia and the Middle East. In 2012 Designers Remix was nominated and won the prestigious category "brand of the year" at Danish Fashion Award.

Philosophy
Designers Remix is all about a great desire to create feminine and characteristic designs. Charlotte Eskildsen believes that every day can be a joy. It comes from within and it's about feeling beautiful

Mission
It is Charlotte Eskildsen's mission to make women feel beautiful wearing her clothes. "I want to create forever items - fashion that women will keep in their closets for decades".

Consumer
Designers Remix is made for positive sophisticated women with poise and power. It's for curious women with a lust for life, and a willingness to explore own contradictions. Fans of Ms. Eskildsen's unique angle on style can find her flagship store in Copenhagen central, where 200 m2 set the stage for the look and feel of her original array of clothes, shoes, bags and other accessories.

Designers Remix has three separate lines:
Designers Remix Signature
Designers Remix 2ème
Little Remix

With Designers Remix Signature, Charlotte Eskildsen brings abstract minimalism to elegance. In an array of forever items with an architectural angle on sophistication. Seen in geometric, organic and asymmetrical silhouettes, exquisite fabrics and 3D accents. For women who dare to take an unconventional stance on style.

With Designers Remix 2ème, Charlotte Eskildsen brings a French accent to her popular prêt-à-porter line. Featuring a sexy edgy approach to urban wear. Seen in streamlined styles with unexpected accents, new tactile sensations and a twisted take on tailoring. For women in search of a new kind of cool.

With Little Remix, Creative Director and Designer Charlotte Eskildsen creates a platform for playful provocation in a line of casual, cool looks with a link to the

Designer Remix adult line. Designed for girls from age 6-16, who are destined to be street savvy little fashionistas.

Texts from Elvine's identity page

About Elvine

Elvine is a Swedish clothing brand inspired by Gothenburg's unrefined subcultures and the legacy of traditional craftmanship. We create sophisticated clothes for unsophisticated behaviour.

History

Elvine Mänd may not be known by a lot of people, but her legacy and name is embroidered on the behinds and across the hearts of many. Elvine worked as a seamstress in Estonia during the Second World War. When the Russians invaded, Elvine made a run for Estonia's neighbour, Sweden.

In 1975, Elvine's daughter gave birth to a boy named Daniel Mänd, who would revive Elvine in a whole new way. Daniel grew up in the outskirts of Gothenburg, and quickly became one with the streets and its graffiti culture. With the opening of his own street wear store, Daniel realized what it was he and his friends weren't able to find in the clothing industry. He wanted to create something that came entirely from him and Gothenburg's unrefined street culture, but made in the tradition of his grandmother.

Wanting to reach people from the street, Daniel found inspiration in his everyday life, and more importantly, in his friends. It was about having a good time and bringing his community closer together. And somehow, the founder had become the very essence of his own brand. The unsophisticated boy from the streets became obsessed with quality and sophisticated craftsmanship. Daniel's life on the streets merged with his grandmother's functional legacy to create a new kind of Elvine: Sophisticated clothes for unsophisticated behavior.

— Watch The Story of Elvine
— Read our brand booklet online
— Read an interview with the Elvine founder

Texts fromFilippa K's identity page

The Story

We interpret fashion into wearable, aesthetically balanced pieces, that stand the test of time.
- Filippa Knutsson, Founder.

Simple fashionable garments with a clean design. Essential pieces to build a wardrobe around, easy to combine and long-lasting in both style and quality. That was the start of Filippa K in 1993 and is still the essence of the brand today. Based on real needs and real experiences, Filippa K offers fashionable style solutions for the challenges of modern life. By doing so we help women and men, on the move, to look fashionable and feel comfortable whatever the situation.

The Movie
Filippa Knutsson, Founder, talks about Filippa K.

The Filippa K Style

We design for ourselves and our friends, who live modern lives just like we do
- Filippa Knutsson, Founder

The Filippa K brand philosophy is based on the values Style, Simplicity and Quality.

Our definition of the Filippa K style:
- a genuine passion for simplicity.
- modern, yet always stand the test of time.
- uncomplicated and effortless.
- long-lasting, both in design and quality.

Filippa K offers fashionable style solutions for people living modern busy lives. People who seek clean design and clothes with a perfect fit and high quality. Clothes that are easy to combine and create a modern wardrobe that makes modern life just that little bit easier.

We dream of a perfect wardrobe. A piece for every moment. A purpose for every piece.

HISTORY (in another section called under a page called Company)

Filippa Knutsson is one of the two founders of Filippa K. Having been educated in London, Filippa Knutsson returned to her native Stockholm in the mid-80's to work for the successful family-owned fashion company Gul& Blå, initially as a buyer and later as a product manager. After six years Filippa decided to start her own business

designing clothes that she felt were simply missing in the marketplace – uncomplicated yet modern clothes to suit every occasion.

In 1993, Filippa Knutsson together with Patrik Kihlborg founded Filippa K. Designer Karin Segerblom who previously worked as a designer at Gul&Blå, also joined the company at an early stage. In its first year of trading, the three ran the design and business from home. Their entrepreneurial spirit together with a unique early design ambition, allowed the brand to grow very quickly.

1994 marked the launch of Filippa K in Norway and Denmark. Filippa K's iconic product, the stretch jeans, soon became a renowned success. By the time the first store opened in Stockholm in 1997, the range of products had expanded, as had demand on the market. The following year the company's first menswear range was launched, while international sales took off. Over the next few years, several more stores opened both in Sweden and abroad, while the design concept was further refined.

Now almost 20 years on, the range of garments has both broadened and deepened considerably, while the basic garments still form the heart of the collections. The brand philosophy of style, simplicity and quality remains the same.

Texts from Globe Hope's identity page

What is Globe Hope?
Globe Hope is an innovative Finnish company that designs and manufactures ecological products from recycled and discarded materials. Through re-designing and re-sewing, left over and old materials are turned into new and unique clothes, bags and accessories.

Here at Globe Hope we live by our three key values: aesthetics, ecology and ethics. We are committed both in our design and production to the principles of sustainable development and want to offer consumers an ecological alternative and to encourage people to think about their environment. Our clothes, bags and accessories save and reuse the limited resources on earth and their production is ethical. While we're not ready to compromise our ecological values, creating interesting, beautiful and practical products is the most fundamental driver for our design team.

Our headquarters are located in Nummela, some 45km from Helsinki. This is where the design, marketing, production coordination, sample creation, jewelry making, material storage and online store are centered and run by the 13 people that make up the Globe Hope team. You can also find our factory outlet with a wide selection of old and new products at the same premises.

Production

Our production is done mainly by subcontractors who are sewing houses of different sizes. As ethical working conditions are key for us, we have personally visitied the premises of all our subcontractors. To minimize transportation distances and the related pollution, we have centered our production in Finland and Estonia.

Most of our subcontractors are specialized in working with a specific material: all our seatbelt products are done in Mikkeli and the banderol products in Central Finland with expertise and craftsmanship gained over decades of working. All the bags and purses with the metal clasp mechanism are made in Nokia near Tampere.

As an exception, our shoes are made in Portugal and our organic cotton T-Shirts in Turkey.

Collections

We have two seasonal collection in addition to our classics collection, which includes our all-time favourites and best seller products. The seasonal collections, autumn/winter, and spring/summer, consist of clothes, bags and accessories for both men and women. When designing, we always have an important theme driving the design, such as freedom or happiness.

Our collections can be characterized as classical yet including many interesting and surprising details related to the history of the materials. The design process is very material-driven and the tight design team aims to use as many details of the original materials as possible to tell the story and give the products personality. We often also combine different kinds of materials, such as take pockets from old coats and attach them to a bag made from another material. Stamps, signs of previous use and other small details are very characteristic to our products, and two products are almost never alike. Some of our materials also date back a long time – in some jackets from the Swedish army we have even found stamps from as early as 1932!

Business gifts and corporate offering

In addition to our own collections of upcycled fashion, we also work together with many companies, associations and bands to create specifically designed products for their customers, employees and fans. It's always exciting to see an old uniform or banners of our customers being turned into new products. In addition to being ecological and helping our customers to communicate their ecological values, our products are also designed to be practical.

Examples of past executions are the shopping bags made from Yliopiston Apteekki's old pharmacists uniforms or Alko's old advertisement banners.

How was the idea of Globe Hope born?

Everything started when Seija Lukkala, the heart and soul of our company, came up with the idea of Globe Hope in 2001. She had been a clothing entrepreneur for 13 years when she started thinking about how she could contribute through her own skills towards sustainable development. She simply wanted to go against the trend of disposable fashion and overconsumption.

The business idea soon started to form around creating unique and interesting clothes without creating new material. The first years of the company were then centered around tackling the challenges related to material sourcing and finding ways to apply traditional textile industry techniques and processes to recycled materials.

The first upcycling collection was launched in 2003 under the brand Hope. The collection was aimed at young trendsetters who value ecological thinking, sustainable development and were interested in quality fashion and making a statement with what you wear. The first collection was presented at the Vateva exhibition during Helsinki Fashion week. The reception was phenomenal! Hope was noticed in the Finnish press and also the doors to Japanese markets were opened. A couple of years later the brand name was changed to Globe Hope.

Since then Globe Hope and Seija Lukkala have been awarded many times for the work in the field of ecological fashion and design, such as: Amnesty International's Designer Of The Year (2005) and the prestigious Suomi Palkinto for outstanding performance in the field of Art and Culture, awarded by the Finnish Ministry Of Culture (2006). Since the beginning of 2008 Globe Hope products have had the privilege to bear the Avainlippu symbol for outstanding Finnish production and skill. since 2012 our products have also corried the "Design from Finland" –badge. The Globe Hope collection is sold around Europe and in Japan.

Our shops and the current state

In May 2010 one of Globe Hope's long-term dreams came true when the first Globe Hope shop was opened in Helsinki. The shop is furnished with recycled production furniture such as metal trolleys and their plywooden trays that were originally used at the old Nokia gumboot factory. You can really sense the history and the stories of the furnishing at the shop.

Summer 2010 brought big news to Globe Hope as the company purchased another Finnish ecological design company called Secco Finland. Secco was known for its products made of hard materials such as computer curcuit boards, unplayable LP-records and rubber from car tires. With this merger Globe Hope's material and product range expanded a lot and some products made familiar by Secco were joined as a part of the Globe Hope collection. Alsonew products were created out of the new material finds.

In Spring 2011 we opened our second store in Helsinkin next to Senate Square at the Kiseleff mall. In the future our focus is on expanding the availability of our products in the rest of Europe. We are looking for new resellers and at some point hope to open a flagship store of our own as well. You can read more about our progress from our blog, so stay tuned!

Texts from IvanaHelsinki's identity page

"Love stories, Road trips & Dresses/// Northern Oddity, Pure Beauty& Wildwood Vagabonds"

Ivana Helsinki is an independent art, fashion & cinema brand, delicately mending Slavic rough melancholy and pure Scandinavian moods. The balancing between white arctic summer nights and endless winter sadness. Eerie hovering isolation and intense starkness. Ivana Helsinki collections are like small ballads with charming, soulful and savvy tones.

"Ivana Helsinki started as my personal art-project; now it's a way of living. I could easily spend my life as a nomad, raising stories of love and life and going to my road trips – but it is pretty much ok to do cute, straight cotton and woolen dresses for charismatic drummer girls and girl-women with beautiful souls instead. My world is for the ones whom love moonlit fields, pirates, dark forests, crummy motels, champagne states of drunkenness, fragile butterflies, passionate relationships, cowboys and guardian angels. After all, they all are just after a love of their lives, rarely seen peaceful madness; just waiting to see, will he be a rockstar, a motor biker, a gnome, a cosmonaut or a sailor," explains Ms. Suhonen.

Paola Ivana Suhonen is a Helsinki born designer, artist and filmmaker. As the artist behind the fashion pieces, she starts from her dark, naïve mind-landscapes, northern legends and western romantics, creating the prints, graphics and films to supplement her collections. The mix of past and present has infused her style with yester years' flavourful sophistication along with a shot of contemporary charm.

A brand thirteen years in the making, the family-operated Ivana Helsinki atelier is based in downtown Helsinki where unique pieces and small-series production are done. All knits are manufactured in Finland and hand knits come from Lapland. The brand is the only Scandinavian womenswear brand to be accepted into the official Paris Fashion Week "IN" Show calendar and has been featured in several alternative projects where fashion, design and modern art have been combined. In addition to her own projects, Ms. Suhonen has worked product development, print and concept design for several companies including Head Snowboards, HP Sauce, Topshop, Google, Swarovski, Coca-Cola, Canon, Artek, Amnesty International, Mori Art Center in Tokyo, Finnish

traditional porcelain company Kermansavi and her own jewelry line for Kaipaus. A graduate of the University of Art and Design Helsinki, Ms. Suhonen has also studied at the prestigious American Film Institute, where she fulfilled her passion of great filmmaking.

Texts from Kaksitvå's identity page

Double trouble since 2005

Designer duo Marjo Kuusinen & Piia Keto run together Kaksitvå from Helsinki, Finland. Kaksitvå includes an accessory brand and a design office.

Kaksitvå collection includes bags, jewelry, accessories and apparel. The product family also includes pillows, dishes and other decorative items.

Kaksitvå design office provides services for companies. Service includes illustrations, as well as design-, product-, and event planning. You name it we do it!

The spirit of Kaksitvå comes from the nature of the designers, humor and love of adventures. Inspiration for the design comes from everything that happens around them.

Kaksitvå products are mainly manufactured in Finland. Kaksitvå pays attention to ecological aspects of products using recycled materials when possible.

The name Kaksitvå comes from the word for number two in Finnish (kaksi) and in Swedish (två). The designers came up with the name when they met a pair of Finnish-Swedish twins whose dissimilar personalities inspired them to this day.

Texts from Makia Clothing's identity page

Hailing from the old workers district Punavuori, in Helsinki Finland, comes MAKIA. A modern, yet old fashioned clothing company that reflects the Finnish tradition of simple straightforward design. Founded in 2001 by a group of friends, with an intention of creating a line of easily approachable timeless clothes. Designs reflecting values that the Nordic people have lived by for ages and the harsh climate influencing them to last and look good, year after year. Trust, honesty and a no-nonsense attitude where the essential has been stripped down to the bare minimum and functionality playing the key role, making MAKIA an easy choice without having to think too much about it.

Texts from Minna Parikka's identity page

The Woman

The story of the Minna Parikka brand began when Minna decided at the tender age of 15 that designing shoes was her life's true calling. "I felt like I'd been struck by a lightning when I first realized I could actually make a career out of making shoes."

After moving to England at 19 to pursue a degree in footwear design, Minna spent the next six years living, working and finding inspiration in London, Milan and Barcelona. She returned to her native Helsinki in 2005 to launch the Minna Parikka brand.

"I felt like I'd been struck by a lightning when I first realized I could actually make a career out of making shoes."

Minna's love of footwear is based on the fact that shoes – unlike clothes – don't have to be inhabited by a body in order to look attractive. But while they're beautiful alone, it's when a woman steps into a pair that the magic really happens. The right shoes can change how she looks, feels and is seen by others. And as objects of desire for women and men, they're not just symbols of power but its Holy Grail.

The Brand

It's a strange paradox that the world of women's shoe design is dominated by men. Well, Minna Parikka isn't prepared to live in a world like that, and she's on a mission to change it.

A lifelong shoe-lover herself, Minna creates designs that combine elements of surrealism, playfulness and contemporary design – in all colours one can imagine. Crafted in Spain from the finest materials with unparalleled attention to detail, Minna's shoes have helped countless women build their own style from the ground up.

The Helsinki based designer's accessories have graced the feet and bodies of women all over the world, including Lady Gaga, Fergie, Paloma Faith and Beth Ditto.

Her work has been featured in international publications, such as Vogue, Vogue Pelle, Elle, Marie Claire, Grazia, Glamour, Collezioni, Tatler, Harper's Bazaar, WAD, French and Sleek, just to name a few. She even has her very own first class postage stamp in Finland and three pages in SCARPE!, a book of shoes by Rizzoli.

"My designs are almost like love letters from one high heel shoe lover to another. Allow yourself to be playful and let a pair lead you to new adventures. Life is too short to take style too seriously."
—Minna Parikka

Texts from Minni f. Ronya's identity page

About

Minni f. Ronya is a ready-to-wear women's label from Helsinki. A mix of functionality and spontaneity, the label pays attention to detail in fit and finish while introducing wild printed patterns and avant-garde shapes in their ultimately wearable garments

"Do you still remember the little island we always went to watch the sun set? Today as I was swimming near the island I found a toy ship. It must have come from afar. I showed it to Pa who says he's seen one of them before somewhere in the Caribbean. I wonder who it belonged to. More than that, I wonder whether it's a model of a real ship. Pa warned me not to keep it but to take it back where it belongs. He says it looks like the ships of the Dark Merchants far across our shores. The ones you told me about. They must have a gloomy past. A past I would not mind looking into though. I hid the ship along with my other treasured items. Many times I wish you were here with me. You knew the islands well. We could take a journey into the darkness and discover their story. Maybe they aren't as bad as we think they are. Perhaps I will write them my story and bottle it in hope of receiving their story. A story of their past."

Minni f. Ronya's SS13 Collection, A Story of a Nereid, is a tale of a youthful yet experienced and well travelled mermaid with a strong desire to explore and treasure memories. The collection draws its inspiration from tropical aquatic environments and oceanic landscapes. The textures of materials are reminiscent of sea creatures: corals, plants and fish combined with a color palette full of fresh pastilles and light hues seen in the dip-dyed materials. Graced with elegance and a splash of sportiness the pieces play on elements characteristic to traditional diving, surfing and fishing outfits.
As a whole A Story of a Nereid is about understanding the beauty of stories derived from memories. These recollections extend beyond the story teller's experiences to understanding the journeys and memories stored up in objects and the stories of loved ones..

Texts from Month of Sundays' identity page

The label, Month of Sundays was created by designer sisters, Milla and Iina Kettunen. It features clothing and accessory pieces from head to toe.

After working together for some time, the label was founded at the end of 2010. Apart from their education background of textile and fashion design the work process is enchanced by creativity and sisters` close relationship.

The labels name Month of Sundays can be traced back to England. In the 50´s this saying was used to define ageless and very long time. Month of Sundays refers to everlasting sisterhood as well as the never-ending work of the design business. It also describes the ambiance that Month of Sundays would like to reflect with its collection and products. It is ageless, casual Sunday in the company of great people.

The duo describes their target audience as following and at the same time finds somewhat similar characteristics as in them selves: Month of Sundays woman walks uneven path and takes a break from the rush where ever she wants. She is spontaneous, nice and smily, but also thoughtful lover of silent moments. She dresses as her sister by playfully combining clothing details and loving everything soft on her skin. At best she is with her sister on Sundays.

Texts from Nümph's identity page

About (From the page titled about)

This is nümph: clothes with soul and personality. What we do today, is indeed our dream come true: we are free to design our ideal type of clothes - there are no limitations.
Our dream was to create a brand from scratch, which is different and stronger simply because nümph sums up our experiences and creativity: cutting edge, twisted, feminine and rough, vulnerable and strong.

Like the nymphs in the fairy-tales who fearlessly and very confident of their own strength run through the forest - these are the thoughts behind nümph. Trusting our own creativity and professional skills, we dare to live out our dreams. Experimenting with shapes, details and print is the sum of our individual experiences.

Like the nymphs who play in the clear water of the brook and see themselves reflected in the smooth surface - this is how nümph clothes are created. We create clothes - this is our passion. Because what we find dashing and useful will become dashing and useful to others, when we put our hearts into it. We create the clothes for our own reflection of the tough, beautiful and independent girl who, like us, loves to draw attention to herself by means of her own personal style.

Like all nymphs who are strong as giants and gentle as angels because their hearts are in everything they do. This is nümph: driven by will and the desire to create those favourite and indispensable items that simply last time and again - this is our passion.

When Nymphs Dream (From the page titled press)

The new Danish clothes brand nümph is the result of the dream of seven young women. A businessman gave them the opportunity to create their ideal type of clothes.

They are young and creative. They used to work for major Danish fashion companies, where they yearned for making work really fun: to create their ideal type of clothes that they would wish to pull out of the wardrobe cabinet time and again. Feminine, yet edgy. Faultless, yet affordable. Design and tailor details, but still useful on a rainy Tuesday. CEO of Solid A/S Per Johansen gave them the opportunity, and the seven women jumped at the offer at once. This resulted in the new Danish brand nümph.

nümph is the result of the dreams and skills of these seven young women. Each woman is a specialist within design, print, graphic and marketing. Together they are so much more, though: they are indeed a dream come true. They take part in building the brand from scratch and therefore have particular obligations towards each other: they agree that they will change their course, if one day their hearts are no longer in the project. nümph clothes should not only reach the shelves but also touch the heart of the girl who will wear the clothes. Gorgeous stores in Denmark, Norway and the rest of Europe will sell the clothes. Thus, many girls will take pleasure in the design of the nymphs.

The seven women behind nümph have been given free play, and this has resulted in a strong, self-confident and super useful brand. Their first collection consists of 120 styles, which will continuously provide stores with new input. Just the thing to tune up the somewhat drab wardrobe. Just the thing to lighten up a girl's Thursday, as the prices will still allow her to enjoy a couple of mojitos or buy a bouquet of white tulips for her girl friend. This small, daily luxury that we can all afford.

Six annual collections and creative input from seven professional female designers make nümph a strong and very personal brand. Exactly like the nymphs in the fairy-tales who are strong as giants and gentle as angels, nümph is not only one girl, one style, but many opportunities to create one's own personal look.

Texts from R/H's identity page

About

R/H
The letters R and H come from the first letters of both designers` lastnames, Riiheläinen and Hernesniemi. R/H designers Hanna Riiheläinen and Emilia Hernesniemi met while studying in the University of Art & Design Helsinki. After working in different fields of fashion & design, Riiheläinen at Zac Posen in New York and Hernesniemi in Berlin at Agency V they decided to create their own design world through their own collection. R/H`s unique world of colors, shapes and relaxed style developed into a collection rich on playful details combined with nordic minimalism, insightful feminine cuts, colorful

prints and a certain spirit of black magic – still light and easy to wear. R/H plays with the contrasts of masculine and feminine through mixing soft materials with rough details. R/H`s garments are always made of fine materials such as silk, bamboo jersey and ecological reindeer leather, all combined with beautiful prints. The designers get inspired by atmospheres, music and the female anatomy. The R/H woman is a balanced individual with a creative mind.

R/H PR
You can find the R/H collection at the Agency V showrooms in Copenhagen and New York.

Texts from Samsoe & Samsoe's identity page

Brand Profile

The identity of Samsoe & Samsoe is based upon unique and recognizable Scandinavian design. The look is built on ideas of freedom and simplicity. With raw details, denim as well as tailored details the collections are designed to match current trends and meet market demands. The ambition is to develop an attractive, market-oriented and international design based on Scandinavian design tradition. The current portfolio consists of clothes, shoes and accessories for both women and men.

With our concept and design we aim to be a leading brand within our area of operating. With great success and experience Samsoe & Samsoe has taken on Scandinavia and is today acknowledged as a successful, progressive brand throughout Scandinavia promoting modern design for an international market. The brand is widely available and reflects personality, identity, credibility, innovation and quality. The leadership style, the freedom and a democratic approach to design are some of the driving forces behind the company.

History

1991   The brothers Klaus and Preben Samsøe establish the company Samsøe & Samsøe.
Samsøe & Samsøe opens jewellery shop in Copenhagen.
1993   The first fashion store opens in Studiestræde, Copenhagen.
1993   Samsøe & Samsøe starts producing menswear.
2000   Peter Sextus and Per Ulrik Andersen takes over the company. The company establishes the head office in an old industrial building in Ryesgade, Copenhagen.
2004   The first female collection is launched.
2005   First concept store opens in Illum, Copenhagen. A multibrand shop selling several established fashion brands.

2008   Samsøe & Samsøe launches the first shoe collection.
2009   The first shop opens outside Denmark. A monobrand shop in Malmø,
Sweden.
2011   Samsøe & Samsøe launches a denim line. Samsøe & Samsøe launches the
bi-annual newspaper THE COLLECTIVE. Re-opens flagship store in Oslo
2012   Nominated for the E-commerce award for the first time Nominated for
Best Danish Brand in DANSK Fashion Award. The first monobrand store opens in
Stockholm

Texts from Samuji's facebook page (as no information was given at website)

About
Samuji is a creative studio and design house based in Helsinki, Finland.
www.samuji.com

Company Overview
Samuji is a creative studio and design house based in Helsinki, Finland.

Our work focuses on art direction, design, consulting and production. We see
practicality as essential to our artistic projects. Moreover, our design is based on the
values we hold in everyday life: simple functionality, a love of necessary things,
kindness.

The Samuji clothing line, like all our work, represents these values. Our ambition with
this collection is to produce sustainable design: clothes that last from season to season,
in style and in quality. We aim to offer design that serves a purpose yet carries a story.

Samuji items are all produced by carefully selected manufacturers and suppliers who,
like us, insist on the highest quality in everything they do. One of the most important
aspects of this quality is the ethical and sustainable nature of the materials sourced.

The Samuji collection presents a complete wardrobe for women, bringing together two
separate lines: Samuji Classic and Samuji Seasonal. Samuji Classic carries permanent,
timeless clothes and accessories, while Samuji Seasonal is a more bohemian and
colorful collection renewed seasonally. The Samuji collection is a guarantee of quality
and an invitation to our world.

Description
www.twitter.com/samujistudio
www.pinterest.com/samuji

Texts from Swedish Hasbeens' identity page

The story

Her name was Anita and she was the hottest mum in all of southern Sweden in the 1970's. While smoking Camel she screamed at her kids until her curlers fell out and just looked fabulous in her white high-heeled clogs.

One summer day in 2006 we found the shoes she wore (300 pairs of red, white and black beautiful clogs from the 70's) in the basement of an old clog factory in the neighboring village and brought them to Stockholm. So for all these people that shared our love for Anita's wooden shoes and for ourselves we started Swedish Hasbeens.

Our ambition is to continue to release more incoherent and fun shoes and stuff inspired by Hasbeens that once ruled the planet.

The Hasbeens toffels, bags and belts are based on original 70's models and are made of ecologically prepared natural grain leather since it's the most beautiful and the highest quality at the same time as it's environmentally friendly.

They are still handmade with respect for people and the environment in the old traditional way, and in small factories that have made shoes for decades. Our production methods and material are kind to nature and people. Happy toffels make happy people.

The shoes of the Swedish fashion brand Swedish Hasbeens were chosen as the trend of the year in Sweden at the annual Trend Award Gala 2008 in Stockholm.

During 2009 Swedish Hasbeens have become one of Sweden's fastest growing fashion brands and now sells in 15 countries. Please see the stores here.

Texts from WeSC's identity page (found under WeSCpedia / Brand Story)

The Brand Story

The name We Are The Superlative Conspiracy WeSC comes from the sense of unity that has always been exceptional in the skateboarding community - the creativity, the attitude and the people is what laid the foundation of WeSC. Founded by five guys with a background in skate- and snowboarding, WeSC set out to be a brand that would be a mix of streetwear and fashion; where elements of cultures such as skateboarding, art and music would be combined with fashionable design to create products that caters to the streetfashion consumer.

The cornerstones of WeSC are punk mentality, creativity, community and having fun - it's about going your own way, being proud of that and be creative. This is something that has been WeSC's mission since day one and which is applied to all parts of the brand: the staff, the people, the stores, the design and the way we are. With activities in arts, skateboarding, snowboarding, music, acting, producing and more on a daily basis, we are proud to say that we live our brand - the WeSC way: it's not a brand that makes clothing, it's a lifestyle that we all enjoy and with/for causes that we support. Creativity at its' finest.

The most important part of the Superlative Conspiracy are the people. It's the people who are and have the ideas, the creativity and the purpose and it' one of the things we enjoy the most! WeSC has a family of WeActivists. The WeActivists are the ones flying the flag of the Superlative Conspiracy and the people who inspire us, and activate, us on a daily basis. We also activate them - hence the name WeActivists. It's a group of skateboarders, musicians, artists, dj's, snowboarders, actors, writers, a chef, photographers and much more who are all flying the flag of WeSC and being part of the brand in all we do. It's these people, this group of creativity, that makes our brand what it is. It's family and that's what we love about it.

For more information on our WeActivists, visit wesc.com where their stories, activities and ideas are told and broadcasted daily.

In the Superlative Conspiracy, things move quickly. We are active, out there and always have things happening. Events, concerts, launches, new products and exciting projects all over the world. With a presence in 30 countries, 31 own concept stores worldwide including prime locations in New York, LA, Stockholm, Osaka, Paris, Berlin, Athens, Hong Kong and more, we are constantly spreading the word of who we are, what we do and what we stand for. Our collections strive to be fashionable, wearable and fun - something different and special for creatives and likeminded people all over the world. WeSC is a nice company and brand - and that is something we're proud of.

Sharing is caring, as the saying goes, and we hope that you want to be a part of spreading our words and message and to be a part of the Superlative Conspiracy.